◯ CHATTING IN L2 SPANISH: INTERACTIVITY, SELF-EFFICACY AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

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This study seeks to examine variations in patterns of interactivity as they are displayed in the ongoing discourse construction of high and low self-efficacy learners of Spanish in the context of computer-mediated-communication. The paper specifically focuses on the analysis of synchronous text chats of six university students of Spanish at intermediate level over the course of two semesters as they carried out semi-directed discussions. The analytical framework is drawn from Eggins and Slade's (2006) model of speech functions within Systemic Functional Linguistics which, to our knowledge, has never been applied to second language online chat discussions. This approach highlights how general patterns of dominance, sustainability and dependence in the management of discourse behaviour are displayed through the participants' contributions. The analysis suggests in particular that the realisation of interactivity can be traced back to the negotiation of exchanges concerned with social and interpersonal relations. These findings become particularly relevant when considered within the wider educational debate of participation and acquisition (Sfard, 1998), as the interpersonal relations of people who engage in collaborative activities are normally considered peripheral to second or foreign language learning (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). On the basis of the present analysis, a further elaboration of the model is proposed to take account of the relational perspective that would need to be tested in future studies using similar data.

KEY WORDS: Interactivity; self-efficacy; speech-functions; interpersonal relations; discourse sustainability

INTRODUCTION

As language classrooms become increasingly dependent on global information technologies, a deeper understanding of the role of Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) in

providing opportunities for second language learners to engage in open-ended conversational exchanges in synchronous environments is of central importance. This paper specifically focuses on the analysis of synchronous text chats of six university students of Spanish at intermediate level over the course of two semesters as they carried out semi-directed discussions. The engagement of learners in interactive participation online will be discussed from the points of view of self-efficacy, understood as a person's belief about what they can do in a second language, as well as socialisation through discourse. The nature of online participation will be analysed from the perspective of the participants' display of interactive discourse in terms of discourse dominance, dependence and sustainability. These are determined in relation to the negotiation of speakers' roles and interpreted according to the degree of control over the distribution of speech functions selected by the conversational participants. Based on the literature on self-efficacy, it is our contention that low self-efficacy learners will choose to take a dependant and reactive role in conversational exchanges in the target language while high self-efficacy learners may be more independent and able to sustain discourse involvement in the target language through prolonged exchanges.

A key question in this investigation, however, is how a discourse approach along the lines of Eggins and Slade's (2006) model of speech functions can usefully inform the analysis of our data, given that this model has not been used before in the particular context of CMC. In order to take account of multiple layers of understanding afforded by this model the following more focused research aims will serve to drive the examination of these complex matters. Briefly, this paper seeks, firstly, to examine how levels of high or low self-efficacy relate to learners' participation patterns with regard to their achievement of interactivity over the length of an academic year and, secondly, to report on the unfolding of interpersonal dynamics between intermediate students of Spanish as they become members of a social and linguistic community.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED PERSPECTIVE OF CMC INTERACTION

Within the broad context of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and language learning, research has suggested that CMC can encourage learners' participation in conversational exchanges, and that this can provide opportunities for the development of their communicative competence in the target language. For example, Kern (1995) showed that students in synchronous written environments produced more turns than in face-to-face classrooms, resulting in more language produced, and Chun (1994) pointed out that CMC allows learners to take greater control of the discourse. Similarly, Warschauer (1996), and more recently Levy and Stockwell (2006), have shown how learners contribute to online interactions more equally than when in face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, some research has shown how social presence (Vogiazou, Dzbor, Komzak & Eisenstadt, 2003) is created in

synchronous environments, and has highlighted the potential of CMC to 'allow socialization and communication to take precedence over form' (Kelm, 1996, p. 19). However, most studies have not been able to establish a clear link between learners' increased participation in CMC and the process of second language learning.

The term *interactive participation* within the present study presupposes that learning is essentially a social phenomenon that is constructed through patterns of interactive discourse behaviour and displayed through each participant's contributions, thus involving interpersonal dimensions. In contrast to exclusively cognitivist or interactionist approaches to second language acquisition, studies that have adopted a social perspective of the learner have paid closer attention to the context and the social processes of second language interaction and development (Breen, 2001; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) rather than the particular linguistic forms that are acquired. More recently, they have also focused on the evolving style of the learner's engagement (Norton & Toohey, 2001) and their influence on this process. Our theoretical position is thus informed by the perspective of the learner as a 'social being, taking part in structured social networks and social practices' (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 27) that are regulated by affect. The importance of understanding social relations and affect in the language classroom has been acknowledged by many researchers (see in particular Dewaele, 2005; Lantolf, 2000; Schumann, 1998), who suggest that 'interpersonal relations between students […] affect a student's sense of well-being in a profound survivalist sense' (Garrett & Young, 2009, p. 210). Such insights have revealed that besides the anxiety and the challenge to one's self-image, interpersonal relations that develop between students working together on a task contribute to enhance one's learning experience and general feeling of well-being (Garrett & Young, 2009, p. 223).

As research into socio-affective issues has only recently begun to emerge, the concept of 'self-efficacy', which reflects the learners' beliefs in their ability to complete a task, has been identified in the present study, as a core working concept. We believe that in conjunction with a discourse analytic approach it can contribute to further enhance our understanding of the relation between the social and personal dynamics of second language learners' online participation.

