ESL Children’s Error Recognition and Correction Patterns in a Synchronous CMC Context

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Synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) is an interactional writing that incorporates some elements of oral communication. The purpose of the study was to explore young L2 learners’ experiences and impressions when engaged in synchronous CMC activities. In particular, the study focused on examining how and why children identified and corrected their own and other children’s errors in the chat room. Nine elementary intermediate ESL students participated in ten chat sessions. Data sources included written chat transcripts, questionnaires, interviews, essays, and field notes. The children indicated that they engaged in self error correction in order to enhance the flow of the ongoing discussions and to avoid receiving negative feedbacks from other peers. Although the children seemed to be generous about other children’s errors, they employed various negative feedbacks to point out errors that hindered them from understanding the contexts of online conversations. The children were seen to endeavor to maintain the balance between fluency and accuracy in the CMC environment.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, language classroom environments have rapidly integrated various information and communication technology. The use of computers in second and foreign language (L2) classrooms has increased since the early 1990’s, due especially to the potential of the Internet and the fact that it allows for far richer interaction and communication. Among many computer technologies used in L2 contexts, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has begun to receive much attention from many researchers as well as language teachers. CMC is an umbrella term that refers to human communication via computers. Generally, with CMC, there is a distinction made between synchronous and asynchronous communication. Synchronous communication is a real-time interaction, and allows
spontaneity and immediacy for interchange of ideas and questions (i.e., chatting). In contrast, asynchronous communication does not occur in real time, with participants not necessarily online simultaneously, and is thus not constrained by time. Examples of asynchronous CMC include e-mails, listservs, and bulletin board systems.

The research findings on CMC in educational contexts have highlighted several important potential benefits compared with face-to-face language teaching settings. Studies thus far have suggested that learners participating in CMC feel more involved in the development of ideas and in determining the selection of discussion topics (Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Ortega, 1997). Learners’ attitudes and motivation also appeared to be more positive under CMC environments than in face-to-face discussions (Beauvois, 1997, 1998). In addition, it was argued that CMC fostered a learner-centered environment in which learners could initiate conversation on their own initiative at their own pace. As a consequence, learner-to-learner exchanges, which seemed to be more interactive and collaborative, had increased in CMC environments as well as facilitated the negotiation of meaning process (Blake, 2000; Kern, 1995; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Warschauer, 1996). Also, discourse patterns in CMC reflected the use of a wider range of social and language functions than were true in face-to-face communication (Abrams, 2001; Chun, 1994).

With regard to language output, studies found that students had produced not only syntactically complex and lexically sophisticated language features, but also increased amounts of speech compared to conventional oral discussions (Beauvois, 1997; Chun, 1994; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Warschauer, 1996). Most of all, text-based online chat featuring semi-oral conversations has recently been found useful in noticing writers’ own mistakes (Lai & Zhao, 2006).

The present study intended to examine young L2 learners’ experiences and impressions when they were introduced to the use of a synchronous CMC tool. In particular, the study focused on investigating the children’s reactions to their own as well as other children’s errors committed in the CMC sessions. As pointed out by Zhao (2003), to date, little is known about L2 children’s use of CMC and the current study is an attempt to fill the gap in knowledge about children’s use of technology in learning English as an L2.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Unique Features of CMC

The advent of new technologies has blurred the distinction between speaking and informal writing (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Among various technologies, synchronous electronic communication has unique qualities in that it possesses hybrid elements of both spoken and
written language. According to Warschauer (1999), “the historical divide between speech and writing has been overcome with the interactional and reflective aspects of language merged into a single medium” (p. 6). Synchronous CMC occurs by typing messages with a computer keyboard, which of course is a form of writing. However, at the same time, the writing is interactional, taking place in real-time, like oral communication. Thus, when individuals participate in synchronous CMC, they communicate by reading and writing the messages, instead of speaking and listening.

According to Kern (1998), synchronous conferencing is different from pen and paper writing in multiple ways: (a) as opposed to formal accuracy, CMC promotes fluency of self-expression; (b) instead of global coherence, CMC puts emphasis on interactive responsiveness; (c) formal writing is based on reinforcement of written practices; however, writing in CMC is a blend of “orate” and “literate” forms of communication; and (d) whereas the author is rarely interrupted with exploration of one’s own personal voice in the process of the conventional writing, CMC includes multiple voices as well as perspectives. In addition, Beauvois (1997) differentiated synchronous CMC from traditional classroom interaction by explaining that in synchronous CMC: (a) there is no designated turn taking; (b) students, not the teacher, have more control over the flow of the conversation; and (c) all students, including the shy and inhibited, participate at will.

