

---

# *Synchronous CMC and Pragmatic Development: Effects of Oral and Written Chat*

**JULIE M. SYKES**  
*Arizona State University*

---

## **ABSTRACT**

This study systematically examines the strength of the connection between synchronous CMC and pragmatic instruction by measuring the effects of three types of synchronous group discussion (written chat [WC], oral chat [OC], and traditional face-to-face [FF] discussion) on the acquisition of the speech act (refusals of an invitation) in the target language. Zhao (2003) notes that CMC research is limited in terms of investigating the effects these types of discussions have on other features of language development. Even so, the existing research indicates a positive connection between the use of written chat and oral production (e.g., Healy-Beauvois, 1997; Payne & Whitney, 2002). However, no other investigations specifically address the effects of CMC (written or oral) on pragmatic acquisition. In this study, two classes of third-semester Spanish students (N = 27) participated in small group discussions as well as pre and post role-play tasks that elicited the invitation refusal. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of these role plays illustrate that synchronous discussion type does have an effect on pragmatic development. The WC groups outperformed the others in terms of both complexity and variety of strategies used. A discussion of the results and implications for future research and pedagogy is included.

---

## **KEYWORDS**

Synchronous Computer-mediated Communication (SCMC), Oral Chat, Written Chat, Pragmatics, Oral Production

## **INTRODUCTION**

The connection between computer-mediated communication (CMC) and inter-language pragmatic<sup>1</sup> (ILP) development presents promising possibilities for language learning. CMC, in addition to other computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technologies, affords the possibility of presenting pragmatic-based materials in a contextualized, authentic, and personalized manner, while at the same time addressing other language skills (e.g., oral proficiency, listening abilities,

accuracy, etc.) Numerous studies have looked at the instruction of pragmatic features in language learning (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Dörnyei & Thurell, 1998; García, 1989, 1991, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2001; Omaggio, 2001) as well as various features within written chat discussions themselves (e.g., Kern, 1995; Abrams, 2001; Blake, 2000; Darhower, 2002; Sotillo, 2000; Smith, 2003a, 2003b). As of yet, none has combined the two.

This study systematically examines the strength of the connection between pragmatic instruction and CMC by measuring the effects of three types of synchronous group discussion (written chat [WC], oral chat [OC], and traditional face-to-face [FF] discussion) on the acquisition of a speech act (refusals of an invitation) in the target language. The study has two main objectives. First, it seeks to add to the body of empirical CMC research surrounding the effects of the use of CMC as an instructional tool. Second, it aims to demonstrate how different types of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) can best be used as effective tools for pragmatic instruction.

### **SYNCHRONOUS COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION**

SCMC research can be classified into two major types of investigations: those which focus on the discourse and interaction within the chat environment itself (at times, implying influence on language learning) and those which measure the effects of SCMC on overall language development. The majority of the existing research can be categorized as a part of the first category (Zhao, 2003).

#### ***Features within the SCMC Environment***

The SCMC research addressing various features within written chat discussions includes discussions surrounding a number of issues. Some of the features examined through this vein include participant roles (Warschauer, 1996; Darhower, 2002; Abrams, 2001; Böhlke, 2003), discourse functions (Sotillo, 2000), and negotiation of meaning (Pellettieri, 1999; Blake, 2000; Vick, Crosby, & Ashworth, 2000; Fernández-García & Martín-Arbeláiz, 2002; Smith, 2003a, 2003b, 2004). By briefly looking at the results of some of these studies, one can gain better insight into how written CMC conversation could support pragmatic development through small group discussion. The current research supports the following conclusions:

1. In terms of the participant roles taken in the discussions, a number of roles are shared with other types of journal discussions (e.g., speaker and respondent). In addition, the roles of attacker, challenger, supporter, and joker, are uniquely found in chat. Furthermore, a number of interactional features similar to oral communication are found in chat discussions (e.g., solidarity, humor, intersubjectivity, off-task discussion, etc.) (Abrams, 2001; Darhower, 2002).<sup>2</sup>
2. Discourse functions and syntactic complexity in SCMC discussions share a number of features with oral communication (Sotillo, 2000).

3. Negotiation of meaning and a wide variety of communication strategies are used in synchronous chat discussions, although, at times, more explicitly and in the learners' native language (Vick et al., 2000; Fernández-García & Martínez-Arbeláiz, 2002; Smith, 2003a, 2004).
4. Task type plays a significant role in negotiation and focus on form. Furthermore, learners notice lexical gaps and work to negotiate understandings (Blake, 2000). Additionally, negotiation within the chat environment is effective in developing and retaining unknown lexical items (Smith, 2004).

Each of these conclusions supports the idea that—in terms of participant roles, discourse functions, and negotiation of meaning—similarities between SCMC and oral communication do indeed exist. Sotillo (2000) asserts that “as with face-to-face communication, the synchronous discussion data show the functional uses of language as students engaged in interaction” and that SCMC “seems to encourage communicative fluency, which is generally understood as a quality of oral communication” (p. 102). In short, although dependent upon a number of factors, written chat contains a number of features of oral interaction.<sup>3</sup>

Payne and Whitney (2002) further summarize these findings into four general conclusions<sup>4</sup> regarding the conversational dynamics of chat: (a) through negotiation of meaning, synchronous online environments play a role in interlanguage development, (b) chat tends to produce more complex language than traditional face-to-face communication, (c) participation increases in “quieter” students because they tend to participate in a written SCMC discussion as much as, or more than, participants who normally dominate the classroom, and (d) attitudes towards the target language tend to improve. It is important to note that all of these studies specifically addressed written chat environments. Up to this point, no empirical research has been done to compare written versus oral chat<sup>5</sup> in the L2 environment. Thus, the work described here will also add insight into the effects oral and written chat discussions have on oral production, specifically pragmatic issues.

### *The Effects of the SCMC Environment*

As evidenced by the previously discussed research, the dynamics of chat room discussions themselves are telling and provide insight into learners' developmental process as well as the potential benefits of SCMC in language learning. However, even more relevant to this study is an examination of the effects SCMC can have on the acquisition of other linguistic features (e.g., syntactic complexity, lexical items, pragmatics, etc.). Most of the existing research confirms that SCMC can have a positive influence on L2 oral speaking development.

Healy-Beauvois (1997) addresses the effects of SCMC on oral achievement. Throughout the course of one semester, four sections of third-semester French students (N = 83) participated in the project in which two of the sections met in the lab once a week to participate in chat discussions. The results showed a positive connection between the chat experience and increased oral achievement. The experimental group outperformed the control group on a semester-end oral

examination ( $p < .05$ ). Healy-Beauvois (1997) mentions three major factors that account for the results: (a) linguistic elements, (b) technology, and (c) social interaction, and she notes that the chat environment provides a great deal of additional interactive language practice. Furthermore, the SCMC environment allows for practice in other skill areas (e.g., reading and writing) as well as access to a medium with which students are familiar. Finally, learners participate in a low-stress environment where many students feel more comfortable, especially those who are often quiet or choose to exclude themselves from L2 interactions.

In further support of the use of SCMC for oral development, Payne and Whitney (2002) examine the effects of SCMC on oral speech as reflected through the notion of working memory and cognitive processing surrounding spontaneous speech (Levelt, 1989). Over a period of 15 weeks, 58 third-semester Spanish students participated in synchronous chat discussions and a completed series of measures to analyze their working memory abilities. After completing a speaking pretest and posttest, it was determined that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Thus, Payne and Whitney demonstrate that SCMC also has promising results for those students with lower working memory abilities. Written chat may give them the needed advantage to succeed due to the slightly slower pace at which they communicate.

Levelt's cognitive processing model<sup>6</sup> can also have promising possibilities for understanding pragmatic development, a skill that requires not only grammatical processing, but many other cognitive skills as well. The Conceptualizer phase in Levelt's model is very important to pragmatic evaluation because it requires not only planning the correct form to use, but also analyzing the context in which the form is to be used. By using written chat, the processing between the Conceptualizer and Formulator stage is slowed slightly. Learners have more time to formulate their preverbal plan.

Finally, Smith (2004) concludes that learner-learner negotiation within the synchronous chat environment also has a positive impact on the acquisition of lexical items. Pairs of ESL students ( $N = 24$ ) participated in jigsaw and decision-making tasks during class sessions over a period of 5 weeks. They completed immediate, as well as delayed, posttests in order to analyze lexical retention. Results showed that, as compared to items where learners only received preemptive input, the retention of unknown lexical items negotiated through SCMC was significantly higher.