SELF-EFFICACY

There is widespread agreement that 'self-efficacy' (SE), defined by Schunk (1985, p. 208) as 'personal judgements of performance capabilities in a given domain of activities', is important in L2 learning. Research on attitudes, and perceptions of learning in particular, indicates that learners' beliefs about their own academic capabilities have a significant impact on actual performance (Bandura & Schunck, 1981), emotions (Stumpf, Brief & Hartman, 1989; Perry, Hechter, Menec & Weinberg, 1993), selection of behaviour (Betz & Hackett, 1981) as well as on the amount of effort and perseverance expended on an activity

(Brown & Inouye, 1978). A key element of this interaction is how SE affects the quality of learner participation in an online environment. It has been noted, for example, that SE regulates participation in learning opportunities (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008), and can predict academic achievement (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2007). In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), in particular, this construct is assumed by many to have an important role in motivation (Breen, 2001; Graham, 2006), as well as a controlling effect on debilitating language learning anxiety (Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2006), thus influencing learning and academic achievement. Based on the literature, it can be assumed that in comparison to high SE learners, low SE language learners will avoid risk-taking language behaviour by minimising sustainability of exchanges and will take a dependent and reactive role in conversational discussions. The concept of 'self-efficacy' is therefore being used in this study to assess its potential role in learners' interactional discourse construction, in particular in relation to discourse maintenance and interpersonal negotiation of exchange moves.

A MODEL OF INTERACTIVITY BASED ON SPEECH FUNCTIONS

In order to understand the nature of interactivity as it unfolds through the learners' discourse structure, it has been necessary to identify patterns in the management of discourse behaviour as they are displayed through the participants' contributions to the chat text. Participation can be looked at in terms of: (a) reciprocity - whether a statement by speaker A is followed by an acknowledgment, a reply/react/response, an elaboration, etc. by speaker B; and (b) topic sustainability – whether a topic thread is short or prolonged. Within Eggins and Slade's (2006)[i] model, however, the interactional structure of talk is realized not only by the amount of speech and turns at talk, but more importantly by the particular category of speech function which speakers select to position themselves and others into discourse roles (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). By paying particular attention to the four categories of speech functions selected by conversational participants - Initiate, Continue, React Respond and React Rejoinder - discourse roles in terms of dominance, discourse dependency and contribution to the maintenance of talk are thus brought into focus.

Dominance reflects how speakers display control over the interaction by leading or monopolising the use of Opening (Initiate moves) and Sustaining SF (Continue, React Respond and React Rejoinder moves). In contrast to independence, which is achieved by Opening, Continue, and React SF such as Develop, Track and Challenge moves, dependence is realised by moves that are elliptically related to prior Opening or Respond SF in the form of answers, grants or rejections. Focussing on the way exchanges are sustained by participants we can also trace the maintenance of talk through the use of either React Respond or Rejoinder SF. These are a particular good indicator of different degrees in discourse sustainability since the former complete exchanges and the latter expand on propositions made by other speakers.

In order to accommodate the complexity created by the data in the new online environment, we have added two sub-categories to Eggins and Slade's original model: (1) Re-demand and (2) Enhance[ii].

(1) Re-Demand moves are classified within the Initiate Speech Function type and refer to a repetition of a Demand due to a lack of response by any participant or by the speaker previously addressed, as illustrated in the excerpt below in line 69:

L56	Kate	Kim... tu jugas baloncesto por un equipo?	Kim... do you play basketball in a team?
L57	Kim	Kate jugas algo deportes?	Kate do you play sports?
[...]			
L59	Kim	que significa "equipo"?	What does "equipo" mean?
[...]			
L68	Kim	ahhh.. ok	ahhh.. ok
L69	Kate	estas en el equipo Kim?	Are you in a team Kim?

(Second Sample, R10, L56-69)[iii]

(2) Enhance moves are classified within the Rejoinder-Support subcategory of Speech Functions. They relate to a prior proposition, perceived as intelligible but deemed to require expansion. More precisely they act as a request for further elaboration before the exchange can be completed, as illustrated below in line 42:

L38	Albert	yo pienso el gobierno de NSW y VIC tiene que limpiar y ayudar el rio murray	I believe that the NSW and VIC government should clean and help the Murray river
L39	Rikki	si.	Yes
L40	Rego	si yo tambien, es los problemas de todos	Yes, me too. It is a problem that we all have [that affects all of us]
L41	Albert	el rio murray tiene muchas granjas se usa irrigacion de inundación	The Murray river has [irrigates] many farms that use [require] flooding irrigation
L42 →	Rikki	y el cuesto por el limpiar? quien pagar	And the cost for cleaning up [the river], who will pay [for it]?

(First Sample R9, L38-42)

Effectively, such analytical framework offers a way of interpreting dialogic structure as it unfolds move by move in a chat environment. Firstly, it enables us to document and explain how L2 Spanish language learners achieve interactivity in their target language over time. Secondly, it also provides us with ways of describing and analysing the multidimensional nature of participation in terms of dominance, dependency and sustainability of discourse together with the interplay of social dynamics that keeps the learners engaged with one another. To our knowledge, such an approach has not been applied to the study of interaction in L2 Spanish in a CMC environment, and should yield interesting insights into the interpersonal dimensions which operate at multiple levels of L2 learning, including meta-talk, in this new context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This longitudinal study was carried over two semesters with the aim to further understand the relationship between learners' self-efficacy, participation patterns and interpersonal dynamics in second language learning. Accordingly, in order to determine the extent to which participation in synchronous text-based CMC provides support for engaging in interactive discourse, the following questions were addressed:

i.   Is there any variation between high and low self-efficacy groups of learners in the patterns of interactivity displayed in their text chats over an academic year?

ii.   How do the language learners in this study negotiate exchanges and sustain discourse construction?

iii.   How does the use of meta-talk contribute to the social nature of interactivity?

