

Foreign language learning with CMC: forms of online instructional discourse in a hybrid Russian class

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Abstract

Where the role of instructor discourse has been the focus of much recent research on asynchronous online instruction, the anatomy of effective instructional discourse of foreign language educators has yet to be examined. Indeed, the majority of work in the area of foreign language and telecommunications has concentrated on student–student, student–peer interaction and the power through autonomy these dyads encourage. Little attention has yet been given to specific language strategies used by teachers in online conversations that are *instructional* in nature. The authors examine the online teaching strategies employed by the teacher of a first-year Russian class that integrated Computer Mediated Communication

Keywords: Computer Mediated Communication; Asynchronous; Teaching and Learning; Communicative Language Teaching; Form-focused Instruction; Instructional Conversations; Teacher online discourse

1. Introduction

Contemporary approaches to foreign language instruction tend to adhere to principles established over the past four decades in the field of second language acquisition as influenced by sociocultural theory. The sum of these principles form a general approach to instruction widely labeled “Communicative Language Teaching” (CLT). Sociocultural or CLT approaches are based on the following key premises: that language is best learned through the active negotiation of meaning (Ellis, 1996; Long, 1991) and that, consequently, a chief role for the language educator is to design, implement, guide, and scaffold such opportunities (Savignon, 1991; van Lier, 1996). Learners’ linguistic development results from skilled instructors employing verbal routines and techniques that guide learners in their communication attempts; indeed, instructor-scaffolded learner communication that focuses learner attention on target forms is widely viewed as a key locus of language learning (Anton, 1999; Belz, 2002; Cook, 2001; Ellis, 1996; Lightblown and Spada, 1993; Pica, 1995). Such dynamic instructional scaffolds guide learner attention, comprehension, and production. Generating appropriate instructional supports at appropriate moments can be difficult for both teachers and learners in real time: for teachers in that detecting ideal teachable moments and optimal strategies to support and augment these during real time communication with a number of learners is demanding at best; for learners the rapid pace of human interaction in the target language can mean that what the best teachers may intend to happen through their guidance and scaffolding efforts may pass right under students’ radar as they focus on unfamiliar words, structures, and the intentions of their interlocutors.

Extending learner opportunities for engaging in communicative practice in the target language via telecommunications has been widely lauded and numerous pilot CMC projects initiated and documented (Cummins and Sayers, 1997; Warschauer, 1996; Warschauer and Meskill, 2000). However, the potential enhancements to the acquisition process whereby telecommunications-mediated language learner discourse gets guided by skillful instructional scaffolding, and just what that instructor ‘verbal’ support and guidance might actually consist of have yet to be explored. Through the examination of a skilled foreign language teacher’s online instructional strategies and their impact on learners and their learning, we suggest that CMC affords both instructors and students both the time and opportunity they may lack in the live classroom to work through the negotiation of meaning with a focus on form. We are not in any way suggesting that CMC serve as a replacement for live instruction; on the contrary, as a complement to live instruction, instructor-orchestrated CMC may enhance f2f (face-to-face) learning by providing an additional venue to practice and reinforce f2f instruction. This study examines instructor strategies and learner responses to these strategies within the CMC portion of a hybrid language class of first-year US college students learning Russian. How form-focused communicative language

learning can take place online as an extension of the f2f component of a Russian language class with the direct aid of the instructor is examined. The framework and focus for the analysis of the CMC component are the affordances of CMC that facilitate and support form-focused CLT, specifically how teachable moments are manifest, exploited, and responded to by teachers and learners.

