

The Multimodal Internet and CMC, Comprehensible input, Ungrammatical English

Résumé

La CMO serait un moyen qui facilite l'acquisition rapide de la langue cible. Toutefois, dans certains cas, elle ne permet pas à l'apprenant d'acquérir une langue normée. Ainsi, l'apprentissage de l'anglais langue étrangère (ALE) nécessite des niveaux élevés de précision et de sélection du vocabulaire et des structures grammaticales. La présente contribution vise à examiner les contraintes que la CMO apporte à l'apprenant d'anglais afin d'orienter l'utilisation vers le niveau universitaire

Abstract

CMC is a facilitating means for the rapidly acquisition of the target language but cannot operate in its social aspect where the focus is not the language item but its meaning and the message behind. The internet provides varied models of using unfixed English while EFL learners are concerned with academic English which necessitates high levels of accuracy and selection of particular vocabulary yet not present in CMC. The multimodal internet is the source of an instable and unfixed use of English. In that, CMC provides a comprehensible input to the user by initiating a stimulating exchange but at the detriment of grammatical English. The present paper aims to discuss the constraints CMC brings to the EFL learner to direct the use more towards the academic level.

The emergence of the internet in the second half of the 20th century was much more the concern of the scientific community. Later, more than thousand million of people use the internet for diverse tasks such as shopping, studying and communicating. Within the on-line world, communication takes new shapes with linguistic features often different from the Jacobean communication. Users of the computer mediated communication (CMC), are not always aware of the integrity of the language and tend to tolerate the grammatical mistakes because what so ever is the aim of using CMC, they care less about the language content as they do for the message behind. Whether be it emails, chat rooms, listservs, newsgroups, instant messengers and blogs, users seem to focus more on the facility CMC provides and less, therefore, on the quality of the language which mediates communication.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) helps the English learner to acquire intimate aspects of English but at the expense of grammaticality which is correlationally related to different types of competence. EFL learners are exposed at two levels of acquiring language: correctness and appropriateness. Correctness concerns the accuracy of using language whereas appropriateness has to do with correspondence between the language item and its use. CMC is a facilitating means for the rapidly acquisition of the target language but cannot operate in its social aspect where the focus is not the language item but its meaning and the message behind. The internet provides varied models of using unfixed English while EFL learners are concerned with academic English which necessitates high levels of accuracy and selection of particular vocabulary which is not present in CMC. CMC is simultaneously of great help to the general English learner as it provides a direct access to the native language (chat, sms, emails); and, simultaneously, it is a burden on grammaticality. In that, learners get to the message without knowing all its linguistic forms (Krashen, 1981).

The focus the present research is to demonstrate how CMC neglects important grammatical aspects which are necessary for

the linguistic competence. For CMC to be helpful for its users, it must be accompanied with a big focus on the grammar of English. It must be helpful not only for the general English proficiency but also to academic English since the University level is concerned more with accuracy in the acquisition of the target language.

The Multimodal Internet

Multimodality is an emerging concept accompanying the internet discourse. It refers to the multiplicity of modality and acts as polysemous in the sense that *it might make reference either to the grammatical system of existential stances or simply to the presence or use of modes of communication* (LeVine et Scollon, 2004, p.1-2). From the grammatical point of view, multimodality refers to an existential state of a representation. However, semiotically speaking, it is a mode of communication. Being a new form of discourse, CMC is a multimodal communication necessitating investigation as it presents to the user an easy medium of communication yet subject to grammatical deviances that academic learners may make less advantage from. CMC is a mode of communication featured by the physical distance between the interlocutors and the absence of pragmatic aspects of real communication which are substituted by the mediation of the computer.

The multimodal internet is a source of an instable and unfixed use of English. Despite the existence of guidebooks published to direct the correct English usage, the high expanding interaction of the CMC made the books unauthentic ones. That is why analytical research in fixing the internet language is necessary:

Even though research on the use of English in Internet is increasing exceptionally, there is still the major lack of an appropriate analytical framework that may guide both linguists and internet professionals in a better use of English across the net (Posteguillo, 2002, p. 36).