As made evident by the existence of only a handful of studies regarding the effectiveness of SCMC on language development, additional empirical research is needed regarding a number of language features and abilities, including interlanguage pragmatic development. The following section gives a brief discussion of L2 pragmatic development and speech act theory in order to establish the frame of reference from which this study comes.

## **L2 INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT**

The acquisition of speech acts and pragmatic features of language is an essential component of L2 language development and is included in a number of models

of communicative competency (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1990; Bachman, 1997). Learners must not only have available the necessary pragmalinguistic abilities—the proper resources to carry out the intended speech act (e.g., grammatical forms and proper routine formulae)—but must also possess sociopragmatic skills—an understanding of the social surroundings and interactions (Crystal, 1997). Kasper and Schmidt (1996) further define interlanguage pragmatics as “the study of the development and use of strategies for linguistic action by nonnative speakers” (p. 150). These actions can include, among others, requests, invitations, apologies, complaints, compliments, and expressions of gratitude. These actions are often classified as speech acts.

### ***Speech Acts***

Although by no means complete, research regarding the investigation of use of speech acts by native Spanish speakers is becoming more readily available. Speech act theory<sup>7</sup> was first outlined by Austin (1962) and Searle (1976, 1979) who first defined and classified speech acts. Although speech act theory was not originally designed for use in discourse analysis, it does provide unique and meaningful insight into language use. A speech act can be summarized as a communicative act, performed through speech, which demonstrates how meaning and action are related to language.

Speech acts also form speech act sequences which include not only head acts, but also the supporting moves that strengthen or weaken the head act (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). As defined by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) in their study of requests and apologies, a head act is “the minimal unit which can realize a request; the core of the request sequence” (pp. 275-276). Thus, in the case of refusals, the initial refusal would be the head act. Surrounding this head act are the supporting moves which can soften or strengthen the impact of the refusal using mitigators or aggravators. In the case of refusals, these supporting moves can be apologies, explanations given, and so forth.

### ***Refusals***

The speech act analyzed in this study is refusals, specifically, refusals of an invitation. In Spanish, the appropriate expression of apologies and excuses for missing an event is a very important part of pragmatic competence. Thus, refusing an invitation can be a very high-risk situation (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; García, 1992, 1999; Felix-Bradesfer, 2002). One must rationalize the missed event in order to maintain solidarity in the relationship. Speakers tend to use strategies that give complete, detailed explanations/apologies/excuses as to why the invitation cannot be accepted (García, 1992; Felix-Bradesfer, 2002). The strategies chosen for instruction and analysis in this study are those utilized by the majority of the cultural groups studied and are favored by native speakers of Spanish<sup>8</sup> (see definitions and examples of these strategies in Appendix A). In addition to appropriate strategy choice, the interlocutors involved in the invitation sequence must also follow certain required stages (García, 1999; Felix-Bradesfer, 2002). As one can

imagine, it is very difficult for L2 learners to internalize this process and to successfully refuse an invitation in Spanish.

### **PRAGMATIC INSTRUCTION AND SCMC**

Due, in part, to the complexity of pragmatic instruction and assessment, as well as widespread pragmatic variation, pragmatic instruction is still largely ignored in foreign language classrooms, and relatively few instructional models are available.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, classroom attention focuses mostly on linguistic features of the target forms, rather than the social and cultural aspects so essential to their use (Felix-Bradesfer, 2002).

Numerous factors could account for this lack of pragmatic focus—a lack of authenticity in textbooks and input (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Felix-Bradesfer, 2002), limited time in the classroom (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996), a focus on assessment of “microlevel grammatical” correctness as opposed to “macrolevel pragmatic competence” (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998), the newness of empirical research surrounding L1 Spanish speech act use, and the individual and sensitive nature of pragmatic features (Kasper, 1997; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). SCMC offers a powerful tool to overcome some of these difficulties (e.g., difficulty concentrating on micro- and macrolevel issues at once and sensitivity to individual student personalities and instructor intervention) by, for example, lessening the pragmatic pressure of the interaction and allowing more individualized control of the learning environment. Therefore, the use of SCMC as a learning tool should have a positive effect on pragmatic development. By slowing down the interaction slightly through SCMC, learners have the opportunity to process larger amounts of the necessary features as well as the contextual features and, in turn, increase the frequency and quality of their use.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In order to determine the impact that various types of SCMC have on pragmatic development, this study addresses two specific research questions:

1. What effect does synchronous discussion type have on the production of head acts and supporting moves using the instructed pragmalinguistic forms to create the refusal?
2. What effect does synchronous discussion type have on the quality of the speech act sequences produced (pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features<sup>10</sup>)?

### **METHOD**

#### ***Participants***

This study was conducted with two classes of third-semester Spanish students who had the same primary instructor (not the researcher) and whose native language was American English. The students were divided into small groups of 3

each ( $N = 27$ ) and remained in the same group throughout the course of the study. There were a total of nine groups included in the final analysis (three groups of written chat, three groups of oral chat, and three groups of traditional face-to-face discussion). As expected, a number of outside circumstances (e.g., missing class one day, technical difficulties, etc.) hindered a number of other groups from completing all the required tasks, and, therefore, they were removed from the final analysis.

One week prior to the treatment, the participants took a classroom participation/technology survey in which they self-evaluated their basic computer skills (e.g., chat rooms, typing speed, etc.) as well as their typical classroom participation. This survey included participant identification information, a classroom participation analysis, and an evaluation of technological skills. It consisted of a paper-and-pencil questionnaire using a Likert scale with space for comments. This use of the paper-and-pencil survey eliminated the need for any special computer skills for completion. Furthermore, the Likert scale provided a fairly uniform scale of comparison, whereas the space for comments permitted students to express any unique differences or individual skills that could not be expressed adequately on the Likert scale.

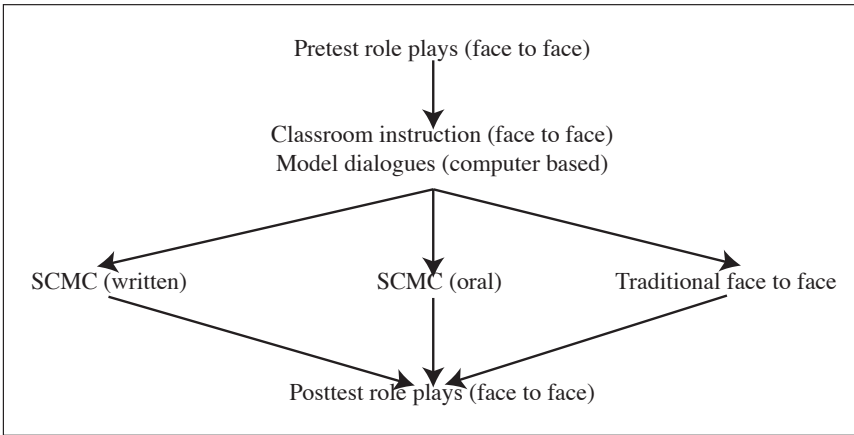
Based on the responses from the technology portion of the survey, students were then placed into groups. Those students who had extremely low computer skills were first placed in the appropriate group (traditional face-to-face), and then the remaining students, who could be successful in any group, were randomly distributed into triads. Placement, based on computer skills, helped to eliminate the effects that the inability to use the technology itself could have on the effectiveness of the intended treatment.

### ***Procedure***

Each participant completed the same tasks with only the mode of discussion differing—written chat, oral chat, or face-to-face discussion (see the basic research design in Figure 1). The day prior to the computer-based model dialogues and treatment discussions, each of the triads participated in a pretest (face-to-face role plays) of pragmatic knowledge in the classroom. This established the baseline level of use of the instructed speech act (refusal of an invitation). Three days following the treatment, the participants then completed a posttest (similar role plays) in order to determine the level of improvement.

Both the pre- and posttests (face-to-face role plays) were videotaped (in a separate room to avoid distractions and noise interference) in order to gain an accurate picture of the interactions within the role plays. Each group received a written prompt 5 minutes prior to the taping of their role play in the pretest, and each participant was assigned the role he or she was going to play (Person A, B, or C) in both dialogues. Assigning permanent conversational roles to the participants helped to assure consistency of results in the posttest dialogue. Each of the role plays was then transcribed using adaptations of Jefferson's (1986) conventions (see Appendix B).