2. Perspective

Traditionally, the main role of the teacher in asynchronous online teaching environments has been to encourage student participation, act as coordinator for group planning, suggest alternatives, model certain behaviors, reflect on students' postings, remain present to learner needs (Anderson et al., 2001), and foster the sense that there is a learning community online (Mason, 1991). The mission and imperative of foreign or second language instruction, however, requires specific elements of the instructional conversation that happens between teacher and learners. Simply put, the instructional conversation in the language classroom is distinct because the medium of instruction is also the target of instruction (Tharp and Gallimore, 1991). This is true of the live, communicative classroom where at any given moment an instructor is both assessing and responding to student learning in supportive, scaffolded ways that lead to learner attending and subsequent acquisition of the language while maintaining the natural flow of meaningful communication (Doughty and Varela, 1998). The dynamics of a live language classroom are complex and multifaceted. The sociocognitive demands on the part of both learners and instructor are high; learners must attend to what is otherwise new and challenging aural and written information while rehearsing verbal responses. Instructors must orchestrate communicative activity while identifying, calculating, and scaffolding teachable moments whereby learner attention and production will focus on the target forms and functions of the moment. In such contexts, teachable moments include teacher responses to learners' interlanguage efforts and errors through various verbal techniques that focus on form while sustaining the communicative momentum.

While offering optimal contexts for language acquisition to occur, for language teachers to manage these as well as many additional oversight and orchestration tasks simultaneously is a substantial challenge. To successfully undertake the feat of running instructional conversations while drawing appropriate attention at appropriate times to the language being used is indeed demanding. For learners as well, real time target language and meaning processing, rehearsing, and production while attending to the forms the target language in real time is likewise daunting. CMC is a forum where such demands of real time communication can be compensated for through a set of affordances the medium offers foreign language learners and teachers.

2.1. CMC affordances

In order to notice and attend to target language forms during real time communication, talk must typically stop while words and sentences are written on the board

and/or explicated by a teacher or peer. As CMC consists of ‘written speech’, target language forms are visually immediate and teachers or peers can highlight or otherwise call attention to those forms. Learners have the opportunity not only to *see* the language being used to communicate, but to look at it as many times and for as long as they wish without disruption of the online conversation. These features – seeing the target language, having the time and opportunity to reflect, use resources, compose, and edit responses – also mean for the teacher perfect opportunities to respond to the teachable moments she detects; moments that in real time may not have been perceivable nor judged sufficiently relevant or teachable during rapid, fleeting f2f communication.

As illustrated in this CMC transcript analysis, the teachable moments to which foreign language educators can respond are plentiful. Indeed, the kinds of real time tactics of which form-focused communicative language teaching would ideally be comprised appear eminently realizable in CMC. Both teacher and students are afforded the needed time and visual anchors within the communicative stream to make instructional sense of the written conversation. For learners, this means time and opportunity to attend to and process the target language; for a teacher this means time and opportunity to recognize and respond thoughtfully to the kind of teachable moments that render the conversation *instructional* for second language acquisition. CMC allows teachers to employ a balanced approach to language instruction whereby communication is given preeminence while target forms are highlighted.

2.2. Research on CMC and foreign language teaching

While the role of instructor discourse has been the focus of much recent research on asynchronous online instruction (Arbauch, 2001; Jiang and Ting, 2000; Mason, 1991; Mazzolini and Maddison, 2003; Picciano, 1998; Procter, 2000; Wergerif, 1998), the *instructional* discourse of foreign language educators has yet to be examined. In his 1997 list of questions that language in education researchers might investigate in the near future, Warschauer includes the following: “What is the optimal role for teachers to play in the computer-mediated learning environment? How can teachers make the effective transition from “sage on the stage” to “guide on the side” (Tella, 1996, p. 6) that online education entails? What types of online interaction by teachers facilitate learning, and what types stifle student initiative?” (p. 478). To date only a very few studies examining CMC in teaching foreign languages have addressed the nature and goals of instructor participation. The bulk of studies on CMC in foreign language education looks at contexts where the instructor’s influence and power over the discourse have been reduced in favor of the expansion of student autonomy, control over discussion topics and directions, and learner initiative. Several of these studies point to a decrease in instructor participation in favor of student participation. For example, Kelm (1992) reported that 92% of the total messages in computer conferencing in a Portuguese class were posted by the students in contrast to what typically happens in a live classroom. In analyzing the target language production of students of French, Kern (1995) discovered that in electronic discussions students produced 85% and 88% of the total number of sentences, while

in live discussions they produced 37% and 60% of the total T-units. Likewise, Sullivan and Pratt (1996) found that 65% of all turns in oral discussion in a French class were made by the instructor, whereas in CMC the instructor took only 15% of the total turns. Warschauer et al. (1996) also found increased participation by ESL students in computer, as compared to f2f, interaction. Finally, Hudson and Bruckman (2002), comparing the results of discussions in an f2f classroom and an online discussion led by two instructors of French, found that the instructors produced 82% and 84% of the total words in f2f classes whereas in the online classroom they produced only 6% and 14% of the total words.