Two types of CMC are distinguished on the basis of users' needs and interests. CMC between native and non-native users. The former may not deteriorate the users' written language as they already know about the correct grammar and spelling, and use the simplification as a means to save time. The second, however, do devitalize the language from its grammatical properties as the users do not master the grammatical rules and

establish therefore simplifications based on non-grammatical usage. It is, thus, the second type that spreads fast in our context since university students, be they studying English or others subjects, may lack the basic grammatical knowledge of English and have instead the facility to communicate with counterparts, i.e. non-native users. The CMC facilitates the learning of English as the message is more or less at easy reach while the written form of the language, including most importantly grammar, is the deteriorated side. It is to say that grammaticality of sentences is less worried about by non-native users because in both synchronic CMC (instant messages) and asynchronous CMC (emails), grammatical mistakes dominate.

CMC as Comprehensible Input

CMC facilitates the rapid acquisition of English because the learner gives importance to the message he/she gets from the exchange and not the language itself. CMC, therefore, provides a comprehensible input to the user by initiating a stimulating exchange. Language is acquired by means of exposure to an input (Krashen, 1981) being mediated generally by the teacher who is supposed to attest the learner's increase in level ($i + 1$):

Input is made comprehensible by the teacher adapting the language roughly to the comprehension level (N.B. not the production level) of the learner. The learner's knowledge of the context will fill in the missing bits and understand any new items. The message of context and language will ensure that any new language in the input is acquired. (2005, p.28).

The teacher's presence is replaced by the computer and since it is a digital processor of language, it does just guarantee the transmission of language whereby the quality of the latter is the interlocutors' responsibility. When the interlocutors are non-natives, they exchange a comprehensible input subject to variation because English itself is set to different varieties and act as a variable model. The English learner is concerned rather with the Standard English language because other dialects may have linguistic restricted usage. Even if communication is between a native and a non-native speaker of English, the former may not be aware of the other's incorrect English since English speakers have tolerance with other speakers and do not recommend the

correct use of their language. In this case, the learner is in front of an input that may not result in an increase in his competence.

For input to be helpful to the learner of a foreign language, it needs to be presented gradually in the way to involve the learner in progressive acquisition of the language. The CMC does not have this feature as the language of communication is rather presented in one form free from design or specifications. Moreover, the CMC input needs repetition of linguistic items since frequency is likely to restore the learners' acquisition of new linguistic items. In the same concern, input modification, which is an important aspect of comprehensible input, is remarkably neglected within the CMC for the same reason discussed before (repetition).

CMC and Ungrammatical English

Several studies undertook the comparison between CMC and oral and written language. Rollason (2005) argues that the Internet revolution resulted in a return of the written word, McWhorter (2003) thinks rather of the Internet as leading a massive change at the detriment of grammar:

We drift even further from old written norms with the rapidly jelling traditions of instant messaging. Here, technology does encourage the change, as the small keyboards and screens make abbreviations like u for you and C for see expedient, and make composing elaborate written syntax fell rather like packing to many clothes into a suitcase. (p. 242).

CMC develops in the user a facility of getting to the message and rapidity of exchange but at the detriment of the accuracy of language. As Chapelle (2003) said,

... this experience is limited in terms of the degree to which it can help the learner to develop grammatical competence and particularly the ability to produce grammatical language. (p.36)

CMC helps the general English learner in making him/her more familiar with the native language but at the detriment of grammar. In that, learners get to the message without knowing all its linguistic forms. (Krashen, 1981).

Means of CMC are varied and affect grammaticality at different levels. While emails keep the traditional way of writing appropriately (Cristal, 2006), chat does not do the same and

grammaticality becomes neglected as the result of factors such as ignoring plurals, shortening grammatical forms and using ungrammatical ellipses. English learners' needs go beyond the comprehensible input; they need rather a medium of learning using a fixed language accepted at the academic level. The following section discusses the ungrammatical usage of English used in CMC.