2. Beneficial Features of CMC

1) Learner-Centeredness

CMC created a learner-centered environment as well as fostered more learner-controlled, cohesive, and collaborative learning among students. As more participants had equal opportunities to contribute their comments into the discussion threads, the role of the teacher in CMC became decentralized. Thus, researchers indicated that CMC could reduce the number of discussions that were heavily dominated by the instructor and that online discussions provided greater opportunities for students. Chun (1994) argued that, in synchronous discussions, “learners take the initiative, constructing and expanding on topics, and take a more active role in the discourse management than is typically found in normal classroom discussion” (p. 28), whereas in face-to-face settings, students usually talk only when they were asked or called upon by the teacher. Kern (1995) reported that his second-semester French students had 91% and 89% of the conversation turns in the CMC condition, whereas they only had 55% of the turns in face-to-face discussions. Similarly, Sullivan and Pratt (1996) reported that intermediate ESL students in composition classes took 85% and the teacher had only 15% of the conversational turns in a synchronous online discussion, while students had only 35% and the teacher 65% of the conversational
2) Increased Language Output

In the learning of a second language, output is the most obvious production of the learner. There also is a high possibility that learners themselves notice problems in their own outcomes and make positive changes. According to Swain’s (1985) Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, comprehensible input is necessary but not sufficient for language acquisition to happen. Swain further proposes that the role of output is essential in second language acquisition because it promotes fluency, pushes students to engage in syntactic processing of language, and gives students opportunities to test their hypotheses about what works and is acceptable. Additionally, in order for learners to increase their language proficiency, they need to generate language via speech or writing and receive feedback on their output. Previous research has suggested that producing language and reflecting on one’s own output to create meaning offers an opportunity for the learners to pay attention to their erroneous features (Iwashita, 1999; Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara, & Fearnnow, 1999; Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

In CMC discussions, because learners can return to previous texts of the conversation as they write their messages, learners have more opportunity to produce output than they do in oral discussion. Much of the CMC literature showed that synchronous CMC is especially helpful in promoting language learning in terms of increased language production and improved linguistic competence. In a study of fourth-semester German foreign language learners, Chun (1994) found that the learners demonstrated increased morphological complexity in their written work over the course of the semester. Kern (1995) confirmed Chun’s (1994) findings of increased language production among two groups of learners of French in his analysis of the quality of the output in CMC sessions. Kern also noted that the learners produced a greater level of morphosyntactic sophistication and a wider variety of discourse functions as compared to face-to-face discussions of the same topics. In addition, Warschauer (1996) and Kim (1998) confirmed this claim by finding significantly more lexical and syntactic complexity and sophistication in ESL CMC interactions than in oral face-to-face class discussions.

3) Increased Opportunities for Negotiation of Meaning

Since the late 1990s, research in CMC began to put more emphasis on the interactional features of CMC than simply gauging the students’ participation rates and the amount of output by comparing the traditional oral and CMC venues. According to Long (1996), interaction is facilitative because it not only provides learners with opportunities to receive
comprehensible input, but also to produce modified output, and to receive various forms of feedback as part of the learning process. Hatch (1978) was the first person to recognize the importance of interaction in language learning. Then, Long (1981, 1996) in his Interaction Hypothesis argued that interaction, especially negotiation of meaning, facilitated L2 learning because it influenced input and output as well as learners’ internal capacities and attention in productive ways. Empirical research also showed that communicative interaction through negotiation among nonnative speakers promoted second language acquisition not only in a face-to-face learner interaction but also in computer-mediated environments (Blake, 2000; Gass & Varonis, 1985; Mackey, 1999; Pelletieri, 1999; Smith, 2003). Blake, Smith, and Pelletieri all claimed that CMC provided more opportunities for the negotiation of meaning.

Although very few studies have examined child-to-child interactions within the second language acquisition context, Oliver’s (2000) study on the negotiation of meaning between age-matched children found that children could and did negotiate meaning and used a variety of negotiation strategies as well. Oliver claimed that although children are less developed in terms of cognitive, social, and linguistic skills, they are still “aware of their conversational responsibility and attempt to work towards mutual understanding” (p. 379). In the CMC environment, Morris (2005) found that children were actively involved in providing negative feedback to other peers, which promoted negotiation and encouraged half of the errors to be repaired immediately.