This collection of studies clearly demonstrates the possibilities for quantitative changes in a language instructor's participation. However, CMC can also be viewed as a venue for *qualitative* changes in instructor behaviors as well. In some cases, an instructor joins online discussions but only as a "mere participant" (Ortega, 1997), or "another voice" (Sullivan and Pratt, 1996). In other studies, the facilitative role an instructor can play is emphasized. A language instructor can facilitate student participation by acting as a coordinator for group planning, introducing a task for students, and then during the task circulating to help them: encouraging them to be responsible for their learning, acknowledging student initiative, functioning as "discourse gatekeeper (i.e., evaluator of the appropriateness of the language and content of each student's contribution)" (Kern, 1995, p. 469), and promoting active interactions between learners (Barson et al., 1993; Berge, 1995; Ewing, 2000; Heift and Caws, 2000; Kelm, 1996; Kern, 1995; Peterson, 1997; Wang and Teles, 1998; Warschauer, 1996).

Nonetheless, specific strategies foreign language instructors employ to render CMC communications *instructional* have yet to be investigated. Although some authors make general statements concerning the necessity and effectiveness of language assistance provided by an instructor (Kern, 1996; Stepp-Greany, 2002), they do not provide specific examples of what such instructional scaffolding might consist of. A few studies (Barson et al., 1993; Beauvois, 1998; Gonzalez-Bueno, 1998) mention the potential instructional role that an instructor can play in a CMC environment. Barson et al. (1993) and Beauvois (1998), for example, mention that implicit negative feedback can be incorporated in instructor's messages. Gonzalez-Bueno (1998) points out that an instructor can model certain expressions or vocabulary items in her/his messages that might be picked up easily by students. Some studies that do not treat the instructor's role directly nevertheless suggest online strategies and techniques that might be successfully implemented in online FL teaching practice such as modeling, saturation, negotiation of meaning, repetition, paraphrase, lexical elaboration, morphosyntactic elaboration, and recast (Doughty and Long, 2003; Kitade, 2000; Pellettieri, 2000; Salaberry, 2000; St. John and Cash, 1995; Tudini, 2003).

3. Context/method

Using the discussion feature of Blackboard, a CMC component was incorporated into one beginning level Russian language course, Basic Russian 2, the first year,

second term of Russian language. All of the online discussions were led, monitored and maintained by one of the authors. The pedagogical intent was to use the CMC component as a supplement to and support for in-class work. During the Winter 2003 trimester six students (five males, one female, ages 18–22) were involved in participating in asynchronous discussion forums in Russian. Each student had taken Basic Russian 1, the first year, first term of Russian language.

Discussion threads for online language practice were initiated by the instructor and included “Дружба” (Friendship), “Русская культура” (Russian Culture), “Экономика и политика России” (Russian economy and politics), “Стереотипы” (Stereotypes), “Жизнь в колледже” (College Life), “Война в Ираке” (War in Iraq), and “Твой форум” (Your Own Forum). Participation in the CMC component was obligatory and figured into the final grade as outlined in the course syllabus: “You will be expected to participate in online discussions on given topics via the distance learning platform Blackboard. Participation in online discussions is worth 10% of the overall grade. Topics and further details will be discussed in class.”