Unsyntactic Forms

As it is said above, CMC affects English users at the two levels of communication between natives and non natives and communication between non natives. The former seems less disadvantaging the usage:

- "Where r u now? " For "where are you now? "
- "ttul" for "talk to you later"
- "wysiwyg" for "what you see is what you get"

Even if the sentences are shortened, this does not affect their syntactic aspect as there is at least awareness and knowledge about the syntacticality of sentences. The same thing can be said about the omission of the pronoun subject:

- Don't know?
- Depends on his conditions.
- Must have

These sentences lack the subject pronoun which is rather elliptical and its absence is understood by the users as being implied and thus does not affect the syntactic aspect of the sentence.

The usage changes when communication occurs between non-natives whereby the syntacticality is apparently affected:

- I bought book
- Why asking?
- Where r u now korea guy?
- He come 2moro
- She take them
- They not go

The ill-use of articles and the absence of the plural "s" is a very frequent feature in CMC between non-natives. Besides, "to be" does not relate appropriately the subject and its verb. The third

singular pronoun is source of deviancy as it is a generalization to all verbs. Negation, too, is badly employed as users give focus on the “not” with less care to how it relates to its antecedent.

Lexically ill Formed Words

The CMC results too in lexically ill formed words wherein the lexicography is modified to new different words:

- “Beards” instead of “birds”
- “Fone” instead of “phone”
- “Nite” instead of “night”
- “Wot” instead of “what”
- “No” instead of “know”

The above words are the result of a lexical deviance originating from the users ignorance of the right form. The word “beards” is generalised from “the long /e/ thought to be written with /ea/ instead of /i/. Another delicate deviance is the use of the /f/ instead of /ph/ for phone. This marks not only English but French too: foto instead of photo. With English the matter is much more delicate because it may affect other words with the pronunciation in /f/ while the written form is with /gh/: laugh. The user will have difficulty in acquiring new pronunciations if he/she is not aware of the distinctive features /ph/ and /gh/. The same thing for the word “know”. The /kn/ is pronounced /n/ and if written without the /k/ it makes reference to another word “no”.

Another lexical deviance is seen in the over use of abbreviations, symbols and ellipses:

- Ok ok ok I understand
- It him.....
- Use the tlf/TF

Particularly “ok” is very frequent in sms, chat and even emails. This is the abbreviation of “okay” denoting acceptance, agreement, assent or acknowledgment. It is rather deviated to mean the end of speech as several non-native CMC users employ it to end conversation or to end a disagreement. Ellipses are too frequent in non-native CMC whereby users employ them to not cite particular information or for avoiding wordiness. In lot of cases, ellipses do not make sense at all as they take the same amount of question marks and irrelevant symbols. Finally, abbreviations are too ill used because though they point to

something, they are created out of the users' individual way by taking just the main letters. The abbreviation of telephone is internationally known as "TEL". Its deviating forms are an indication of the ignorance of world abbreviations.

The non-native users employ lexically ill-formed words as the result of their ignorance of the correct spelling. Counterparts in the native CMC does rather less disadvantaged usage:

- C u l8ter
- Good n9t
- I'm f9

Natives are aware of the write spelling and if they shorten words, it is for the sake of brevity but not to produce new destroyed words. That is, they draw links with the usual words without harming the original form.

Conclusion

The CMC brought with new usage of English leading to the emergence of new codes. Some linguists see that lexical and syntactic deviation is rather a creative aspect and productivity of language (Barron, 1998) while others see it as a disadvantageous code. Several voices call for considering CMC as a new language (Collot et Belmore, 1996; Thurlow, 2000). However, this may not be the case of non-native CMC whereby the used code resists categorization since users rely on usages created out of grammatical knowledge.

At the syntactic level, CMC has been found to be the result of the users' simplification and overgeneralization of forms. The big disadvantage of these features is the incapacity to progress in the learning of English at the academic level because users employ forms they think fixed and do not, therefore, proceed to other different forms.

At the vocabulary level, there is the non internalization of words' contents as it is the case in simple lexical words. Non-native users care less about the meaning of words like "desktop" "4real". The acquisition of these terms is not deliberate and results from the need to communicate, as if there is a reduction in the assimilation of the full attributes of the word.

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