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were selected from two intact classes of 42 intermediate-level students who spoke English as their first language and had studied Spanish for two semesters at university level prior to this study. From an initial pool of 42 students, six males and five females were selected on the basis of two criteria: (1) the results obtained from a preliminary questionnaire assessing the students' perceived SE level in speaking Spanish; and (2) the available data resulting from the students who participated in all CMC tasks.

Participants' SE levels were measured using a preliminary 13 item Likert-scale style survey which was carried out on the second week of the academic year. The design of this survey was based on a combination of existing scales that relate to factors regulating oral interaction[iv]. Average scores on a scale of 1 to 5 were collected for 42 students. Students averaging 1 to 2.99 were classified as Low SE, those averaging 3 to 3.99 as mid-point SE and those averaging 4 to 5 as High SE participants.[v] Questionnaire results originally

identified 8 high SE and 6 low SE students. Of these 14 students, three low SE and three high SE students participated in all semester one tasks and thus were included in this project. Of these six students, only two females Rikki, a Low SE learner, and Denise, a High SE learner[vi], participated also in all semester two activities designed for this study. These limiting criteria represent an attempt to solely include English speaking students with similar L2 formal instruction to ensure comparability of data.

THE TASKS

The tasks consisted of three 50-minute text-based synchronous semi-directed discussions that were part of the normal class activities. All text chat communication was carried through a *WebCT* platform as it was available to all students enrolled in the class and they could easily identify their communication partners through the display of their usernames. Communication amongst participants was thus made public and the regular face to face classroom conditions were replicated to encourage social dynamics. It should be noted that class attendance as well as participation in these discussions was non-compulsory.

From a list of themes previously identified in class as being of interest to students, three were selected for the online discussions (the environment, health and happiness, and a personal key life decision). Before each online discussion, learners viewed a short film or read a story in Spanish. Issues raised through the selected films and stories acted as prompts for the discussion tasks. Students were provided with key cultural background information and essential vocabulary related to the text in preparation for the tasks. They were also given a short list of opinion-based questions related to the thematic context of the texts which they could use to open their discussion[vii]. Tasks aimed at offering students opportunities to express their personal opinions and discover personal connections, as they were asked to relate their personal experiences. Students worked in small groups in all tasks. In order to avoid any personality clashes or preferred friendship groupings, the composition of each group was changed for each discussion task.

DATA

Data for this project were collected throughout one academic year and consist of three sessions of 50-minute synchronous chat discussions. In order to compare interactions carried out at the beginning, mid-way and end of year, online discussions were collected in week 4 (henceforth First Sample), and week 11 (henceforth Second Sample) of semester one, and in week 12 (henceforth Third Sample) of semester 2. All data were coded according to Eggins and Slade's (2006) classification of Speech Functions as explained earlier by two independent raters to ensure internal reliability. Initial agreement was at 82% or above, and every instance of disagreement was resolved after mutual discussions. The data were subsequently analysed in order to describe: (1) the nature of interactivity in CMC discourse structure; and (2) the interpersonal relations displayed in the socially constructed interactions

that go beyond the language learning task itself. Consequently, interactivity of discourse will firstly be accounted for by type and frequency of occurrences of speech functions selected by the participants in their exchanges, and secondly by meta-talk.

In the following section we first present findings related to learners' use of speech functions in three data samples corresponding to the three online discussion tasks described above. We then compare the results of the three samples in order to highlight how participants' discourse behaviour evolves over one academic year.

FINDINGS

DISCOURSE BEHAVIOUR IN THE FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD SAMPLES

Recalling that Self-Efficacy (SE) has been defined as the perceived capability to engage in a conversational exchange in Spanish, one could make the assumption that High SE participants will not only use higher number of speech functions than the Low SE group, but also specific categories of speech functions that enable them to perhaps dominate and control the negotiation of talk. Thus, initially it was expected that HSE participants would use Initiate, Continue and Rejoinder moves whilst LSE participants would use mainly Respond moves, and in particular Answer, Agree and Register moves that would only minimally sustain the discussion.

FIRST SAMPLE

In the first sample, as can be observed in Table 1, HSE participants use a higher number (119 compared to 66) and average percentage of SF (41% compared to 27%) than the LSE group.

Table 1

Speech Functions – LSE and HSE Participants

LSE	SF	% SF	HSE	SF	% SF
Laura	25	33.33	Denise	44	39.28
Rikki	31	32.63	Celine	32	38.09
Claudia	10	13.69	Albert	43	45.26
Total	66		Total	119	
Average*		27	Average		41

*Average: This percentage is calculated out of the total number of CS produced by all conversational partners in the sampled chat interaction in which the selected LSE or HSE learner participated.

SECOND SAMPLE

In the second sample, as Table 2 indicates, the HSE group does not use a markedly higher number of SF than the LSE group, but continues to use a higher average percentage (40% compared 32%) of SF.

Table 2

Speech Functions – LSE and HSE Participants

LSE	SF	% SF	HSE	SF	% SF
Laura	28	41.79	**Denise**	23	34.32
Rikki	22	22.91	**Celine**	34	43.58
Claudia	40	29.85	**Albert**	46	41.07
Total	**90**		**Total**	**103**	
Average*		**32**	**Average**		**40**

Thus, in line with our expectations, in the first and second samples, HSE participants use a higher average percentage of SF than the LSE participants. However, it is also important to note that in the second sample, differences are less marked than in the first sample.