Russian was the exclusive language of online communication. Each student received three and a quarter hours of in-class instruction and forty-five minutes of laboratory practice each week. The textbook for the course was *Live from Moscow, Stage One, Volume 1*, and *Live from Moscow, Stage One, Volume 2*. Students were asked to post 3–7 messages per week on given topics. The number and length of sentences as well as the number of words was not specified. Online discussion participants also included two native speakers – the instructor of the course and the teaching assistant (TA). For preparation, students were given small assignments involving typing in Russian and were asked to exchange emails (in Russian) with each other and the instructor. This preparation stage did not include any extensive work on students’ grammar or vocabulary. All of the online discourse was printed out, archived, and those portions that contained instructional moves on the part of the instructor and learner responses to them analyzed.

All participating students were very proficient in e-mail communication. All except for one student had computers in their apartments/dorms. All had access to computers on campus. They learned how to type Cyrillic using a scheme/map of a Russian keyboard that was provided by the instructor. On average, each student posted 26 messages, or 6.5 messages per week during the CMC assignment. An average student posting included 2.5 sentences. The average length of the student message was 16.3 words.

3.1. Categories of analysis

Analysis of the CMC transcripts centered on the sets of conversational/instructional moves made by the instructor in response to what she perceived as teachable moments within the CMC threaded discourse. The authors developed these labels through a process of iterative discussions, modification, and eventual consensus. Borrowing from both of their experiences observing and studying the f2f classroom behaviors of foreign language teachers and from the extant literature on descriptive techniques for classroom teaching, the authors came to agree on labels for the tea-

cher's instructional moves in the CMC transcript. The added dimension of authentic reflection and self-analysis on the part of the teacher/researcher was invaluable in assessing the instructional intent of these archived conversations. The teacher's instructional strategies in the course transcript came to fall under the following labels:

3.1.1. Saturation

When a particular form (sets of vocabulary items and/or syntactic forms) had been introduced in the f2f classroom, the instructor took advantage of the CMC portion of the course to saturate the conversation with these forms.

3.1.2. Providing linguistic tools

When a topic came up in the CMC portion of the course, the instructor took advantage by providing lists of vocabulary items and/or other forms that students would logically need to participate in discussion of that topic.

3.1.3. Incidental modeling

The instructor's utterances became unintentionally modeled forms that learners appropriated and used in their f2f and online communications.

3.1.4. Calling attention to forms

In many cases, the instructor seized the opportunity to point out forms learners would either be using or needed to be using.

3.1.5. Providing meaning/form-focused feedback

Because of the additional time and opportunity to compose and edit her feedback, the instructor frequently integrated form-focused feedback into the communicative stream.

3.1.6. Using linguistic traps

The instructor "trapped" learners into using specific target language forms under study.

Each of these instructional strategies will be illustrated below and the special affordances of CMC in their implementations discussed.

Saturation: When a particular form (sets of vocabulary items and/or syntactic forms) had been introduced in the f2f classroom, the instructor took advantage of the CMC portion of the course to saturate the conversation with these new forms.

We found saturation to be a distinctive instructional practice that deliberately reinforced and recycled what had gone on in the f2f portion of the class. It was also the most frequently employed of these instructional strategies. Practically every instructor message provided at least one of the course's targeted forms. This was intentional on the instructor's part as the CMC portion of the class was aimed at reinforcing the target forms introduced in the live classroom. In the following

example, student W. wrote, “Я не знаю что я делал вчера вечером. Я не пью. Ой Профессор знает что я пью. Что делать?? (I don’t know what I did yesterday night. I don’t drink. Oh! Professor knows that I drink. What should I do?)” The instructor answered deliberately including forms of the accusative case in time expressions and prepositional case with nouns indicating places that had been introduced in class: “Что делать?! Не пить – вот что делать. И, конечно, **каждый понедельник, каждую среду и каждую пятницу** быть на лекции. (What should you do?! Not to drink is what you should do. And, of course, be in class *every Monday, every Wednesday and every Friday*).” As the use of these constructions was on the class radar during this time period, the instructor seized the opportunity to saturate discussion with them and thereby conversationally reinforce their forms and functions.

Providing linguistic tools: When a topic came up in the CMC portion of the course, the instructor took advantage by providing lists of vocabulary items and/or other forms that students would logically need to participate in discussion of that topic.