III. METHODS

1. Participants

The present study included nine elementary intermediate ESL students (Case Study 1: n=4, and Case Study 2: n=5) who were learning English as their second language in the United States. Euntae, Heesu, Kwangshik, and Minsuk participated in Case Study 1 and Hyunah, Jinho, Jungah, Kunwoo, and Sooki took part in Case Study 2. In Case Study 1, Heesu and Minsuk were siblings and they were friends with Euntae. However, all three of them had not known Kwangshik prior to the study. Hyunah and Jungah in Case Study 2 were fraternal twins and were acquainted with Kunwoo who went to the same school. Jinho and Sooki were cousins and had just met the other three children in the group at the first day of the study. All nine children indicated that they had started learning English by the age of seven, which was the mean age for children to enter elementary school in Korea. The majority of children pointed out speaking and reading in English as their strong areas whereas they felt least confident in writing in English. Children were selected either
purposefully by personal contact or through snowball sampling by way of my initial contacts. Both cases had children of similar ages, mean ages of 11.3 and 11.4 respectively. Regarding the children’s length of stay in this country, children in Case Study 1 ranged from 11 months to 23 months, with a mean length of stay of 17 months. By contrast, the length of stay for those in Case Study 2 ranged from 2 months to 13 months. Children indicated that they were engaged in various types of online activities (i.e., writing e-mails, playing games online, and reading the Internet news) on a daily basis. All children felt comfortable typing in English; however, none of them were exposed in English chatting prior to the study.

2. Data Collection Procedures

Although Case Study 1 and Case Study 2 were not conducted at the same time, the data collection procedures were identical for both groups. During the summer and early fall of 2006, the children participating in each case study completed 10 synchronous CMC sessions, for a total of 20 chat sessions for the study. Each group met at least two to three times per week to chat among themselves in an online environment. In general, the children’s entire discussion time ranged from 25 to 50 minutes. All chat sessions were conducted in an empty classroom in a building at the local university. In order to allow the children to take part in the chatting, I set up the room with laptops that were connected via the wireless internet service available in the building. The software used was Blackboard that allowed for real-time, synchronous online discussions. The children in each case study and I gathered our tables around and engaged in online chat sessions.

At the initial meeting with the participants, I asked for the children’s background information including their ages, length of stay in the United States, and computer usage. When the children had logged on and were present in the chat room, I gave them the tasks one by one as prompts in each session. For each chat session, they were assigned to three tasks: a topic discussion, a story completion, and a scenario discussion task. For the general topic discussion, I asked the children to chat about a topic, which I presented to them as open-ended questions. The purpose of the general topic discussion was to provide opportunities for students to “talk” about and exchange their thoughts on diverse themes. The story completion task required the children to be engaged in an online story reading by visiting English learning web sites, Kizclub (www.kizclub.com) and LearnEnglish Kids (www.britishcouncil.org/kids.htm). The children initially were asked to read the stories to a certain point and began to write the rest of the story using their imagination. For the scenario discussion task, the children took part in discussions about a scenario designed to stimulate discussion and debate. After the children had completed all three tasks, five to ten minutes were allocated for them to share their experiences about and reactions to the chat
session by filling out a post questionnaire.

On the last day of the study, after we had finished a total of 10 sessions of synchronous CMC for each group, I asked the children to compose a short essay about the chatting experiences. I also conducted a one time in-depth interview with each child individually. Each semi-structured interview lasted from 25 to 45 minutes. All interview sessions were audiotaped and fully transcribed for further analysis. The interview mainly focused on obtaining their overall perspectives about the electronic conversations they had been involved in during the online sessions. Additionally, I took field notes for each session as soon as I returned home, augmented by watching the videotaped session of that day.

3. Data Analysis and Credibility of the Study

I collected various forms of data in order to describe the children’s error recognition and correction patterns as well as their responses to error correction. The main data source was children’s written chat transcripts saved by the Blackboard. I then copied the transcripts and pasted them into a word file where I could change the children’s names into pseudonyms. Also, I numbered each participant’s message in order to indicate the chronological order of their postings.

Data analysis involved using qualitative coding procedures informed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). I began to analyze and interpret the data as an ongoing part of my data gathering practices. I expanded my field notes by rereading them and adding analytic memos during which I found tentative categories. After I had collected all of the data and prepared them for further analysis, I carefully read the print-outs of the electronic texts, interview transcripts, questionnaires, and the children’s essays to refine the tentative categories and develop other categories by coding various features from the data.

While examining the chat print-outs, one of the categories I found intriguing was the identification and correction of their own as well as other children’s errors. At first, I excerpted all instances of error corrections from their conversations and largely sorted them out according to whether the error was recognized by oneself or by another member of the group. I then reviewed selected examples and classified them based on types of errors, including spelling mistakes, typos, and grammatical errors as well as various corrective feedbacks. Also, I noted that the children’s error correction category emerged from other data sources after a close reading of the interview transcripts, questionnaires, and field notes. These procedures, which involved triangulating across various sources of data, led me to develop the issue of error correction from the data.