THIRD SAMPLE

As can be observed in Table 3, in the third sample, and in marked contrast to the first sample, it is the LSE participant, Rikki, who uses a higher number and average percentage of SF. It can be said, therefore, that recorded average numbers and percentages of SF used by the LSE participants increase from the first to the second sample, and that in fact differences narrow between the two groups in the second sample. Moreover, in the third sample, the LSE participant uses not only a higher average number of SF but also a higher average percentage of SF than the HSE participant.

Table 3

Speech Functions – LSE and HSE Participants

	SF	% SF
Rikki (LSE)	35	42.68
Denise (HSE)	26	27.95

If we now look at the four SF categories of Initiate, Continue, Respond and Rejoinder, we can also observe changes in the categories used by the HSE and LSE participants across the three samples.

FIRST SAMPLE

Table 4 and Table 5 show that HSE participants use a markedly higher average percentage of Initiate, Continue and Rejoinder moves than the LSE participants and to a lesser degree also Respond moves.

Table 4

SF by category – Low SE Participants

	Init.	% INI	Cont.	% CON	Resp.	% RES	Rej.	% REJ
Laura	1	20.00	7	35.00	17	39.53	0	0.00
Rikki	4	40.00	5	26.31	17	32.07	5	38.46
Claudia	3	21.42	0	0.00	5	18.5	2	33.33
Total	**8**		**12**		**39**		**7**	
Average		**27**		**20**		**30**		**24**

Table 5

SF by category – High SE Participants

	Init.	% INI	Cont.	% CON	Resp.	% RES	Rej.	% REJ
Denise	6	60.00	18	50.00	13	26.00	7	35.00
Celine	9	75.00	7	26.92	10	31.25	6	42.85
Albert	4	40.00	10	52.63	23	43.39	6	46.15
Total	**19**		**35**		**46**		**19**	
Average		**58**		**43**		**34**		**41**

SECOND SAMPLE

Table 6 and Table 7 show that in the second sample, HSE participants use a higher average percentage of Initiate and Continue moves, but only a slightly higher average percentage of Respond moves and, interestingly, both groups use a similar average percentage of Rejoinder moves.

Table 6

SF by category – Low SE Participants

	Init.	% INI	Cont.	% CON	Resp.	% RES	Rej.	% REJ
Laura	0	0.00	7	53.84	17	51.51	4	26.66
Rikki	4	44.44	3	15.78	8	19.04	7	38.88
Claudia	5	62.50	3	11.11	15	28.30	17	36.95
Total	**9**		**13**		**40**		**28**	
Average		**35**		**27**		**33**		**34**

Table 7

SF by category – High SE Participants

	Init.	% INI	Cont.	% CON	Resp.	% RES	Rej.	% REJ
Denise	6	100.00	5	38.46	9	27.27	3	20.00
Celine	3	37.50	10	40.00	9	34.61	12	63.15
Albert	3	27.27	8	34.78	29	48.33	6	21.42
Total	**12**		**23**		**47**		**21**	
Average		**54**		**37**		**37**		**35**

THIRD SAMPLE

In the third sample, as shown in Table 8 and Table 9, the percentages for Initiate moves for both participants are within a close range and both participants also use a similar percentage of Respond moves. In contrast, the LSE participant uses a markedly higher percentage of Continue (60% compared to 40%) as well as Rejoinder moves (67% compared to 26%) than the HSE participant.

Table 8

SF by category – Low SE Participants

	Init.	% INI	Cont.	% CON	Resp.	% RES	Rej.	% REJ
Rikki	3	37.50	12	60.00	6	26.08	14	66.66

Table 9

SF by category – High SE Participants

	Init.	% INI	Cont.	% CON	Resp.	% RES	Rej.	% REJ
Denise	2	28.50	8	40.00	9	23.00	7	25.92

Comparative results across the three samples therefore indicate a marked change in the use of SF categories by the LSE participant. Importantly, in the third sample, and in contrast to the first sample, the LSE participant not only uses a similar average percentage of Respond and Initiate moves to the HSE participant, but also a higher average percentage of both Continue and Rejoinder moves.

In the next section, discourse behaviour will be analysed from the perspective of the speech roles taken by the HSE and LSE participants. This will be followed by a discussion of the extent to which participants contribute to sustained collaborative participation and the role of meta-talk in developing interpersonal relations. Due to word limitation, we will be mentioning subcategories of moves that come under Initiate, Continue, Respond and

Rejoinder SF without detailing them here. The reader may wish to refer to Appendix 1 for a classification of Speech Functions adapted from Eggins and Slade's (2006) model.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following discussion focuses on how exchanges are sustained by the participants' use of specific speech functions in terms of conversational involvement and interactivity patterns.

SPEAKER ROLES AND DISCOURSE SUSTAINABILITY

DOMINANCE, INDEPENDENCE AND DEPENDENCE IN PARTICIPATION

Since conversations collected for this study are between peers using the same L1 and with similar level of formal L2 instruction, competition for turns is established on the assumption that all participants have the same right to equal turns. The prevalence of turn taking by a particular speaker can generally indicate assertiveness at dominating a conversation (Gass & Varonis, 1986). However, within Eggins and Slade's (2006) framework, the interactional structure of talk is realised not simply by the amount of talk and turns but by the type of speech functions used by speakers. Thus, how speakers dominate the interaction is revealed by the selection of any of the four categories of SF (Initiate, Continue, Respond and Rejoinder) as well as specific moves within these.