Instructors continually calculate what linguistic material students need in order to participate in communicative activities. Providing linguistic tools was a frequently used method of giving students the language they needed to use in the CMC portion on demand. Integral to her calculations were: (1) what is linguistically required for the particular context and (2) what learners know and do not know at a given point in time in relation to what is linguistically required by a given context. In the following example of the instructor employing a Providing Linguistic Tools strategy, a list of expressions for clarification of meaning was distributed to students for their reference during in-class and CMC activities (see [Appendix A](#)). Students were already familiar with this type of expression from f2f class time. Putting all the expressions for clarification of meaning that they had already learned in one place and providing several new ones served several goals: to reinforce the knowledge they had, to teach new phrases, to prompt them to use those items in a suitable context, and to show them implicitly (as well as telling them directly) that it is acceptable and appropriate to ask for clarification if they do not understand online messages. They were also given a list of phrases for expressing agreement/disagreement (see [Appendix A](#)). The instructor modeled appropriate uses of these expressions throughout the semester in both the CMC and f2f environments. For example, the following online conversation happened between the students, TA, and the instructor:

- TA: Ребята, вы сможете прийти на вечеринку в следующее воскресенье?
Или лучше сделать ее в субботу?
(Guys, can you come to the party next Sunday? Or is it better to set it for Saturday?)
- J.: Я могу в любое время.
(I can any time)
- V.: Вечер субботы лучший вечер танцевать!
(Saturday night is the best night to dance!)
- Instructor: Я **согласна**. Вечеринка в субботу – самая лучшая вечеринка.
(*I agree*. A party on Saturday night is the best party).

The instructor took the opportunity to deliberately include in her message the phrase “I agree” to illustrate the use of this expression. The following excerpt from the online conversation about the weather is an example of how the instructor modeled the use of the phrase “I don’t think so”:

- A.: Сегодня- льет как из ведра.
 (Today is raining cats and dogs)
- Instructor: Я так не думаю. Сегодня мороз, но дождя нет. Вы шутите?
 (*I don’t think so.* Today is freezing, but there is no rain.
 Are you kidding?)

Learners in turn referred to this list and imitated the instructor. For example when discussing a Russian military uniform that B. had bought at a Russian store in Boston, L. made an unflattering comment about it in class. The following message is B.’s reaction to this comment:

B. wrote, Л., я не согласен с тобой! Я думаю тот я был очень половой в моём костюме, и я был БОЛЬШОЙ половой без моего костюма.

(L., *I disagree with you.* I think I was very “genderish” [sexy?] in my suit, and I was more “genderish” [sexy?] without my suit).

In another instance, when talking about the beverages they preferred, L. and A. wrote:

- A.: По-моему, ты не должна пить кофе. Ты должна пить много пива. :)
 (I think you should not drink coffee. You should drink a lot
 of beer).
- L. responded: Нет, спасибо. Я так не думаю. Мне не нравится пиво.
 (No, thank you. *I don’t think so.* I don’t like beer).

In another example, while talking about life in their dormitories, B. and P. wrote:

- B.: Я люблю жить в общежитиях. Но, я предпочитаю (prefer)
 жить один. У меня есть сосед сейчас, и я не люблю его!
 (I like to live in dorms. But I prefer to live alone. I have a
 roommate now, and I don’t like him).
- P. responded: Я тоже так думаю.
 (*I think so too.*)

When provided the linguistic tools that contribute to the flow of online conversation, learners were quick to implement these to make their meanings known. By having both a list of expressions and the instructor’s modeling, they could make productive use of expressions that in the live classroom may have slid by undetected.

Incidental Modeling: The instructor’s utterances became unintentionally modeled forms that learners appropriated and used in their f2f and online communications.

Throughout the semester, the instructor used naturally occurring forms and expressions in her native language. Learners were quick to pick up on these and in many cases appropriate them for use in their own CMC and live communications. Incidental expressions such as “ребята” (guys), “действительно” (indeed), and the like became frequent features of learners’ online and live target language discourse. For example, one of the teacher’s discourse habits was the use of the word “действительно” (indeed):

Это, **действительно**, очень смешно.