In order to deal with issues related to the credibility of the study, I adopted techniques suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, Lincoln and Guba maintain that prolonged engagement, devoting sufficient time so as to accomplish specific goals, is beneficial in
becoming familiar with the context, recognizing misinformation generated by distortions of the researcher, and establishing trust with the participants. I was fully engaged in the study as a participant observer by not only taking part in every single chat session with the children but also observing the children at the same time. Second, according to Lincoln and Guba, triangulation increases the credibility of the researcher’s findings and interpretations. For the study, I collected and made use of various data sources, including the electronic chat texts, interview transcripts, multiple questionnaires, essays, and field notes, and triangulated them during the data analysis procedure.

IV. FINDINGS

Because I tried not to position myself as an authoritative teacher, I did not correct the children’s errors in the chat room. I preferred to allow the conversation to flow. Yet, since the conversation occurred in a written form, CMC seemed to offer plentiful opportunities for the children to monitor their comments as soon as these appeared on the screen as compared to the traditional face-to-face conversation. In the chat room, they could easily observe misspellings, typos, and grammatical errors in their own or other children’s messages. Not every error was pointed out and repaired; however, when the error was considered to hinder the comprehension of the comment, then the original writer would fix it or other children in the group would indicate or correct it.

1. Error Recognized by the Original Writer

(1) Excerpt from Session 10

127

Sooki: why are you living in the world jin?
129

Sooki: world

(2) Excerpt from Session 4

40

Kunwoo: I had an hour of violin lessom
41

Kunwoo: n

(3) Excerpt from Session 9

139

Heesu: OK. WHAT EVER YOU NSAY.
143

Heesu: SAY.
146

Heesu: I MEANT TO SAY WHAT EVER YOU SAY.

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1 The number in front of each message indicates the chronological order of the message posted.
Examples (1) to (3) present instances of children’s typos identified and corrected by the original writer. As shown in example (1), after Sooki posted a message, she noticed a typo in her message where she should have changed the order of the letters “o” and “r” in the word “world.” In the following message, Sooki quickly sent another message to the group with the corrected word “world” but did not rewrite the entire sentence again. In (2), Kunwoo realized that he, by mistake, had pressed the letter “m” instead of “n” from the word “lesson.” Rather than fixing the mistyped word “lessom,” Kunwoo simply wrote the letter “n” in the following message as a means of signaling the letter “n” needed to replace the incorrect letter “m.” In the case of Heesu in (3), she recognized that there was a typo in her message and then wrote what she had intended to say in her next message. However, it appeared that Heesu was not confident about whether other children would understand her intention. As can been in line 146, Heesu composed a follow-up message which explained what she had wanted to express in a full sentence.

(4) Excerpt from Session 6

43 **Jinho:** I LIKE CAMPUPER GAMES
45 **Jinho:** COMPUTER

(5) Excerpt from Session 6

185 **Kunwoo:** THEN THE GOVERNMENT TOLD THEM THAT THE MAIL WAS FOR THE NEXT DOOR NEIBOR
188 **Kunwoo:** NEIGHBOR

Whereas examples (1) to (3) resulted, most likely, from typos caused by slips of the finger, (4) and (5) show instances of words being spelled incorrectly, possibly because of confusion or lack of knowledge. As can be seen, Jinho and Kunwoo in (4) and (5) spelled the words “computer” and “neighbor” inaccurately; however, those misspellings were soon identified and repaired by the original authors. Again, the writers simply sent the correctly revised words in a follow-up message, not in full sentences.

(6) Excerpt from Session 2

5 **Kunwoo:** It was mistake
6 **Kunwoo:** a mistake

(7) Excerpt from Session 10

333 **Hyunah:** kill people aren’t right
334 **Hyunah:** ing
(8) Excerpt from Session 5
128 Kunwoo: I want wormtail to die
130 Kunwoo: I want for wormtail to die

As portrayed in (6) and (7), Kunwoo and Hyunah made changes to grammatical errors they committed in their comments. In a separate message, Kunwoo inserted the left out article “a.” Hyunah also added the “ing” in the subsequent message to correct the gerund in her initial message but did not notice the still unacceptable number agreement in the verb, “isn’t” instead of “aren’t.”