Figure 1  
Basic Research Design



The routine formulae used to carry out the refusals were adapted from the students' textbook, *Interacciones* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) and were classified according to previous L1 Spanish research on invitations and refusals (e.g., Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; García, 1992; Márquez-Reiter, 2000; Felix-Bradesfer, 2002). A set "native speaker model" was not presented as a strict model of what should be done; instead, various options that would be appropriate for native speakers, based on L1 Spanish research, were taught as strategies for refusing. The online model dialogues incorporated this variety in formulae choice and dialects. The prompts for the dialogues were designed to represent actual situations students might encounter (formal and informal) in the target culture. The situations themselves were adapted from Felix-Bradesfer's (2002) investigation of a number of speech acts by native speakers of Spanish.

An example of an informal and formal prompt given to each of the groups during the pretest role-play situation can be found in Appendix C. Although the video camera was present in the recording rooms, the pretest was integrated as much as possible into the classroom lesson itself so as not to produce an overwhelmingly high expectancy of the treatment to come. Following the pretest, the lesson was first taught by the student's classroom instructor face-to-face. The day after the classroom instruction time, the students then went to the computer lab. The tasks completed in the lab component of the treatment are listed below:

1. model, native-speaker, dialogues (20 minutes);
2. reflection questions (10 minutes) in synchronous discussion groups; and
3. practice dialogues (20 minutes) in synchronous discussion groups.

During the first 20 minutes of the class period, all participants accessed a web-based interface containing two model dialogues (similar to the role-play situations) in which they had access to the target speech acts in authentic situations by na-

tive Spanish speaker volunteers from a variety of countries. The model dialogues (similar to the pre- and posttest role-play situations) were filmed and digitized specifically for this project and were then imported into a web-based application (using *Macromedia Dreamweaver* and *Flash*) in which students had complete control to play and rewind the video as they wished. The participants also had access to a written script that they could follow while watching the dialogues. Some focus questions were provided to aid with the viewing. Each participant had 20 minutes to view the conversations for comprehension and processing.

After the 20 minutes, participants were asked to then move into their small groups for 30 minutes where they participated in their prescribed type of discussion (written SCMC [WC], oral SCMC [OC], or traditional face-to-face [FF]). The WC and OC groups remained in the lab, while the FF group returned to the classroom. In each group, the participants completed two tasks: (a) discussing reflection questions as a group about choice of routine formulae in each of the viewed conversations and (b) doing practice dialogues (see instruction sheet in Appendix D). After 15 minutes, the participants were reminded orally that they should move on to part two of the discussion. Records of each of the group discussions/practice dialogues were kept for future reference and analysis.

The written SCMC took place using a LAN chat system designed specifically for language-learning lab at the university where the study took place. This system was chosen due to its simplicity, despite the availability of more advanced chat programs. The chat program resembled many of the applications students were already accustomed to using and had very few extraneous features (e.g., emoticons, sounds, etc.). The transcripts of the chat discussions were available to the researcher.

The oral SCMC discussions were done using *Wimba*, a commercial synchronous chat program.<sup>11</sup> The *Wimba* program is a slightly more complicated program than the written chat program but is still user friendly and looks similar to the *Blackboard* applications the students were accustomed to using. Although not ideal in a lab environment, this type of application would be especially beneficial in a distance learning or hybridized environment where there may be few opportunities for face-to-face discussions.

Finally, the face-to-face classroom discussion took place in a normal classroom. In order to keep similarly complete records of all three groups, the face-to-face discussions were audio recorded (instead of video recorded). The audio recording provided the same type of archive material as in the two computer-mediated discussions and made comparisons of all three groups possible.

Three days after the lab activities, each discussion group completed the posttest using formal and informal situations similar to the pretest and practice dialogues. Just as in the pretest, the posttest face-to-face role plays were video recorded for later analysis.

## ANALYSIS

Each of the role-play situations (pre and post) were transcribed and coded in order to answer the proposed research questions. Because of the small sample size as

well as the nature of pragmatic analysis, qualitative analysis of the data provided the greatest insight into the effects of different synchronous discussion types on pragmatic development. The quantitative analysis will be considered, but the primary focus of the discussion here will remain on the qualitative results.

### **Research Question 1**

What effect does synchronous discussion type have on the production of head acts and supporting moves using the instructed pragmalinguistic forms to create the refusal?

In order to answer this research question, a number of statistical analyses were done to compare the three discussion groups in terms of head acts (HA) and supporting moves (SM) used in the posttest. ANCOVA comparisons of the HA and SM posttest data were run for all three groups using pretest data as a covariate. In addition, an analysis of repeated measures was done on pre and posttest data to examine the rate of change overtime of the use of HA and SM among the three groups. The pairwise comparison between the FF and OC group's use of SM in the posttest formal dialogue was the only statistically significant comparison ( $M = 2.372$ ;  $SD = .985$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The FF group ( $M = 3.83$ ) used significantly more supporting moves than the OC group ( $M = 2.16$ ).<sup>12</sup>

Examples 1 (OC group) and 2 (FF group) demonstrate these differences.<sup>13</sup> Each of the supporting moves (which may precede or follow a HA) is enclosed with \*.

#### (1) Group K (OC), Posttest, Formal

- A: muy bien, gracias, gracias. sabes que este fin de semana es el bautismo de mi hija.  
*very well, thank you, thank you. you know, this weekend is my daughter's baptism.*
- C: tu hija. \*qué hija?- o qué tiempo?\*
- your daughter, what daughter? or what time?*
- A: va estar el sábado a las doce ah de la:: sí, sí de la tarde y tú sabes, espero= que todos ustedes pueden venir? es mi- tú sabes es mi única hija.  
*it is going to be Saturday at 12 in the:: yes yes, in the afternoon. You know, I hope that all of you can come? its my, you know, my only daughter.*
- C: \*lo siento\* pero yo tengo un boda para mi prima.  
*I am sorry, but I have a wedding for my cousin.*
- A: en serio? [[en el mismo día?]]  
*seriously? the same day?*
- C: [[en serio.....sí::  
*seriously.....yes*
- A: y, tú?  
*and you?*
- B: \*lo siento mucho\* am pero no tengo ah (tiempo) de ir. \*me gustaría ir pero-\*
- I am sorry, but I don't have time to go. I would like to  
but*



as ‘a:::h’ and ‘lo::: sie:::nto’ are not feasible in written form, so in the WC group additional words would have to be added to gain equivalent intensity. However, WC is intermediate in nature, indicating that there are a number of other factors involved in the interaction aside from tone of voice.

This quantitative examination of the data shows that discussion type does have some effect on the HAs and SMs produced. The changes are limited in terms of the actual number of strategies used in all three groups due to a small sample size and a short treatment period. It is very possible that a longitudinal study with a greater number of participants would produce more statistically significant differences among the groups. Nevertheless, a more qualitative analysis of the different strategies used as HAs and SMs demonstrates that the WC group outperformed the other two groups in terms of the complexity and variety of the strategies used. Before moving to the discussion of these differences (Research Question 2), it is important to address some of the strategies used by all three groups in both the informal and formal situations.

### *Choice of Head Act Strategies*

Overall, the posttest role plays demonstrated the use of a variety of strategies to perform the speech act of refusing an invitation. Table 1 shows the number and type of strategies used for HAs in the posttest informal situation by all three discussion groups. Table 2 does the same for the formal situation.

Table 1

Head Act Strategies Used by Participants in the Informal Situation

Strategies	Oral chat		Written chat		Face to face	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Direct refusal	2	1	3	1	4	3
Future plans	0	1	0	0	0	0
Grounder	4	5	3	4	3	4
Negation of proposition	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	6	8	6	6	7	7

Table 2

Head Act Strategies Used by Participants in the Formal Situation

Strategies	Oral chat		Written chat		Face to face	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Direct refusal	5	0	2	0	3	2
Future plans	0	0	0	0	1	2
Grounder	1	5	2	6	1	3
Indefinite reply	0	0	2	0	0	0
Negation of proposition	0	1	0	0	0	0
Compliance	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	6	6	6	6	5	8

Grounders and direct refusals were by far the most commonly chosen strategy in all groups in both situations. The others were used sporadically throughout the dialogues. In order to give the reader a better understanding of the nature of the HA used, some of the most commonly used strategies are illustrated below with examples from the data. The definitions themselves are adapted from García (1992) and Felix-Bradesfer (2002). In cases where the same strategy was used in both registers and was noticeably different, examples of both types are given. Additional examples can be found in Appendix A.