(It’s funny *indeed*)

Это, **действительно**, так

(It’s so *indeed*).

The students picked this word up from the instructor’s messages. A. wrote, “По-моему, **Я действительно** люблю этот город. (I think *indeed* like this city).” J. wrote, “Да, я **действительно** хотел это сказать. (Yes, *I indeed* wanted to say that).”

The word “ребята” (guys) was also not the part of this curriculum. The instructor did not use this term in the live classroom. Online, however, it came naturally in her messages:

Ребята, вы знаете, что думают русские о войне в Ираке?

(*Guys*, do you know what Russians think about the war in Iraq?).

Очень приятно видеть, что вы, **ребята**, хотите знать русскую культуру.

(I’m very pleased to see *guys* that you want to know Russian culture).

The students picked up this word. For example, J. wrote:

Привет **ребята!** Вы не знаете, что наша домашняя работа на среду?

(Hi *guys!* Do you happen to know what our homework for Wednesday is?).

The following conversation happened between L. and the class TA. They were chatting about the young men on campus:

L.: Но, мы их любим как-нибудь. ; р
(But we love some anyway)

ТА: Любим? Ты уверена? Я даже не знаю...;) Шучу (jk)
(Do we? Are you sure? I even don’t know... Joke!)

L.: Нет. Я не уверча.; р /к **ребята!**
(No, I’m not sure. Joke, *guys!*)

In the CMC discussion thread, “War in Iraq”, the instructor provided a link to the online version of an article in the Russian newspaper “Аргументы и Факты” (Arguments and Facts). She also wrote a brief comment that included the title of the article which contained novel vocabulary words, “апокалипсис” (apocalypse) and “невозможно” (impossible).

Статья называется “Терминатор Джордж. Остановить невозможно? Война в Ираке – начало апокалипсиса? Что вы думаете об этой статье?”

(The article’s title is *George the Terminator*. Is it impossible to stop? The war in Iraq is the beginning of the **apocalypse**. What do you think about this article?).

Students incidentally picked up, and in turn repeatedly used the words “апокалипсис” (apocalypse) and “невозможно” (impossible). L. responded immediately: Да. Война была бы апокалипсис. (Yes. The war would be an *apocalypse*). Several days after this particular discussion on the Iraq war, W. used the incidentally occurring word “Невозможно! (*Impossible!*)” when writing about the instructor’s advice to study more.

In another instance, L. appropriated both a new word and a grammatical construction of the Instrumental case incidentally from an instructor message:

- L.: Я судила соревнования по фигурному катанию.
(I judged a skating competition.)
- Instructor: Вы были субъективной?
(Were you *subjective*?)
- L.: Я испытуюсь (try) не быть субъективной.
(I try not to be *subjective*.)

Incidental modeling frequently happens in f2f classrooms but online it can be as, if not more effective because of the opportunities the format provides: anchored visual form to which learners can refer, contextualized examples of use, and opportunities to compose and edit using the new forms. When incidental learning happens in f2f classrooms, it can derail the course of the conversation by diverting attention. For example, if a student hears a word she doesn’t know, she asks that it be written on the blackboard. The communicative moment is lost.

Calling Attention to Forms: In many cases, the instructor seized the opportunity to point out forms that individual learners would either be using or needed to be using.

Unlike the fast-paced forum of the live classroom, the format of CMC supports instructors in more thoroughly detecting problems that individual learners may be having. Instructors can thereby supply individualized instruction tailored to the individual student’s needs at a given moment. In the following example, the instructor learned that B. had particular difficulty with the use of the Russian infinitive. There is a parallel between the use of infinitives after certain transitive verbs such as “хотеть” (to want), “любить” (to love) in English and in Russian. In spite of this similarity, students often make mistakes using personal forms instead of infinitives, for example, “он хочет читает” (‘he wants reads’) instead of “он хочет читать” (he wants to read). B. was one student who had a problem with this form. He wrote, “Я люблю живу один. (I *like live* alone)” in both his written assignments and oral presentations. The instructor called attention to a form the student was clearly having trouble with, the “like to” construction, when she replied “Я тоже люблю жить одна. (I also *like to live* alone).” Later the instructor modeled this type of construction in her messages addressed to B. again calling his attention to the correct

construction. B. attached an image he found on the Russian Internet site – people dancing in a winter park and wrote:

Они танцуют в парках когда погода очень холодная! Почему!!!!???? Я не понимаю. (They are dancing in parks when the weather is very cold. Why!!!!???? I don't understand).