Initiate and React moves can reveal roles of independence or dependence. Initiate moves show independence as they indicate control over the interaction. They involve speakers putting forward a proposition (controlling the direction of the negotiation) in a generally assertive manner, whilst React moves that function as Respond Reply moves are non-assertive and suggest a dependent relationship to the Initiate moves. Independence is also realised through Continue Prolong and Continue Append moves. Both of these are used to develop one's own position either within the same turn or in another turn and can be used defensively to pre-empt possible challenges, or can indicate assertiveness, as illustrated in the excerpt below in L58 and L 59 respectively:

L56	Charlotte	Como nos evidamos realidad?	How can we escape from reality?
L57	Celine	es necesario hacer las cosas que nos hacemos contentas, pero pienso que est necesario stay en la realite	It is necessary to do [those] things that make us happy but I think that it is not necessary to stay/ / keep in reality
L58	Celine	evidamos realidad cuando cerramos nuestros ojos del mundo	We escape from reality when we close our eyes to the world
L59	Charlotte	Dormir no es quede en realidad. Es una otra estado y cuando no duerme volvemos loco!!	To sleep is not to remain in reality [sic: conscious]. It is another state and when we do not sleep we become crazy!!

(Second Sample R1, L56-59)

Dependence is further realised through Confronting Respond moves which indicate a dependency between initiator and respondent, but also convey weak forms of non-compliance. Still, Rejoinder Challenge moves express dependence more assertively given that they confront the positioning of other speakers and lead to further talk.

In summary, as our data show and in line with our expectations, the HSE group displays dominance as they use of a greater number of Initiative moves than the LSE group, and within these a greater variety of subcategories including Demand Question moves particularly in the first two samples. However, in the third sample, it is the LSE participant who uses a higher number of Demand Question, thus indicating a greater control over the interaction.

Without providing further detail here, it is worth noting that the marked decrease of Re-Demand moves in the participants' discourse behaviour in the second and third samples is not necessarily related to a decrease in dominance but to possibly intensified collaborative discourse construction, as the need to repeat a demand for information or opinion is reduced by the willingness of conversational partners to react.

Besides the role of Initiate moves in establishing discourse independence, we can see that this is particularly heightened when speakers use Continue moves. In line with expected discourse behaviour, in both the first and second samples, HSE participants use a higher number of Continue Prolong moves than the LSE group. Although we note a decrease from the first to the second samples in the overall use of this category, in the third sample, by contrast, it is the LSE participant who uses a higher number of Prolong moves than the HSE. This indicates a change in who shows control in the discourse over time.

What these findings seem to indicate is that throughout the first semester, the HSE participants expand on their own contributions by using relatively high numbers of Continue moves, in particular Continue Prolong moves. Remarkably, by the end of the academic year both the HSE and the LSE participant, display this type of discourse behaviour. It is worth noting that these moves are more critical in building the participants' collaborative behaviour than Continue Append moves because the latter involve the retaking of one's turn, ignoring other speakers' contributions, as illustrated below in line 69:

L64	Eloisa	como vivimos hoy es muy peor por el medioambiente	[The way] we live nowadays is worst for the environment
L65	Celine	si y no estan lo que causo el agujero?	Yes and isn't that the cause for the whole [in the ozone layer]?
L66	Anthony	peor? en inglise?	"Peor"? In English?
L67	Celine	worse	Worse
L68	Anthony	gracius.	Thanks
L69 →	Eloisa	por producimos mucho despersicios, usamos muchas productos naturales	Because we produce more rubbish [and] we use more [and more] natural products [sic: raw materials]

(First Sample R3, L64-69)

DEGREES IN SUSTAINING COLLABORATIVE PARTICIPATION

React Respond SF

Within the React SF type, both Support and Confront Respond moves expand on speakers' proposition but also close off further negotiation. More than any other Respond moves, Develop moves expand on propositions within the negotiation. Added to this, the willingness to accept propositions made by other speakers make these moves a very supportive choice and constitute added content for furthering the negotiation of talk. Develop moves are thus a good indicator of discourse sustainability since they uphold talk. However, not all Respond Develop moves broaden subsequent discussion in the same way. While Develop Elaborate moves build on propositions by merely re-stating, exemplifying or clarifying things, and Develop Extend is a neutral way of broadening the field since non-attitudinal information is added, Develop Enhance moves qualify or justify content, and thus imply the use of more argumentative strategies.

The use of React Respond moves in our data indicates that completion of responsiveness in the construction of discourse by both the HSE participant and the LSE participant is maintained from the first to the third samples. Further, if we look at the type and number of

Respond subcategories used by both groups, we note an increase in Respond Develop moves over the course of the academic year. The fact that in the third sample both HSE and LSE participants proportionally increase the number of Develop moves, but decrease the number of Agree and Answer moves, indicates that collaborative HSE and LSE participants' discursive role is heightened throughout the year. This finding is important to note since earlier research has indicated that advanced learners differ in their ability to construct and sustain discourse in comparison to that of intermediate learners (Young, 1995). In his study, Young reports that the advanced learners introduced topics that persisted longer than those initiated by intermediate learners and provided more elaborated answers.