### **Direct Refusal**

Direct refusals are an unmitigated refusal of the invitation without hedges. However, as is the case with most HAs, it can be preceded or followed by other strategies (e.g., grounders). Direct refusal strategies were used by participants in all three groups in both the pre- and posttest and in both the formal and informal situations. In addition, the use of this strategy decreased from the pre- to posttest by at least one strategy in both formal and informal role plays in all three groups.

#### (3) Group B (WC), Pretest, Formal

B: no puedo ir  
*I cannot go*

### **Grounders**

Grounders are the excuses or explanations interlocutors give to explain why they are unable to attend an event, party, and so on. As with direct refusals, this strategy was used across the board by all three groups in both formal and informal role plays. Instead of decreasing in use over time, as with direct refusals, the use of grounders increased from the pretest to posttest. Examples 4 and 5 demonstrate the types of grounders used in the pre- and posttest.

#### (4) Group B (WC), Pretest, Informal

B: yo voy a estu- estudiar.  
*I am going to stu- study.*

#### (5) Group G (FF), Posttest, Formal

C: sí, sí, ah voy a New Orleans para ah una fiesta  
*yes, yes, I am going to New Orleans for a party*

The differences in quality and complexity of these strategies are discussed in Research Question #2. However, before continuing, it is important to address the SMs for both formal and informal situations.

### ***Choice of SM Strategies***

In every role play, pre and post, there was at least one SM used to soften the refusal in some way. In addition, the strategies used by the participants for SMs were more varied than those used for HAs. Furthermore, in the formal situation, both

the WC group and the FF discussion group increased the number of SMs used from the pretest to the posttest. Although not statistically significant, this finding indicates that, after the treatment, the participants internalized the need to soften their refusals in some way in order to remain in the good graces of the inviter. When comparing Tables 1 and 2 with Tables 3 and 4, it can be seen that for all three groups, the number of SMs was at least double that of the number of HAs. Tables 3 and 4 show the SM strategies used in the informal and formal situations respectively.

Table 3  
Supporting Move Strategies Used by Participants in the Informal Situation

Strategies	Oral chat		Written chat		Face to face	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Gratitude	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sorrow/regret	5	6	5	10	5	9
Future plans	0	0	1	1	0	0
Grounder	3	3	3	1	10	2
Indefinite reply	1	0	0	0	0	0
Negation of proposition	1	0	0	0	2	0
Positive opinion	1	1	4	4	5	1
Compliance	1	2	6	4	1	7
Total	12	13	19	20	23	19

Table 4  
Supporting Move Strategies Used by Participants in the Formal Situation

Strategies	Oral chat		Written chat		Face to face	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Gratitude	0	1	0	1	1	2
Sorrow/regret	3	4	2	6	5	9
Future plans	0	0	0	0	0	3
Grounder	6	3	2	2	3	3
Negation of proposition	0	0	0	1	0	0
Nonverbal	0	0	0	0	2	0
Positive opinion	1	1	0	2	2	1
Promise to try	0	1	0	0	0	0
Compliance	1	3	4	5	6	5
Total	11	13	8	17	19	23

In the informal situations, three of the strategies used as SMs were also used as HAs. In the formal situations, five of the SMs were the same as those used as HAs in the role plays. However, in some cases, their purpose and location within the conversation is different. Other strategies were only used as SMs. Some examples follow.

**Sorrow/Regret**

The expression of sorrow or regret indicates that the refuser does indeed lament not being able to attend the event. This SM was the most commonly used strategy to soften the refusals and was used a great deal throughout all of the conversations. However, it is important to note that, although not the only routine formulae taught, *lo siento* 'I am sorry' was used overwhelmingly as compared to the other expressions of sorrow, a feature not found in L1 data on refusals in Spanish. Out of the total 25 expressions used in the pretest, 21 of them are *lo siento* or *lo siento mucho* 'I am very sorry.' Furthermore, in the posttest, 34 of the 44 expressions were *lo siento*. Despite the fact that the numbers indicate a major improvement, the reality is that there was not an improvement of the quality of the expressions used. While this influx of strategies does indicate an intent to mitigate with additional softeners, the choice of *lo siento* (a routine formula whose equivalent 'I'm sorry' would be completely adequate in English, but not necessarily so in Spanish), demonstrates that full internalization did not occur. Instead of adding stronger expressions (e.g., *¡Qué lástima!* 'How terrible!'), the majority of the participants just increased the number of times they used the same formula to apologize, a pattern not prevalent in L1 research. Example 6 demonstrates the multiple use of *lo siento*.

## (6) Group G (FF), Posttest, Informal

C: e:hh \*lo siento\* pero mi hermano tiene una fiesta el próximo sábado  
*I am sorry, but my brother has a party next Saturday*

A: o:::

B: \*lo siento\* pero me gustaría ir  
*I am sorry I would like to go but ...*

A: eh...es bueno  
*It's good*

B: está bien  
*It's well*

A: qué lástima. Adios  
*What a shame. Good-bye*

C: \*lo siento\*  
*I am sorry*

The WC group did use some additional formulae to perform this strategy.

## (7) Group B (WC), Posttest, Formal

A: sí, y tú?  
*yes, and you?*

C: \*qué lástima\*! Pero mi- am yo voy a trabajar mucho  
*What a shame! But me- and I am going to work a lot*

## Grounders

In contrast to a number of other strategies, grounders used as SMs decreased in all three groups. (A further discussion of grounders will take place below.)

(8) Group A (OC), Pretest, Informal

B: yo no puedo \*porque tengo que trabajar\*  
*I can't because I have to work*

## Compliance

Participants tended to prefer this strategy to indicate that they were, indeed, interested and that they were doing everything in their power to try and make it. By asking questions, the participants demonstrated that they were more than willing to comply, if the circumstances allowed it. In example 9, the compliance strategies used as SMs are enclosed by \*.

(9) Group F (OC), Pretest, Informal

A: ... tengo un fiesta para mi cumpleaños-años?  
 ... *I have a party for my birthday?*

B: \*sí, sí\*  
*yes, yes*

C: \*o:::H!\*

B: \*qué tiempo?\*
*what time [literally]?*

A: ocho?  
*eight?*

C: \*viernes?\*
*Friday?*

A: sí.

B: \*sábado?\*
*Saturday?*

Each of these questions was actually a request for information. However, the requests also implied to the hearer that the other person was interested in the invitation and willing to comply with the invitation, if possible. Thus, they also represent refusal strategies.

## Summary

Overall, the participants overwhelmingly favored grounders and direct refusals as HAs to refuse the invitations in both the formal and informal situations. However, both the informal and formal situations evidenced an increased variety in strategies and were marked by a change in the specific strategies used between the pre- and posttest of all groups. The intricacies of these differences will be discussed shortly when they are compared with the SMs used to mitigate refusals.<sup>14</sup>

By looking at the number of SM strategies used, one can see that all three groups internalized the need to mitigate their refusals using SMs as a result of the treatment. However, despite instruction, most of these strategies were not fully adopted for use as HAs. This indicates that, although internalized as appropriate for mitigation, they were not internalized as sufficiently appropriate to be used as HAs for making the refusal. The majority of the strategies chosen by the learners as SMs in this study, were used as HAs by native Spanish speakers (García, 1992; Felix-Bradesfer, 2002). SM differences also varied among the groups, in the complexity of each of the strategies used, and by situation.

### ***Research Question 2***

What effect does synchronous discussion type have on the quality of the speech act sequences produced (pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features)?

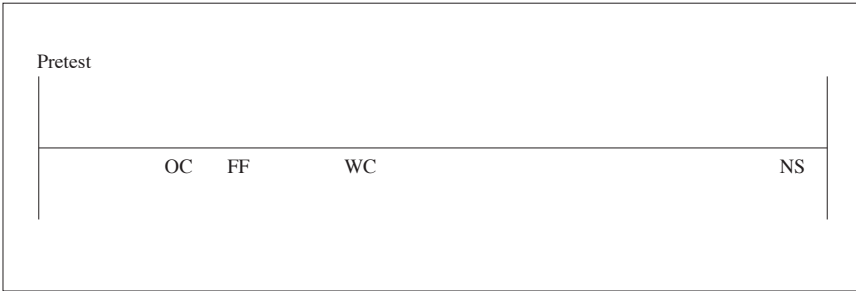
In order to discuss this question, it is essential to first define what is meant by the term “quality.” As mentioned previously, pragmatic issues in any language are complex and vary greatly cross-culturally as well as within dialects. The same strategy might be seen as good or bad; thus, in this case, the term ‘quality’ is not meant to imply ‘better or worse.’ Instead, the term implies closeness to native Spanish-speaker norms and distance from the learners’ own native English-speaker tendencies. Furthermore, in this case, the term native speaker is not meant to imply a norm that all learners should ascribe to and develop, but rather a pattern of appropriate pragmatic behavior, as determined by L1 Spanish data that could be tailored to an individual’s perceptions and intentions.<sup>15</sup> In this analysis, the researcher examined a number of issues to determine the quality of the responses in the posttest as compared to those in the pretest in each group. The groups were then compared to determine the effectiveness of each type of synchronous discussion. The areas of comparison include (a) the complexity of some of the chosen strategies and (b) the variety of strategies used among groups. Each of these components plays a vital role in the overall ILP competency of the participants.