The instructor wrote: А вы не любите танцевать в парке зимой?

(Don't you *like to dance* in a park in the winter?)

B. responded: Я люблю танцевать в парке. Но не когда погода так холодная!

(I *like to dance* in a park but not when the weather is so cold).

The instructor had become aware of B.'s problem with the infinitive in the live classroom. CMC became an excellent venue for drawing his attention to this form and prompting him to practice it repeatedly.

Providing Meaning/Form-Focused Feedback: Because of the additional time and opportunity to compose and edit her feedback, the instructor frequently integrated form-focused feedback into the communicative stream.

Implicit feedback provided in the online mode is an example of tactful teaching combined with learners being able to see the language used, and the non-disruptive aspect of online conversation. In live classrooms, error corrections that are too intrusive may harm authentic communication, intensify students' fear of making mistakes, and discourage them from participating. In CMC, a foreign language instructor has the opportunity to involve students in using correct target language forms by asking questions, inviting response, and requesting clarification. This type of give and take works well in CMC, and the instructor can avoid the intimidation factor involved when asking students to perform in the live classroom. Feedback can be provided without breaking the flow of the conversation, and can indeed become a natural part of the conversation.

For example, when P. wrote, “Она говорит по-французский. (She speaks ‘*Frenchy*’),” he used an incorrect form of the adverb “по-французский” (‘*Frenchy*’). After the instructor wrote him a message, “Она говорит только по-французски? А она говорит по-русски или по-английски? (Does she speak only *French*? Can she speak *Russian* or *English*?), providing implicit negative feedback and modeling several similar forms, P. answered, “Она говорит по-французски и по-английски тоже. (She speaks *French* and also *English*), using the correct forms.

Feedback was thus provided as a part of an authentic conversation on the topic of the learner's personal interest without discourse derailment. In another instance, P. began the discussion, “Французы ненавидят американцы. (The French hate *Americans*).” He incorrectly used the nominative plural instead of the accusative plural. The instructor responded, “Почему французы ненавидят американцев? (Why do the French hate *Americans*?), using the word “американцы” (Americans) in the accusative plural. Following the instructor's lead, P. answered, “Я думаю французы ненавидят американцев потому что они не пытаются говорить по-французски когда они во Франции.” (I think the French hate *Americans* because they don't try to speak French when they are in France).

Feedback can thus be integrated into the conversational flow with the static nature of the CMC text making learner reflection on the corrective information possible and, in the case of this particular language class, highly likely.

Using Linguistic Traps: The instructor “trapped” learners into using specific target language.

This CMC teaching strategy differs from Saturation and Prompting Attention in that the instructor herself does not use the target forms in her messages. Rather, she asks questions in such a manner that learners are forced to answer using certain forms and vocabulary items. For example, the question “Что вы вчера ели?” (What did you eat yesterday?) requires the use of the past forms of the verb “to eat”, a direct object in the accusative case, and the use of appropriate vocabulary items. The following CMC dialogue took place between W. and the instructor:

- W.: Сейчас Я буду ходить в магазине.
(Now I'll be going to the store)
- Instructor: Что вы хотите купить в магазине? Продукты?
(What do you want to buy at the store? Groceries?)
(the question ‘what do you want to buy?’ prompts using the accusative case in an answer)
- W. Да конечно. Я тоже купил пиццу. Вы знаете что я ненавижу пиццу здесь.
(Yes, of course. I also bought a pizza. You know that I hate food here) (The word ‘pizza’ is in the accusative case; he also used the verb “to hate” that also requires the accusative case)

The verbs “есть” (to eat), “любить” (to love), “ненавидеть” (to hate), “читать” (to read) are transitive. They require the use of a direct object in the accusative case. The online mode of instruction as part of the ongoing CMC conversation was in this, and in many other instances, the perfect place for the students to be coerced into practicing the forms they had learned in the f2f classroom.