The excerpt in (8) is interesting in terms of self error correction. Although his message in line 128 was completely legitimate, Kunwoo seemed to hyper-correct his statement by quickly composing an upgraded sentence that he considered as more grammatically accurate. Throughout the online sessions, Kunwoo appeared to be especially conscious of mistakes and errors of not only his own but also other children’s, whether the mistakes were crucial or trivial. After talking with Kunwoo’s mother over the phone, I learned that Kunwoo had just started having private grammar lessons from a native speaker of English. She told me, with concern, that Kunwoo had become very conscious of grammatical errors since the start of these lessons. Kunwoo also often expressed that he was frustrated when he read comments made by the tutor on his essays full of corrections made in red ink.

(9) Excerpt from Session 10
90 Jinho: SOMETHONG
91 Jinho: SOEMTHING

(10) Excerpt from Session 10
199 Hyunah: Hollowin
203 Hyunah: Oops
204 Hyunah: Holloween

One similarity found in (9) and (10) was that while they likewise spelled a word incorrectly and made an attempt to repair the errors in subsequent messages, neither succeeded in making corrections. In the case of Jinho, although he switched the letters “o” to “i” properly, he committed another mistake in writing the first syllable. Additionally, Hyunah typed “Oops” in-between her messages to indicate that there had been a slight mistake in her previous entry. When trying to fix the incorrect spelling “Hollowin” on her second try, she ended up only fixing the last syllable. Hyunah did not realize, until the end of the discussion, that her revised comment had failed to catch the misspelling of the word “Halloween.”
2. Error Recognized by Other Children in the Group

Most children considered making mistakes while composing messages as understandable as long as “The meaning of their comments is comprehensible” and thought that “Other children are just like me” [Translated into English]. According to an interview with Euntae, “Well, errors can happen. I do that many times too.” However, some errors that prevented children from understanding the contexts overlooked by the original writer were often pointed out or corrected by other writers in the group. Children employed various corrective feedbacks, including repetitions, clarification requests, recasts, and explicit corrections to inform others of the errors.

(11) Excerpt from Session 6
165 Minsuk: BAD BOY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!NO MONY FOR YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
166 Heesu: MONY?
168 Minsuk: MONEY

In example (11), by repeating the incorrect word “mony,” Heesu drew Minsuk’s attention to the misspelling in his posting. In the next message, Minsuk used the correct spelling and wrote “money.” Heesu expressed during the interview why she often repeated other children’s mistake. “If I’m gonna understand that, it’s ok. But if I can’t understand that I’d be like, ‘What does this mean?’ and then they’ll be like, ‘Oh, I mean I misspelled it’ or ‘It means blah blah blah.’”

(12) Excerpt from Session 8
235 Jinho: MY LASSROOM IS SO HOT
236 Kunwoo: lessroom
238 Kunwoo: ?
239 Jinho: CLASSROOM

(13) Excerpt from Session 8
81 Sooki: you loods like a so weired
82 Kunwoo: ???
84 Sooki: weird

(14) Excerpt from Session 3
178 Jungah: I want to heard Ms.Koh!
179 Kunwoo: heard?
As shown in examples (12) to (14), Kunwoo either repeated the incorrect word followed by a question point or posed multiple question marks in order to highlight that the messages posted were not clearly understood. Following Kunwoo’s corrective feedback, Jinho in (12) and Sooki in (13) clarified their comments by sending another message with the word correctly spelled. Although Sooki’s sentence (line 81) consisted of several misspellings and grammatical inaccuracy, she only repaired the word “weired” to “weird.” Kunwoo, in example (14), posed a question form repeating “heard” to point out that Jungah’s comment contained an error that needed to be reformulated. Because Jungah’s uptake to his corrective feedback did not immediately follow, Kunwoo offered the correct verb form required in Jungah’s message.

(15) Excerpt from Session 2
85  **Sooki:** KBS channel was free because it was channel for people
90  **Sooki:** but there are a lot of funny channels in Korea programs
103 **Sooki:** others channels, we needed to pay money and we can watch
105  **Jungah:** Is that channel or channel? I confused
107  **Jungah:** I think channel

(16) Excerpt from Session 10
319  **Jinho:** OR USED ALL MISAIL
321  **Hyunah:** you mean missiles
323  **Jinho:** YES

As can be seen in example (15), Sooki misspelled the word “channeer” instead of writing “channel” three times in a row. Yet, her error was not pinpointed by any children until Jungah asked for clarification in line 105, indicating that Sooki’s messages had not been fully understood. However, before Sooki could respond, Jungah posted a message about what she considered as reasonable. Pertaining to the misspelling “MISAIL” written by Jinho in (16), Hyunah provided corrective feedback in the form of a recast. Hyunah implicitly suggested the correct form of the word, and her response was accepted and confirmed by the original author, Jinho.