### ***Complexity of Strategies Used***

As previously discussed, all three discussion groups improved in terms of their choice of strategies and performance, which became more native-like in the post-test role plays. However, a detailed, qualitative look at the data shows that none of the groups adapted to native-speaker patterns in terms of the strategies used. In fact, each group’s level of pragmatic competence can be placed on a scale demonstrating where each group falls in terms of their native-like performance. Figure 2 shows a graphic representation of this scale with the beginning line indicating the students’ level during the pretest. None of the strategies used by the students in any of the groups approached native speaker tendencies, but the written chat group advanced further than the other two groups.

Figure 2

Levels of Pragmatic Performance from Pretest to Posttest by Discussion Group: Oral Chat (OC), Face to Face (FF), and Written Chat (WC) Compared to Native Spanish Speaker (NS)



### Grounders and Direct Refusals

One of the most evident changes between the pre and posttests, especially in the WC group, was the change from the use of direct refusals to grounders. Instead of simply refusing the invitation with a direct refusal and softening the refusal with a grounder as a SM, the participants chose to use only the grounder as the HA in the posttest. Example 10 shows the pre and posttest responses.

(10) Group A (OC), Person C

Pretest: ah yo ah no voy a tu fiesta porque necesito trabajar  
*I'm not going to your party because I have to work*

Posttest: tengo que asistir una boda de mi primo.  
*I have to attend my cousin's wedding.*

This change occurred in the oral and written chat groups; only one direct refusal was performed in each group during the posttest. However, this change from direct refusals to grounders did not occur in the FF group. In the FF group, the direct refusals were maintained intact. The participants instead opted for the addition of supporting moves to mitigate their refusals. Furthermore, in the WC group, the complexity and seriousness of the grounders changed substantially from the pretest to the posttest. For example, an excuse used in the pretest was most often work (e.g., *tengo que trabajar*) or school (e.g., *tengo tarea*, *tengo un examen*). However, in the posttests of the WC group and some of the oral chat groups, the grounders became much more serious and complex, having to do with important events (e.g., *tengo que asistir una boda de mi primo*), illness (e.g., *mi mamá está enfermo*), or other important obligations (e.g., *tengo que visitar mi hermano en otro ciudad*). This change in complexity over time demonstrates that the participants internalized to some degree the importance of the invitation and the sensitive nature of the refusal in Spanish (García 1992, 1999; Felix-Bradesfer, 2002).

### Mitigating the Refusal

As mentioned above, the FF group did not adopt the grounder in place of the direct refusal. However, over time, they did use a much larger number of supporting moves to soften their refusal. These changes also indicate the understanding of the need to mitigate the refusal in some way. It is predicted that since the formulae were not available to the participants to change their primary strategies, they instead flooded the conversation with familiar appropriate phrases to soften their refusal (e.g., *lo siento*).

Interestingly, the WC group also added a high number of supporting moves to their interactions. Thus, in addition to the use of more complex grounders as HAs, the WC participants also added additional softeners, making their refusals more native-like than those in the other two groups.

#### (11) Group M (WC), Posttest, Formal

- B: m::, me encantaría porque am es un cum- cumpleaños de mi hermana  
lo siento  
*I would love to, because [but] it is my sister's birthday.*  
*I am sorry*
- C: lo siento am me encantaría, pero yo necesito ir al centro comercial  
con = mi tía el sábado. lo siento mu:cho.  
*I am sorry I would love to but I need to go to the shopping center  
with my aunt on saturday. I am very sorry.*

In Example 11, both refusers, Persons B and C, used HA grounders having to do with family obligations, something more difficult to get out of than work or school. Each of these HAs is also surrounded by the additional softeners.

### *Variety of Types of Strategies*

Another factor making the WC group stand out from the other two groups is the variety of strategies used from the pretest to the posttest. For the most part, the OC and FF groups did not add a large amount of additional strategies to their repertoire. The OC group did add two additional HAs, but the FF group maintained the same number over time. However, the WC group doubled the variety of strategies used as SMs in the formal situation. Some strategies, which are further removed from their native-speaker tendencies (e.g., negation of a proposition), were also added. This additional variety of strategies is important to note due to the difficulty many learners have with pragmatic issues. Even the acquisition of a few new strategies is a major step in such a short time (1 week). With more prolonged and focused exposure, it is very likely that even further advances would occur and that an even greater variety of strategies would be acquired.

### *Laughter*

The final feature to be addressed is laughter. In many of the OC and FF posttest utterances laughter was used as a coping mechanism to overcome the rudeness of

the refusals given. It was a very common response by the participants when they knew that what they were saying was inappropriate but did not know how to react otherwise.

(12) Group A (OC), Posttest, Informal

B: yo también no puedo ir pero am tengo que trabajar para ... otr ... país. [LR]  
*I also cannot go but ... am ... I have to work ... for ... other ... country [LR]*

A: [LR]

C: [LR]

In this case, person B has used an excuse that was almost too extreme when refusing an invitation to a graduation party. In many cases, it was as though the speakers did not have everything they needed to express what they wanted to and, therefore, exaggerated their reasons and laughed instead. Some laughter did occur in the WC groups' posttest face-to-face role plays. However, it was not the same type of laughter. In the WC groups, laughter occurred after silly comments or interruptions, but not as a refusal strategy.

To conclude, preliminary findings suggest that synchronous discussion type does have an effect on ILP development in the case of refusals. For a variety of reasons (e.g., contextual features of practice environment), learners who engaged in the WC discussion used more complex structures and a greater variety of strategies. Thus, they outperformed the FF and OC groups. However, a great deal of additional research is still needed in this area to confirm these results and submit them to careful statistical analysis. Nevertheless, a number of proposals can be tentatively made from these preliminary findings.

## DISCUSSION

As can be seen in the previous discussions, there were many complexities and differences among the three groups (OC, WC, and FF). These intricacies surfaced even in this preliminary study with a small sample size and would very likely extend and intensify when additional subjects and tokens are included. To explain these differences, it is important to address the underlying contextual features surrounding the different synchronous discussion types which likely account for various distinctions among these three groups. What the students practiced was what they would do in a similar posttest situation; thus, the contextual features of each discussion type (e.g., tone of voice, written vs. oral communication, rate of conversation, etc.) had an effect on their overall pragmatic improvement.

### *Pragmatic Pressure*

In terms of the pragmatic pressure the participants felt, traditional face-to-face communication was by far the highest-pressure interactive situation of the three. As Goffman (1967) notes, interlocutors are very concerned with maintaining their own 'face' (the perception of themselves by others). This notion of 'face' is much more apparent in face-to-face communication than chat environments since facial

expressions and body language can implicitly convey disappointment or disapproval of what is being said very easily. In SCMC environments, disapproval must be explicitly and verbally addressed.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, in face-to-face communication, there is very little time to formulate a response; interactions occur quickly and without any delay. This pragmatic pressure very likely accounts for the infusion of the SM into the FF posttest role plays. In face-to-face environments, there is not enough time for learners to produce a complex refusal strategy. The participants in this project used a larger number of very familiar language ‘chunks’ (e.g., *lo siento*) as softeners to indicate their regret about not being able to attend the specified event.

On the other hand, the WC environment allows more time for participants’ responses. Interlocutors are able to formulate a plan before ‘speaking’ (Pellettieri, 1999), thereby lessening the pragmatic pressure. The WC participants had time to respond with more complex, written refusal strategies and, therefore, did not feel as much pressure to infuse SMs due to pressure from the inviter. Thus, WC is very likely a more effective tool for teaching pragmatic competence since the pragmatic pressure is somewhat reduced.