React Rejoinder SF

Beyond Respond Develop moves, Rejoinders are an even better indicator of discourse sustainability. Rejoinder moves prolong exchanges, as they have a specific relationship of conditional relevance with what follows, setting underway further sequences of talk. The use of Rejoinders also reveals speakers' contribution to the maintenance and open-endedness of talk, and within the Support Rejoinder SF, Track moves particularly promote the highest amount of continued talk. Tracking moves indicate interest in maintaining contact and supporting negotiation, and thus sustaining the interaction by keeping an exchange open, as illustrated below in line 76:

L67	Rikki	como ayudamos timor este?	How can we help East Timor?
L68	Oscar	tenemos mucho problema con la education, comida, sociales salud...	We have many problems with [regards to] education, Social [and] health … [problems]
L69	Rikki	dinero solo?	Only Money?
L70	Rikki	*dar dinero solo?	*Giving only money?
L71	Oscar	no dinero solo	No, not [by] only giving money
L72	Oscar	dinero no es buena solucion para todo	Money is not a good solution for all
L73	Diana	que tipo de cosas vas a hacer en Timor Este?	What kind of things are you going to do in East Timor?
L74	Oscar	la mentalida dela gente no es muy bueno para cambiar	People's mentality is not good [sic: easy] to change
L75	Diana	estoy de acuerdo, dinero no es la problema	I agree, money is not the problem
L76 →	Rikki	y es necesito cambiar la mentalidad de la gente en el mundo moderno?	And don't we need to change people's mentality in today's' modern world?

(Third Sample R10, L67-76)

Moreover, as can be seen below in line 81, Confront Rejoinder moves also lead to further talk because the challenging position that is proposed needs to be justified or modified.

L79	Diana	porque es necessario cambiar la mentalida en Timor Este?	Why is it necessary to change the [sic: people's] mentality in East Timor?
L80	Oscar	por desarollar es no tiene mucho ..	In order to develop [the country since] it does not have much [education]
L81 →	Rikki	si pero por educacion sobre educacion necesita dinero y personas trabajar (mas dinero, no?)	Yes but for education above education [sic: in order to develop the level of education] one needs money and people to work [on this] ([we need] more money, don't we?)

(Third Sample R10, L77-81 - following previous excerpt)

In our data we can observe an increase in the use of Support Rejoinder subcategories for LSE participants across the three samples. This increase is particularly noticeable in the second and third samples. In fact, at the end of the academic year, the LSE participant uses a markedly higher number of Track moves than the HSE participant.

Even more marked is the change in the use of Rejoinder Confront subcategories by the LSE participants across samples. Whilst LSE participants do not use any Rejoinder Confront subcategories in the first sample, they do so in the second sample, although in lower numbers than the HSE participants. Significantly, in the third sample, the LSE participant not only continues to use them but also uses a higher number than the HSE participant.

In summary, changes in the degree to which LSE participants sustain collaborative discourse can be observed not only in their use of React Response moves but more importantly in their selection of React Rejoinder moves, as these moves set underway open-endedness of talk, and even challenge addressees' positions, resulting in further prolonged exchanges. These changes in the discourse patterns of the LSE participant are consistent with other studies on oral production that have identified this type of discourse behaviour as signalling discourse competence. For example, Koike and Hinojosa's (1998) study using discourse analysis to assess oral production indicates that whilst advanced learners provide more propositions and supporting statements to substantiate their opinions, less proficient speakers use single propositions with single supporting statements.

Furthermore, our findings in relation to patterns of interactivity observed in the discourse construction of the HSE participants across samples as well as in the LSE participant's interactions at the end of the academic year are also in line with the discourse functional features that have been identified in the literature (McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Shohamy, 1994; Young, 1995).

The discussion so far has focussed on the speakers' roles and the extent to which the high and the low SE participants sustain collaborative participation with regard to our initial research question. It has highlighted in particular that the use of Respond and Rejoinder categories of speech functions by the LSE participants across the three samples points to a development in their ability to move conversations forward towards open-endedness. Not only do they negotiate interaction by reacting to others' contributions but they move exchanges further, thus contributing to sustained discourse and further interactivity.

META-TALK AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

In order to elaborate further on the social nature of interactivity as it is displayed through discourse moves, we now briefly turn our attention to meta-talk, to be understood as talk that is oriented to the social functions of conversation rather than the topic assigned for discussion. The following remarks take into account not only digressions of a social nature as when speakers break off into private conversations, but also: (1) opening and closing sequences which frame the chat interaction; (2) speakers' appraisals throughout the interaction; and (3) sequences of meta-linguistic talk.

With regard to opening and closing sequences, it is clear from our data that the length and the discourse features of these sequences do not necessarily relate to the learners' self-efficacy levels but rather to the specificities of managing interaction in CMC, characterized by overlaps, delays and disruptions of turns caused by reduced visual-cues. Similarly, the use of first name as signs of listenership in opening sequences does not appear to be significant with regard to the display of the learners' greater personal involvement, as these signals were found to be present throughout the online exchanges. Moreover, we found that the majority of meta-linguistic exchanges, and the differences in their use, were not significant with respect to learners' self-efficacy levels, although we noted that problems of misunderstanding provided heightened discourse interactivity with evidence of uptake after a related meta-linguistic exchange. More importantly, digressions of a social nature and appraisal sequences seem to be more particularly salient for the purpose of establishing social affiliation between the participants, thus allowing a deeper understanding of how learners develop their participatory skills.