(17) Excerpt from Session 1
86  **Euntae:** On your face, Minsuk
91  **Minsuk:** I THINK HE WILL PLAY VIDEO GAMES-TO EUNTAE: IT’S IN YOUR FACE, NOT ON YOUR FACE

(18) Excerpt from Session 3

6  **Sooki:** assume

7  **Jungah:** awsome

9  **Kunwoo:** awesome

Minsuk, in (17), clearly indicated to Euntae that he had not used the proper preposition in his comment by explicitly repairing Euntae’s incorrect form. The instance illustrated in (18) presented a misspelled word being fixed by more than one child without exchanging any types of corrective feedback. In particular, example (18) has shown a nice example of children collaborating in order to repair the incorrect spelling and provide the correct form “awesome.”

(19) Excerpt from Session 8

135  **Jungah:** Mabey..

141  **Jungah:** Mabey that goast was so angry about they cheat him, so he will go their and eat all of goats!

201  **Jungah:** Mabey they shouldn’t turn on the light many times.

204  **Kunwoo:** maybe

207  **Kunwoo:** not mabey

264  **Jungah:** ok. Mabey we shouldn’t turn the light turn on or off~

(20) Excerpt from Session 10

233  **Jungah:** I have no idea~ but mabey that was so so hard. Mabey you can make one!

259  **Jungah:** mabey

266  **Kunwoo:** it is not mabey, it is maybe

326  **Jungah:** Mabey we could just stay calm

In the chat room, Jungah frequently used the word “mabey” when she posted messages as shown in (19) and (20). However, what kept distracting Kunwoo was her misspelling of the word. Whenever Jungah wrote the incorrect form “mabey” in a sentence, Kunwoo explicitly indicated that Jungah’s “mabey” was incorrect and provided the correct form “maybe” instead. Unfortunately, Kunwoo’s continuous efforts in offering corrective feedback did not lead to an uptake that yielded productive repair and neither was it acknowledged by Jungah. Even after Kunwoo clearly corrected Jungah’s misspelling...
several times, Jungah recurrently spelled the word “maybe” inaccurately. It appeared that Jungah was either overlooking Kunwoo’s comments or resisting correcting her misspelling, perhaps regarding it as correct. Kunwoo expressed that he was annoyed by mistakes committed by other children:

Other people’s mistakes are so irritating and I feel like correcting them myself… If I correct their error and the person who made the mistake does not respond to my action, that’s even more irritating because it implies that they are ignoring me. However, what can I do? I just move on [with the conversations] [Translated into English].

Some children also reflected that they wanted to correct other children’s errors but was afraid of their reactions. Hyunah commented:

I was thinking to myself, “Why does that person write like that?” Even though I wanted to point out their error, I was afraid that they might think that I was ignoring them, so I couldn’t [repair their errors] [Translated into English].

Sooki felt that they could benefit more if the more capable adult, me in this case, monitored and corrected errors as they occurred in their discussion. According to Sooki:

For me, it’s natural that other children make mistakes [while writing]. If I happen to point out their errors, they may get upset… [However,] someone needs to revise their errors. Because children don’t know what is correct or not, the teacher would better make changes to them. I wish you had repaired the errors for us [Translated into English].

(21) Excerpt from Session 2

51   Heesu: OKEY DOKEY THEN, I LIKE IT ‘CAUSE IT’S FUN AND NO I DO NOT HAVE A FAVORITE CHARACTOR.
53   Minsuk: WHAT’S FAVORITE?
55   Heesu: MISSED SPELLED IT!!!!

(22) Excerpt from Session 9

242  Euntae: AND IT SAYS COOK DRIVES ALON
253  Heesu: YOU THINK YOU’RE SO MSMART WHEN YOU MISSSPELLED ALONE.
Unlike other examples shown above, the purpose of providing corrective feedback for (21) and (22) seemed to be slightly different. In (21), it appeared that Minsuk almost intentionally drew attention to his sister Heesu’s misspelled word “faborite” although it was obviously a typo. During the interview, Minsuk distinguished his reactions to error correction made between other people and when responding to me. He said, “If you got misspelled a word… ‘[It’s] my mistake,’ [but] if other persons misspelled the word… it’s another chance to insult them!” As he expressed in his words, Minsuk wanted to tease his sister, and Heesu appeared to be well aware of her brother’s intention. Heesu responded to Minsuk by justifying herself that it was a mistake. In that message, Heesu made another error. Instead of writing “Misspelled it,” she wrote “Missed spelled it,” which was not pointed out by any of the children.