The OC group fell in the middle of the FF and WC in terms of pragmatic pressure. The OC participants’ role in the conversation was not immediate, and the participants had more time to respond. Thus, more complex refusal strategies were possible. However, the pragmatic pressure was felt less than in the FF group because, although oral, the participants did not respond face-to-face with the inviter. This can account for the lower use of supporting moves in the OC group. Not as much pragmatic pressure was felt to add additional softeners due to the nature of the discussion group context. This brings up an interesting issue regarding the WC group’s infusion of SM. Since there was little pragmatic pressure, it was expected that the SM total would be even lower. This was not the case in the WC groups in this study. Thus, it seems that additional contextual features may have played a part in the overall outcome.

### ***Tone of Voice and Laughter***

In both the OC and FF discussions, the participants had the possibility of using tone of voice to express their regret. A falling intonation of ‘a::h’ or a giggle could serve as a strategy for mitigating the refusal and eliminate the need for additional SMs. However, in the WC group, this use of intonation was not possible. Thus, more verbal expressions had to be used to mitigate the refusal. In this case, the WC participants chose to use more complex strategies and add additional SMs to their conversations during the practice dialogues. Furthermore, in the posttest, the WC group did not choose laughter as a coping mechanism. The additional practice of the target formulae allowed them greater access to conversational features when put back into a traditional face-to-face discussion.

### ***Rate of Discussion***

Another contextual factor was the rate of conversation. In the WC group, the par-

ticipants were allotted slightly more time to respond to the inviter. The expected immediacy of the response was less than in face-to-face communication since the refusers had to type their response. Although not quite as delayed, the same held true for the OC group. In both cases, the delayed response allowed for some additional processing time of the strategies being used. This was not the case for the FF group, in which the responses had to be given immediately.

### *Mode of Communication*

Finally, as noted by previous research (e.g., Chun & Plass, 1996; Al-Seghayer, 2001; Karp, 2002), multimodal processing of the target formulae accounts for better learner performance. The WC group was the only discussion group that allowed for consistent practice of the strategies in two modes of communication: written and oral. All three groups were required to use oral communication during the traditional classroom instruction before going to the lab, but only the WC groups were able to add the written aspects of communication in the lab. Among other factors, this multimodal processing very likely accounts for the overall higher performance of the WC group and is well worth further exploration.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite the small sample size and the short treatment period, this study provides some data and analysis with significant implications for foreign language pedagogy and future CALL research. Based on the findings reported here, SCMC is a valid manner in which pragmatic issues can be addressed in the foreign language classroom. Two-thirds of the participants participated in some form of electronic discussion, and all improved in their pragmatic competence in some way.

All three discussion groups (OC, WC, and FF) performed more like native Spanish speakers (i.e., complexity of strategies, variety, number of HAs and SMs) in the formal situation than in the informal situation, indicating that they internalized the differences more in a formal setting, in which they may have felt more pragmatic pressure to expand their responses.

Despite the overall improvement and some of the similar behavior among the groups, the WC group outperformed the other two groups in terms of complexity and variety. The OC group added more complex grounders as HAs and used a greater variety of strategies from pretest to posttest. In contrast, the FF group added a large number of SMs over time to soften their refusals. However, the WC participants implemented both of these approaches by adding more complex grounders and additional SMs to their posttest dialogues. Without the tools oral communication often provides (e.g., intonation, body language, etc.), the WC group had to be more explicit in their communication (see also Smith, 2003b, 2004).

Overall, it can be concluded that SCMC is a valuable tool for pragmatic instruction and should be utilized in the foreign language curriculum. However, up to this point, in order to improve the efficiency of this instruction time, written chat should be the principal means of electronic SCMC discussion due to the

complexity and variety of the achieved results. As previous research (e.g., Healy-Beauvois, 1997; Sotillo, 2000, Payne & Whitney, 2002) confirms, written chat contains characteristics of both oral and written communication and provides a multimodal approach to the communication. It maintains many of the features of oral communication (e.g., participant roles [Abrams, 2001; Darhower, 2002] and negotiation of meaning [Smith, 2003a, 2004]) while at the same time functioning as written communication. Furthermore, as Payne and Whitney (2002) suggest, Levelt's (1989) model of cognitive processing that applies to oral production is very likely also utilized in written production. In written chat, communication can be slowed down to aid learner production and negotiation of meaning.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the findings of the current study, OC should not be completely ruled out. In this study, the oral chat environment was not optimal for a variety of reasons (e.g., practice time). In the future, it is possible that very different results would occur. As the oral chat technology becomes more familiar and user friendly, learners will be able to more fully utilize its potential. With the increase of hybridization and distance learning in foreign language learning, oral chat is becoming increasingly important because fewer contact hours for oral practice are available.

### ***Limitations***

As in any empirical study, there are limitations that impede generalization of the results. First of all, a very small sample size was used, thus limiting the applicability of statistical comparison among the groups. With a larger number of tokens, normalization of the data would be possible, and more statistically significant results may be found. Also, the treatment period was rather short and not a great deal of time was available to the learners in order to process and internalize the pragmatic features.

Moreover, when doing any type of technology research one must address the impact of the technology itself on the study. Elements such as typing speed, familiarity with the discussion environment, and understanding of the web page instructions, could have easily affected the outcome. In this case, the *Wimba* oral chat environment was relatively new and not something with which the participants would have had a great deal of experience before the project. The original intention of the researcher was to allow some practice with *Wimba* prior to the treatment period so that students would be familiar with the program. However, due to timing and administrative issues that often come with using expensive technology on a trial basis for research, this was not feasible. Despite these limitations, the current project does bring preliminary insights to the field of SLA, CALL, and pragmatic instruction. With additional research and application to the classroom, the use of SCMC as a means to teach pragmatics can be a very valuable addition to classroom teaching.

### ***Future Research and Pedagogical Implications***

Due to the relatively new connection between pragmatics and SCMC, a great deal

of additional research is needed to fully understand the possible use of SCMC to develop L2 pragmatic competence. First, more research addressing the effects of electronic discussion environments on oral production is essential. Research of this nature should address a wide variety of topics (e.g., grammatical forms, sentence formation, interaction, communication strategies, etc.). The investigation of ILP development must also be a priority. In the future, it would also be helpful to compare all three groups in all three treatment conditions to examine whether the SCMC tools are utilized in similar ways by all students.

Furthermore, future research projects should address different components of pragmatic development and factors affecting this development. These factors include the level of the learners, the speech acts being acquired (some may be more suited for SCMC than others), and the effects of different types of pragmatic processing activities within the SCMC environment. A longitudinal study addressing a number and complexity of speech acts must also be done to compare the overall effectiveness of SCMC on the L2 ILP system. As participants become accustomed to the technology and the process, more improvement in their ILP system may well be evident. Moreover, oral chat should not be disregarded as a practical instructional tool for L2 pragmatic development. As OC programs become more common and more accessible, additional benefits of oral chat will likely be found.

This study demonstrates that SCMC environments can, and should, be utilized as a tool in the foreign language curriculum. Written chat provides an environment in which students can individually practice what they learn and process the pragmatic issues as well as the other L2 forms being acquired. Additionally, as a result of the flexibility of technology, students can practice using L2 speech acts outside of the normal class time. This allows homework to be more interactive than a workbook or discrete-point practice activities and makes it more feasible for the instructor to give more attention to pragmatic issues in the classroom. Finally, in the lab setting, chat rooms can be easily monitored without instructor intrusion. This will likely encourage more open communication among learners.

Another very important application of this type of research is the use of chat rooms in distance learning and course hybridization. Both oral and written SCMC technologies make this possible. Using oral chat students can practice pronunciation and intonation and, by engaging in written chat activities, learners have the opportunity to practice skills that are otherwise impossible in a distance learning course. Finally, using oral and written chat together offers learners the possibility to practice both orally and in writing at the same time. Empirical research is needed to confirm the benefits, but this multimodal processing will very likely be beneficial to the learners.

Overall, the future for SCMC and pragmatic instruction is promising. Instructors, researchers, and publishers should not ignore the possible uses of chat rooms for the inclusion of pragmatic information in the classroom. This study is a preliminary look at the possible benefits of SCMC on pragmatic development. With more research and application, many more positive effects of the SCMC environment will no doubt be revealed.

---

**NOTES**

---

<sup>1</sup> Crystal (1997) defines pragmatics as “The study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in the act of communication” (p. 301). Kasper and Schmidt (1996) specifically define L2 interlanguage pragmatics as “The study of the development and use of strategies for linguistic action by nonnative speakers” (p. 150).