In our data, such digressions were mainly used by speakers for:

a) Exchanging jokes:

> Ok. Why...un cow chica andar con sus legs bow legged?
>
> OK. Why does a cow girl walk with her legs bowed? (First Sample R3, L25);

b) Discussing personal information:

> *Que escuelas tus atender?* Which school did you go to? (Second Sample R1, L38)

> *Cuanto anos tiene tu niño* How old is your son? (Second Sample R10, L115)

c) and offering appraisals in the form of attitudinal comments on the situation or validation of another learner's contribution, as in the following examples:

> i. *hmmm, estamos abborido si?* Are we bored are we? (First Sample R3, L20)

> ii. *Que bueno!* How nice! (First Sample R9, L73)

> iii. *Tu es muy interesante* You are very interesting (First Sample R13, L56)

> iiii. 'lol' (First Sample R1, L102)

Although no systematic analysis was made of appraisals as such, the data reveal occurrences of appraisals in most of the chat rooms, and these were found to be a particular feature of the High SE students' repertoire, as exemplified by Denise in the Second and Third Samples.These occurrences are interesting to the extent that they construct interpersonal relations alongside involvement and negotiation between the participants (Martin & White, 2005) and reflect the affective qualities of the interaction. They effectively serve to strengthen group solidarity between the learners, as in examples (a) and (b) above, and reflect mostly positive attitudes, as in (c). Although further analysis would need to be carried out to confirm these findings, the expression of attitudes that occur in our data function as moves that learners use to encourage each other in keeping the conversation going. These are revealed in the display of the participants' positive emotional responses, in the form of either laughter or explicit politeness, such as thanking, or the use of emoticons. These findings are consistent with several empirical studies within a social interaction perspective. As Pica (1997) and Lantolf and Ahmed (1989) have shown, building solidarity and offering support tend to enhance the language learner's ego. Similarly, appraisals, in the form of positive feedback, have the potential to enhance learner's self-efficacy (Graham, 2006; Pajares, 2007), although these findings would require further investigation.

Digressions raise the question of whether being *off-topic* threatens the coordination of the discussion or whether it encourages participants to successfully carry on the discussion in the target language, as all participants join in. As can be seen from the excerpt provided in Appendix 2 (First Sample transcript), digressions in fact allow participants to get to know each other better. Kate (and to a lesser extent Cleo) seeks personal information of Oscar, and also volunteers further personal information or evaluation, such as '*Tu es muy interesante*!' (L56). This seems to strengthen personal bonds between members of the chat room, as expressed through their display of laughter and emoticons. A further illustration, provided in Appendix 3 (Third Sample), supports this interpretation as personal comments highlight the

display of social politeness and appraisal. The digression starts with Rita displaying empathy for Denise's personal situation (in L92) and finishes with an extended closing acknowledged by Denise (HSE) in L93 '*si gracias Rita*' ('Yes thanks Rita'). Rita, the LSE, continues with a conventional polite formula '*me gusta ayudarle!*' ('pleased to help you'), and Barry shows his support by reinforcing the positive advantages of learning in the target language country '*podremos apprender muchos, ver muchos, hablar muchos*' ('We will be able to learn a lot, see a lot, speak a lot') (L96).

In summary, and with regard to our second and third research questions, participation in a computer-mediated environment has been analysed in terms of levels of discourse interactivity. Using a functional semantic interpretation of discourse structure first, it has been possible to expose reciprocity between interlocutors and to show the extent to which discourse is sustained over a series of Respond and Rejoinder moves which may prolong the topic under discussion to a greater or lesser extent. It is clear that a model adapted from Eggins and Slade's classification of SF provides a useful tool for the interpretation and clarification of the nature of interactivity in computer-mediated discourse. In addition, a focus on the display of interpersonal relations, which is realised through discourse moves that signal listenership for example, as well as by the selection of moves that encourage other participants to continue as speakers appraise or evaluate others' behaviour, could fruitfully complement this analysis in order to show how learners develop their participatory skills in a synchronous chat environment. This exploratory study points to the need for further research investigating discourse interactivity in a CMC environment and the use of meta-talk for social affiliation through appraisal and affective involvement.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to ascertain the extent to which participation in synchronous text-based CMC provides support for engaging in interactive discourse for Low and High SE learners of Spanish, and how learners develop their participatory skills and sustain discourse construction. More particularly, the study has focused on the achievement of interactivity from the standpoint of the participants' interpersonal relations as they engage in social communication. With reference to our research questions, our findings indicate that the use of certain speech functions by some learners, particularly within the Respond and Rejoinder categories, do in fact contribute to heightened interactivity. We have also noticed that at the end of the year, the discourse behaviour of the LSE participants resembles the behaviour displayed by the HSE at the beginning of the academic year. Specifically, at the onset of the study, we noticed differences in their abilities to establish dominant speakers' roles through Initiate and Demand Question, and in their capabilities to sustain discourse and push exchanges forward towards open-endedness. With respect to dominance, we noted the link between a decrease in the use of Re-Demand by Low SE learners in the second and third

samples and an increase in collaborative discourse construction; with respect to discourse sustainability, we also noted a marked increase in the Low SE's use of Rejoinder Confront in the third sample at the end of the year, which resulted in pushing the exchanges towards open-endedness.