Euntae, in (22), was in the middle of explaining his answer to the assigned task. At the end of his comment, Euntae mistyped the word “alone,” omitting the last letter. After reading Euntae’s messages for a while, Heesu teased Euntae for his misspelling. In sum, in these two examples, (21) and (22), misspellings and typos worked as a weakness that allowed other children to make fun of the writer who had made the mistake.

V. DISCUSSIONS

The children in the study generally defined chatting as “talking,” “sharing one’s own opinions,” “exchanging ideas,” “talking without speaking,” “communicating with computer,” or “talking in the Internet.” As partially pointed out by the participants, synchronous CMC resembles several features of face-to-face oral communication, including the real-time interactional patterns (i.e., immediate response expected) as well as the use of various discourse functions (i.e., greetings and questioning) (Chun, 1994; Kern, 1995). However, although it incorporates some of the oral competence needed for face-to-face communication, synchronous CMC requires the ability to read and write, and thus can be regarded as a hybrid form of language (Beauvois, 1998).

1. Children’s Error Correction in CMC

Having been newly exposed to a new way of interacting, the children also faced how they should deal with their own or other children’s errors in the chat room. Should these errors be repaired or should they be overlooked? If the children’s initial impression of chatting was that it was writing, they would have tried not only to point out other members’ errors but also recognize and repair their own. By contrast, if the medium was primarily considered as a spoken mode, most of the errors would have been overlooked as often
happens in our daily conversations. However, as the sessions progressed, the children became familiar with the characteristics of CMC which had integrated aspects of both written and spoken discourse. Therefore, although not every error was identified in the chat room, the children were sometimes observed to point out other children’s errors and corrected their own mistakes as described in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1**

Children’s Error Correction Patterns in the CMC Venue

![Diagram showing the overlap between written language, spoken language, negative feedback & self, overlooking or ignoring, and CMC]

1) Negative Feedback to Other Children’s Errors

Even though the children were usually generous about others’ erroneous messages, they often pointed out other group members’ errors when those incorrect features were preventing them from understanding the text. Although examples of explicit feedback to an error were found (e.g., *It's in your face, not on your face*), the children tended to point out other children’s errors in an implicit manner as observed in the Spanish immigrant children investigated by Morris (2005).

The young learners who took part in the study also provided various types of implicit interactional feedback to signal that an error had occurred in their comments. Unlike the explicit negative feedback, implicit negative feedback, or negotiation of form, helped other children recognize their errors and possibly repair those errors as well. These implicit negative feedback used by the children included a recast (e.g., A: *Or used all misail*; B: *You mean missiles*), a clarification request (e.g., *Is that channel or channer? I confused*), or repetition (e.g., A: *No mony for you!!*; B: *Mony*?). To date, many studies have suggested the use of negative feedback as a means of promoting L2 development mainly due to its potential to increase a learner’s recognition of errors and facilitate the production of pushed output by repairing the incorrect forms (Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Lyster, 1998;
Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Macky & Philip, 1998; Oliver, 2002). In this study, even though the majority of errors were limited to lexical features, the negative feedback offered valuable opportunities for the children to be involved in the negotiation of forms.

One reason the children only implicitly indicated others’ errors may have been because of CMC’s rapid pace. In a spoken discourse, people tend to be more flexible about an interlocutor’s incorrect utterances, whereas every single error is much more rigidly monitored and required to be repaired in a written discourse. The children, who quickly became used to the distinctive features of CMC were not willing to break the conversation flow by offering negative feedback whenever they encountered ill-formed utterances. Rather, they only asked for an explanation or a repair of an error, to the extent that such a request did not disrupt the discussion, when the error was preventing them from understanding the meaning of the discussion.

The children’s use of implicit negative feedback can also be ascribed to the unique setting of the study. Although the children were individually logged onto the chat room, they were physically gathered around a table in the same place facing each other. Being able to see each other’s face closely while engaged in chatting may have encouraged the children to point out other members’ errors in an implicit and more polite way. However, if they had been more distantly located, they might have offered more negative feedback with a more explicit and rigorous attitude.

Additionally, not everyone in the group knew each other prior to the start of the study. Before they first met and began talking to each other in the chat room, the children had no clue about the English proficiency of some of the other members of their group. The children generally reflected that they were initially afraid that their own English proficiency would be too low as compared to others. However, as the sessions progressed, the children appeared to realize that although there were some children whose English was slightly better than their own, they were all in the same boat learning English to improve their proficiency. Although a few participants mentioned that other children’s errors were sometimes bothersome, they considered they could have made the same mistake as well or they would point out the errors politely in an implicit way so as not to offend or embarrass those who had committed the mistake. They seemed to have created a small learning community naturally where they understood each other’s errors and offered implicit corrective feedback when they thought the correction was necessary to help other children pay attention to the ill-formed utterances in the online chat.