<sup>2</sup> Although not included within the scope of this project, a future analysis and comparison of the varying roles within the SCMC chat discussions (written and oral) would prove to be very informative.

<sup>3</sup> The existence of these similar characteristics often produces the perspective of SCMC being a hybrid form of communication between oral and written communication. However, current research points out its importance and complexity as a valid genre in and of itself (e.g., Thorne, 2003). Johanyak (1997) also points out that the features of SCMC must be examined from the point of view of the individual language user in terms of cognitive, social, and contextual factors.

<sup>4</sup> Although Payne and Whitney (2002) do not directly cite many of the works listed in the above discussion, their absence is most likely due to later publication dates. However, since the conclusions are supported even with the addition of new research, they are valid and worth noting.

<sup>5</sup> The availability of oral chat is still limited in the foreign language classroom. Yet, the application and use would be straightforward and practical to implement, especially in distance learning or hybridized courses where face-to-face contact is limited.

<sup>6</sup> Levelt asserts that the production process includes two steps: (a) *Conceptualizer* (a preverbal plan is formulated as to what the speaker intends to say) and (b) *Formulator* (the plan created in the Conceptualizer is converted into words). As the preverbal plan cycles through the two stages, the notions created in the Conceptualizer may change based on what occurs as a result of the utterance created using the Formulator.

<sup>7</sup> Speech act theory is not the only way to analyze pragmatic features. However, it is the chosen perspective in this study since the majority of existing Spanish L1 data has been analyzed from this point of view.

<sup>8</sup> Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) provide a very thorough classification of the strategies that can be used as head acts and supporting moves for refusals. This classification has been used in much of the aforementioned L1 Spanish research for a variety of groups of Spanish speakers and, thus, will serve as the theoretical framework for the current work.

<sup>9</sup> Although not feasible for discussion within the scope of this project, Kasper and Schmidt (1996) provide a very thorough review of the research available on L2 pragmatic acquisition and instruction. Cohen and Olshtain’s (1993) five steps for pragmatic instruction were used in this project: (a) diagnostic assessment, (b) model dialogue, (c) evaluation of the situation, (d) role-play activities, and (e) feedback and discussion.

<sup>10</sup> As previously mentioned, pragmatics includes not only what people say when, but how they say it in relation to whom they are speaking. It is a combination of *pragmalinguistic* factors (resources available to carry out pragmatic strategies) and *sociopragmatic* factors (social perceptions and interactions between interlocutors). For example, when addressing someone in Spanish, there are formal and informal ways of greeting the person (i.e., informal—*¡Hola!*, *¿Qué tal?*; formal—*Buenos días*, *¿Cómo está Ud.?*). Pragmalinguistic aspects consist of knowing these different formulae and how to use them. Sociopragmatic knowledge would be the knowledge of when, why, and with whom to use the various formulae.

<sup>11</sup> For further details, see the corporation's web site (<http://www.wimba.com>).

<sup>12</sup> With a larger sample size, it would be important to normalize the data (number of HA and SA divided by the number of c-units, words, etc.) in order to control for different conversation lengths. However, due to the small number of tokens and the similarity among conversation lengths, such a procedure was not practical for the purposes of this study.

<sup>13</sup> Each of the examples maintains errors exactly as they were uttered by the participant. Nothing was changed to maintain the authenticity of the discourse. Furthermore, only post-interrogative question marks are used since, according to the transcription conventions, they are used to mark rising intonation, not punctuation.

<sup>14</sup> Although it is possible for a SM to aggravate a refusal, in this study only mitigating SMs occurred.

<sup>15</sup> Although not appropriate for discussion in this work, the notion of the 'native speaker' can be problematic. See, for example, Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet (1992), Kramsch (1997), and Thorne (2003), among others.

<sup>16</sup> A complete discussion of face and politeness theory is beyond the scope of this article. For a basic overview see Blum-Kulka (1997) and Schifffrin (1994). Also noteworthy are Brown and Levinson's (1987) notions of positive and negative face as well as Grice's (1975) maxims of communication.

<sup>17</sup> Smith (2004) offers an excellent examination of the literature surrounding the Interactionist perspective and the benefits that SCMC affords the negotiation process in a variety of capacities (e.g., participation, attention, output, etc.)

## REFERENCES

- Abrams, Z. I. (2001). Computer mediated communication and group journals: Expanding the repertoire of participant roles. *System*, 29, 489-503.
- Al-Seghayer, K. (2001). The effect of multimedia annotation modes on L2 vocabulary acquisition: A comparative study. *Language Learning & Technology*, 5, 202-232. Retrieved February 25, 2005, from <http://llt.msu.edu/vol5num1/alseghayer/default.html>
- Austin, J. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bachman, L. (1997). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1996). Pragmatics and language teaching: Bringing pragmatics and language pedagogy together. In L. Bouton (Ed.), *Pragmatics and language learning* (pp. 21-29). Urbana-Champaign, IL: Division of English as an International Language, University of Illinois.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2001). Evaluation of the empirical evidence: Grounds for instruction in pragmatics. In K. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics and language teaching* (pp. 13-32). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Do language learners recognize pragmatic violations? Pragmatic versus grammatical awareness in instructed L2 learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 233-62.
- Blake, R. (2000). Computer-mediated communication: A window on L2 Spanish interlanguage. *Language Learning & Technology*, 4, 20-36. Retrieved February 25, 2005, from <http://llt.msu.edu/vol4num1/blake/default.html>
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1997). Discourse pragmatics. In T. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse and social interaction* (pp. 38-63). London: SAGE Publications.
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Böhlke, O. (2003). A comparison of student participation levels by group size and language stages during chatroom and face-to-face discussions in German. *CALICO Journal*, 21, 67-88.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1990). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47.
- Chun, D., & Plass, J. (1996). Effects of multimedia annotations on vocabulary acquisition. *Modern Language Journal*, 80, 183-198.
- Cohen, A., & Olshtain, E. (1993). The production of speech acts by EFL learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27, 33-56.
- Crystal, D. (Ed.). (1997). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Darhower, M. (2002). Instructional features of synchronous computer-mediated communication in the intermediate L2 class: A sociocultural case study. *CALICO Journal*, 19, 249-277.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Thurell, S. (1998). Teaching conversational skills intensively: Course content and rationale. In D. Oaks (Ed.), *Linguistics at work* (pp. 674-686). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Felix-Bradesfer, J. C. (2002). *Refusals in Spanish and English: A cross-cultural study of politeness strategies among speakers of Mexican Spanish, American English, and American learners of Spanish as a foreign language*. University of Minnesota. (UMI No. 3047626)
- Fernández-García, M., & Martínez-Arbeláiz, A. (2002). Negotiation of meaning in nonnative speaker-nonnative speaker synchronous discussions. *CALICO Journal*, 19, 279-294.
- García, C. (1989). Disagreeing and requesting by Americans and Venezuelans. *Linguistics and Education*, 1, 299-322.