Further illustration of the achievement of interactivity has also been revealed by fine-tuning on the social behaviour of the learners, and particularly looking at their use of social digressions within the conversations. We found that these off-task exchanges, far from being disruptive or an inappropriate use of learning time, are important, as they contribute to building social rapport and individual engagement as evidenced in the display of humour, exchange of personal information, and the use of appraisal between all participants. But, clearly, the lines of enquiries touched upon in the exploration of meta-talk suggest a fertile ground for further investigation on a broader scale.

Finally, we would like to suggest that engaging in interpersonal interaction through CMC sets up favorable conditions for heightened learners' participation and L2 acquisition but, clearly, the analysis of participation and interactivity in a computer-mediated environment emerges as a complex process that cannot be captured through one single lens. There is a need to look at the multiple dimensions of the discourse situation in order to gain greater insights into the relationship between patterns of interactivity and learners' levels of self-efficacy.

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APPENDIX 1: SPEECH FUNCTIONS

Move	Open	Initiate	Demand	Question	Fact / Opinion	
			Re-Demand*	Question	Fact / Opinion	
				Statement	Fact / Opinion	
	Sustain	Continue	Monitor			
			Prolong	Elaborate Extend		
			Append	Elaborate Extend		
		React	Respond	Support	Develop	Elaborate Extend Enhance
					Engage	
					Register	
					Reply	Agree Answer Acknowledge Affirm
				Confront	Disengagement	
					Reply	Disagree Withhold Disavow Contradict
			Rejoinder	Support	Track	Check Confirm Clarify Probe Enhance*
					Response	Resolve Repair Acquiesce
				Confront	Challenge	Detach Rebound Counter
					Response	Unresolve Refute Re-challenge

*Moves marked with an asterisk are the researchers' added subcategories to Eggins and Slade's (2006) classification of SF.

APPENDIX 2: FIRST SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT

Excerpt (a) taken from First Sample R13, L44-59

Line		Spanish Original Text	English Translation
L44 →	Kate	*cuales tu paies?*	What is your country?
L45	Oscar	*Este de Timor*	East Timor
L46	Oscar	*En el pasado con Indonesia*	In the past it was part of Indonesia
L47	Oscar	*Pero en me pais ahora tiene mucha problema con ambientes*	But now there are lots of environmental problems
L48 →	Kate	*gracias. yo conzco mucho porque esta a lado de Darwin, en el territo del norte*	Thank you. I know it well because it is close to Darwin in the Northern Territory
L49 →	Cleo	*cuantos anos viva en Australia Oscar?*	For how long have you lived in Australia Oscar?
L50 →	Oscar	*Si Que intelegent este mujer*	Yes, how intelligent is this woman
L51	Oscar	*Hace ocho anos*	For eight years
L52	Oscar	*pero me no quedo en el Australia todos los anos*	But I do not always stay in Australia
L53	Kate	*estoy vivia en darwin por dos anos*	I lived in Darwin for two years
L54	Oscar	*me siempre viaje y aveces vice en otra pais*	I always travel and sometimes I live in another country
L55 →	Kate	*que otros paises?*	What other countries?
L56 →	Kate	*tu es muy interesante!*	You are a very interesting person
L57	Oscar	*llegue en Australia primero vez en el darwin*	The first time I arrived in Australia I landed in Darwin
L58 →	Oscar	*Tu tambien*	You too
L59	Oscar	*Me planeo por cinco anos de proximo*	I have plans for the next five years

APPENDIX 3: THIRD SAMPLE

Excerpt (d) taken from Third Sample R2, L92-102

Line		Spanish Original Text	English Translation
L92 →	Rita	*no se porque no tengo un nino pero tu puedera hablar sobre tu experiencas con tu hijo por mucho anos enel futuro*	I do not know because I do not have children but in the future you could talk to your son about all your experiences
L93 →	Denise	*si gracias Rita*	Yes thanks Rita
L94	Rita	*me gusta ayudarle!*	Pleased to help you!
L95	Rita	*tengo que ir un otro clase ahora!*	I have to go to another lecture right now!
L96 →	Barry	*podremos apprender muchos, ver muchos, hablar muchos*	We can learn a lot, see many, speak a lot
L97	Denise	*para nosotros a viviamos en el ano 2006 cuando hacia el copa mundial fuera muy fantastico si Barry*	We lived there in 2006 when the World Cup took place it was fantastic yes Barry
L98	Barry	*no puedo escribir con mucho velocidad!*	I cannot write very fast!
L99	Denise	*no es importante solamente escriba...gracias*	It is not important just write… thank you
L100	Denise	*ojala que ustedes tengan un buen examen y un buen vacaiones*	I hope your exam goes well and that you have a good holiday
L101	Rita	*adios amigos!*	See you my friends!
L102	Rita	*hasta manana por el test!*	See you tomorrow at the test!

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ENDNOTES

i   The reader may refer to Eggins and Slade (1997/2006) for a full description of these subcategories.

ii   Appendix 1 illustrates all subcategories of Speech Functions used in the coding of our data analysis.

iii   Transcriptions of excerpts are provided with information indicating in which sample they are found (First, Second or Third) and the chat room in which they occurred. Transcriptions also show numbering of turns taken referred to as Lines (L).

iv   The scales used for the design of the survey administered to participants in this study are: The International personality Item Pool (2001), Pajares and Johnson's (1996) Rating language Learning Capability for French Scales, Pajares' (2007) Writing Self-Efficacy Scale, and Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale.

v   Further information about the specific items included in the survey, the administering of the survey and the protocol for the statistical analysis is available from the authors.

vi   Participants' names provided here are pseudonyms.

vii   Samples of discussion tasks are available from the authors.