2) Self Error Correction

In real life, people rarely engage in self correction while talking with others. However, it is interesting to note that CMC allows for self correction because, even though CMC is
similar to the flow of spoken language, it is also similar to the written form at the same time.

The children’s self correction can be explained in two ways: (a) they wanted to facilitate the smooth flow of their conversation, and (b) they wanted to avoid other children’s negative feedback to their erroneous entries. First, the children did not want their errors to mislead other participants. Because children were posting their comments simultaneously, the conversation could become complicated. As a way of reducing the confusion, the children attempted to repair their errors so that their mistakes would not interrupt the flow of the online discussion. Therefore, self correction could help convey a closer version of what the author intended. Second, the children were trying not to receive negative feedback from other members of the group. Being the target of negative feedback may have made them feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. Furthermore, they may have been afraid that other children would laugh at them for their ignorance. As one of the children indicated in the interview, he considered other children’s mistakes as “another chance to insult them” rather than acknowledge the mistake as “my bad.” Hence, self correction could provide an opportunity to show, “I am not so stupid as to make this kind of simple error. I already know the correct usage of the word but it was just a typo.”

One child in the study, who was particularly conscious of his own grammatical errors, reflected that it was easier for him to fix his mistakes because the messages he posted were generally short as compared to the essays he had to write for his private tutor. The chat room was beneficial for self correction in two ways: (a) the production of output (Swain, 1985, 1995), and (b) the relatively brief discourse of CMC (Kelm, 1992). The electronic texts posted in the chat room let the children recognize and repair their interlanguage easily (Blake, 2000). Although the children generally posted their comments as quickly as they had formulated their thoughts, they appeared to monitor their sentences and sometimes edited them before posting. In addition, the brief nature of their comments allowed the children to identify their errors relatively easily. As Swain (1995) has argued, such output drew the learners’ attention to the form of the language and pushed the learners to produce improved output in the second language. In sum, CMC appeared to have created plentiful opportunities to provide input and feedback that could help the children produce better language, or what Swain called, “pushed output.”

2. Children’s Endeavor to Balance Fluency and Accuracy in CMC

In the study, the children frequently misspelled words, committed typographic errors, omitted punctuations, composed messages either all capitalized or with no capitalized letters, and made grammatical mistakes. This phenomenon may primarily be due to the online chatting’s requirement for quick writing and its highly interactive and free style of
communication. In other words, although synchronous CMC allowed for “simultaneous conversation” with more than one person (Kern & Warschauer, 2000, p. 12), the exchanges in the chat room appeared to be faster and more complicated than traditional face-to-face discussions. In addition, the children were posting messages in a relatively less restricted atmosphere partly because I did not ask them particularly to pay attention or try to avoid errors in their comments.

Therefore, in order to keep up with the fast paced discussions, the children generally seemed to put more emphasis on the flow, or fluency, of the conversation rather than its accuracy. The children generally reflected that the most enjoyable experiences were “talking” with other children and sharing ideas on diverse topics in the chat room. However, at the same time, the children were trying hard to make as few errors as possible in order not to break the flow of the ongoing conversation. Although one participant complained that I did not correct his grammatical errors, the children were usually tolerant about their own and others’ mistakes, attributing them to a lack of typing skills or a lack of proper knowledge of the target language. They noted that as long as they could understand other children’s comments, they tried not to be harsh about errors for two reasons: (a) they knew they themselves could make similar kinds of mistakes, and (b) they did not want to embarrass or offend another member of the group by emphasizing their errors.

In sum, although most children appeared to be generous about other group members’ mistakes and errors that occurred in the chat room, some errors were pointed out either by the original author or other writers in the group. Considering the distinct characteristic of a synchronous CMC, a hybrid form of written and spoken languages, the children noted that as long as the flawed comments were understandable they would not be harsh on them, admitting that they also made similar mistakes all the time. The children often identified and corrected their own errors in order to maintain the flow of the conversation. However, when the error was considered to prevent the children from understanding the context of the CMC discussions, they asked for explanation by providing various negative feedbacks. As the children became more adept at this new communication medium, that involved a hybrid nature of spoken and written languages, they were seen to try hard to keep the electronic conversations going and minimize errors that could complicate their exchanges.

REFERENCES


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