- García, C. (1991). Using authentic reading texts to discover underlying sociocultural information. *Foreign Language Annals*, 24, 515-526.
- García, C. (1992). Refusing an invitation: A case of Peruvian style. *Hispanic Linguistics*, 5, 207-243.
- García, C. (1999). The three stages of Venezuelan's invitations and responses. *Multilingua*, 8, 391-433.
- García, C. (2001). Perspectives in practice: Teaching culture through speech acts. *AATSP Professional Development Series*, 4, 95-112.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Grice, H. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech acts* (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.
- Healy-Beauvois, M. (1997). Write to speak: The effects of electronic communication on the oral achievement of fourth semester French students. In J. A. Muyskens (Ed.), *New ways of learning and teaching: Focus on technology and foreign language education* (pp. 93-116). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Hymes, (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269-293). Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books.
- Jefferson, G. (1986). Transcript notation. In J. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social interaction. Studies in conversational analysis* (pp. ix-xvi). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johanyak, M. (1997). Analyzing the amalgamated electronic text: Bringing cognitive, social, and contextual factors of individual language users into CMC research. *Computers and Composition*, 14, 91-110.
- Karp, A. (2002). *Modification of glosses and its effects on incidental L2 vocabulary learning in Spanish*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Davis.
- Kasper, G. (1997). *Can pragmatic competence be taught?* Retrieved October 23, 2001, from <http://www.lll.hawaii.edu/nflrc/NetWorks/NW6>
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. (2001). Pragmatics in language teaching. In K. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics and language teaching* (pp.1-12). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kasper, G., & Schmidt, R. (1996). Developmental issues in interlanguage pragmatics. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18, 149-169.
- Kern, R. G. (1995). Restructuring classroom interaction with networked computers: Effects on quantity and characteristics of language production. *Modern Language Journal*, 79, 457-476.
- Kramsch, C. (1997). The privilege of the nonnative speaker. *PMLA*, 112, 359-369.
- Kramsch, C., & McConnell, S. (1992). (Con)textual knowledge in language education. In C. Kramsch & S. McConnell (Eds.), *Text and context: Cross-disciplinary perspectives on language study* (pp. 3-26). Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company.
- Levelt, W. J. M. (1989). *Speaking: From intention to articulation*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Márquez Reiter, R. (2000). *Linguistic politeness in Britain and Uruguay*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Omaggio-Hadley, A. (2001). *Teaching language in context* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle, Inc.
- Pellettieri, J. (1999). Negotiation in cyberspace: The role of chatting in the development of grammatical competence. In M. Warschauer & R. Kern (Eds.), *Network-based language teaching: Concepts and practice* (pp. 59-86). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Payne, J. S., & Whitney, P. J. (2002). Developing L2 oral proficiency through synchronous CMC: Output, working memory, and interlanguage development. *CALICO Journal*, 20, 7-32.
- Schiffrin, D. (1994). *Approaches to discourse*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Searle, J. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society*, 5, 1-23.
- Searle, J. (1979). *Expression and meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, B. (2003a). The use of communication strategies in computer-mediated communication. *System*, 31, 29-53.
- Smith, B. (2003b). Computer-mediated negotiated interaction: An expanded model. *Modern Language Journal*, 87, 38-57.
- Smith, B. (2004). Computer-mediated negotiated interaction and lexical acquisition. *SSLA*, 26, 365-398.
- Sotillo, S. (2000). Discourse functions and syntactic complexity in synchronous and asynchronous communication. *Language Learning and Technology*, 4, 82-119. Retrieved February 25, 2005, from <http://llt.msu.edu/vol4num1/sotillo/default.html>
- Spinelli, E., García, C., & Galvin Flood, C. (2002). *Interraciones* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Heinle & Heinle Thompson Learning.
- Thorne, S. (2003). Artifacts and cultures-of-use in intercultural communication. *Language Learning & Technology*, 7, 38-67. Retrieved February 25, 2005, from <http://llt.msu.edu/vol7num2/thorne/default.html>
- Vick, R. M., Crosby, M. E., & Ashworth, D. E. (2000). Japanese and American students meet on the web: Collaborative language learning through everyday dialogue with peers. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 13, 199-219.
- Warschauer, M. (1996). Comparing face-to-face and electronic discussion in the second language classroom. *CALICO Journal*, 13, 7-26.
- Zhao, Y. (2003). Recent developments in technology and language learning: A literature review and meta-analysis. *CALICO Journal*, 21, 7-28.

**APPENDIX A**

## Sample Strategies Used in Head Acts and Supporting Moves for Refusals of Invitations in Spanish

Strategy	Definition	Example
Direct refusal	An unmitigated refusal of the invitation without hedges	no podemos ah ir a tu fiesta <i>we cannot go to your party</i>
Grounders	The excuses or explanations participants give to explain why they are unable to attend the event	sí, sí, ah voy a New Orleans para ah una fiesta <i>yes, yes, I am going to New Orleans for a party</i>
Negation of proposition	The refuser expresses the inability to attend by expressing doubt about his or her ability to be at the event	no tengo a tiempo de ir <i>I don't have time to go</i>
Future plans	The interlocutor making the refusal promises to see their friend/colleague in the future	quizás la próxima vez <i>maybe next time</i>
Indefinite reply	Avoids a direct refusal or making a commitment by replying with an indirect answer	estoy muy triste que jubilar <i>I am very sad that to retire</i>
Compliance	The refuser expresses his/her willingness to comply	yo quiero ir a la fiesta ... ah ... hm:: <i>I want to go to the party ah hm::</i>
Gratitude	The refuser states that he/she is indebted to the inviter instead of outright refusing	gracias por tu invitación <i>thank you for your invitation</i>
Sorrow/regret	The refuser expresses lament for not being able to attend the event	Lo siento <i>I am sorry</i>

**APPENDIX B**

## Transcription Conventions Adapted from Jefferson (1986) (ix-xvi)

## 1. Simultaneous Utterances

[[ are used to link simultaneously starting utterances

## 2. Contiguous utterances

= is placed between utterances by different speakers where no time gap occurs or to link interrupted by a line break

## 3. Intervals

- is placed at point of interruption. An utterance is considered to be interrupted when the speaker starts making an utterance and changes its contents or form

4. Characteristics of Speech Delivery (These characteristics were only marked when their use affected the analysis of the speech act in some way. They are not included in all transcriptions)

- . marks fall in tone
- , marks continuing intonation
- ? marks rising intonation
- ? marks weaker rising intonation
- ! marks an animated tone
- (( marks rising and falling shifts in intonation
- >< marks that the enclosed utterance was delivered at a faster pace
- ::: marks lengthened syllable; each : marking one 'beat'
- Underlining marks emphasis
- (LF) Laughter
- (( )) encloses description of gestures or other nonverbal information
- ( ) marks unintelligible utterances

## APPENDIX C

### Sample Role-play Prompts

#### Invitation: Retirement Party (Formal)

Imagine that one of your professors is retiring. You have a good working relationship with this professor, although you do not socialize outside of the academic environment. Your professor has always been supportive of your studies and is in the process of writing letters of recommendation. She will be retiring at the end of the year and has invited you to a party next Saturday to celebrate her retirement, but neither of you is able to attend. Person A should play the role of the professor and the other two (Person B and Person C) should play the role of the students.

#### Invitation: Birthday Party (Informal)

Imagine that you walking across campus and run into a friend that you have not seen in awhile. You are close friends and study in the same program, but seem to have been too busy to get together lately. He invites you to his birthday party next Friday at 8:00pm. You know it is a good opportunity to see everyone again. Unfortunately, neither of you can make it. Person A should play the role of the friend and the other two (Person B and Person C) should play the roles of the two who cannot make it.

**APPENDIX D**

## Lab Assignment and Instruction Sheet

Me encantaría pero ...

## Etapa 1—Una búsqueda (20 minutes)

Spend about 15 to 20 minutes watching the two conversations. You may watch them as many times as you would like and may also follow along with the written script of the conversations. Be sure you understand the content of the conversations as well as the ending result of the interaction. Pay special attention to anything that strikes you as strange or different.

## Etapa 2—Discussion (10 minutes)

Now, in your groups discuss the following questions in English using details.

- 1.) What happened in the conversations? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?
- 2.) Are these conversations similar or different than those you have in English when refusing an invitation? Justify your answer.
- 3.) What was the most interesting aspect of each conversation? Justify your answer.
- 4.) Normally, would you say the same thing in a similar situation? Why or why not?

## Etapa 3—Nuestra conversación (20 minutes)

Now, create your own dialogues in Spanish addressing the two situations below. Each of you should decide which role you will take and then begin the conversation.

**Invitation: Holiday Party**

Imagine that one of your close friends is having a holiday party. You are close friends and have known each other for a long time. He/she invites both of you to the party next weekend. You already have other plans and neither of you can make it. Person A should play the role of the friend and the other two (Person B and Person C) should play the roles of the two who cannot make it.

**Invitation: Anniversary Party**

Imagine that one of your aunts is throwing an anniversary party for her husband's grandfather. You have a good relationship with this aunt but you do not normally spend a lot of time together. Your aunt and uncle have always been very supportive of you but you do not know them extremely well. You want to celebrate the anniversary, but neither of you is able to attend. Person A should play the role of the aunt and the other two (Person B and Person C) should play the role of the niece and nephew.

**AUTHOR'S BIODATA**

Julie Sykes received her MA in Spanish Applied Linguistics/Second Language Acquisition from Arizona State University. She is currently the 200-Level Spanish Coordinator at Arizona State University. Her research interests include computer-mediated communication, pragmatics, communication strategies, and foreign language pedagogy.

**AUTHOR'S ADDRESS**

Julie M. Sykes  
Arizona State University  
P.O. Box 870202  
Tempe, AZ 85287-0202  
Phone: 480/727-0237  
Fax: 480/965-0135  
Email: [julie.sykes@asu.edu](mailto:julie.sykes@asu.edu)