4. Discussion

Foreign language learners frequently report the difficulties they encounter in live, communicative classrooms where the pace and complexity of real time communication in tandem with an instructor’s efforts to render that conversation form-focused and instructional make it difficult to simultaneously comprehend, produce, and attend to the forms of the target language. As Salaberry and others have noted “text-based CMC provides a natural way to link a focus on meaning with a focus on form” (Salaberry, 2000, p. 6). Indeed, as an accompaniment to live language classes, CMC is a venue where the richness of human–human communication and the forms it takes can be stopped, studied, attended to, and effective teaching strategies employed by foreign language instructors.

In this case, the sophistication of first-year Russian learners’ target language production clearly indicates that they were pushing the linguistic envelope to express themselves. This was evidenced in the ease with which they used the new language in both the CMC and live contexts. They experimented with new forms, new words,

attended to one another and their instructor and, overall, benefited a great deal from having employed the target language in such authentic and productive ways. Instructional strategies used by the instructor capitalized on the features of the medium that allowed learners time to notice, use resources, reflect, and compose unlike in the live classroom. She was able to tailor guidance and feedback to individual learner's needs and scaffold the use of new forms, vocabulary items, and language functions when the opportunity to do so presented itself in online conversations. Moreover, such points of focus easily carried over into the f2f classroom and were likewise reinforced. The CMC portion of the class gave learners the opportunity to ask for help and for clarification concerning what went on in the live classroom and vice versa.

In addition to being an excellent venue for instructional conversations in the target language, CMC also represents a mechanism for assessing student learning in a continuous, naturalistic fashion. In this case, the instructor was able to witness in archived, written form her learners' use of linguistic elements that had been explicitly and implicitly taught to them. In this way, she was able to make judgments concerning their progress and readiness that she otherwise may not have been able to do as accurately through other means. Evidence of student learning, then, can be ongoing and made an integral part of instructional planning and strategies. In the case of these Russian learners, their learning of specific target forms as orchestrated by the instructor could not be more clearly evidenced.

5. Conclusion

As illustrated in these transcripts, the instructional opportunities afforded by electronic communications make CMC an excellent tool to complement live foreign language classes. In addition to providing a venue to extend communicative practice guided by skilled instructional moves, the medium also affords learners access to language in static text form and the additional time they may need to process these instructional moves and develop their own appropriate responses (Kern, 1996; Warschauer, 1997; Meskill, 2002). Moreover, slowing down the conversation provides instructors with what may be the time they need to identify teachable moments and strategize appropriate instructional scaffolds. As Lee (2002) states: "Future studies are needed to find out the effectiveness of modification devices on the development of learners' language competence. In terms of linguistic inaccuracy, learners tended to ignore each other's mistakes and moved forward with the discussions. Despite the importance of promoting communication, which is the key for SLA, *pedagogically students need to be advised of the need to write correctly to maintain a balance between function, content, and accuracy*" (p. 286). It is indeed through instructor advisement on function, content, and accuracy that learners learn the language. Such *instructional* conversations, those that guide learner attention to and production of the target language, are well accommodated by the features of CMC environments and thereby make instructional CMC a promising tool in foreign language education.

Appendix A. Vocabulary

Clarification

У меня есть вопрос.

Можно спросить?

Повторите, пожалуйста.

Что это значит?

Как сказать это по-русски?

Я не понимаю.

Что? (informal)

Скажите по-другому.

Понятно.

Agreement/Disagreement

Я тоже так думаю.

Я согласен

Я согласен

Я согласен

I have a question

May I ask?

Repeat, please.

What does it mean?

How do you say it in Russian?

I don't understand.

What?

Say it in different words.

I understand/I see/Got it.

I think so, too.

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