Talk to Learn, Learn to Talk

Master’s Project Proposal

Abstract

“Learn to Talk, Talk to Learn” is an online learning community designed to address the learning problems associated with a conversational Chinese class at Stanford. The data collected from the observation, interviews, survey, and document analysis shows that students in this class lack opportunities to communicate with native speakers in a real social context in which the language is really used.

This proposed online learning community will employ various web 2.0 technologies, including wikis, blogs, and chatting rooms to provide a read/write web platform to connect distributed learners interested in one another’s expert language to develop communication competence.

1. Learning Problem

This project tries to address the learning problems associated with a conversational Chinese class at Stanford. The targeted audience is college students at Stanford University enrolled in a two-credit class to learn basic conversational (oral) Mandarin. The class is held in the winter quarter twice a week for 50 minutes. Each class has between 10-15 students.

I observed the class one time during the winter quarter, interviewed four students, and conducted a survey and document (syllabus and course materials) analysis. The data collected from the observation, interviews, survey, and document analysis shows that these learners are:

- Motivated – many are learning Chinese as an elective fun course
- Busy – learners can’t fit more class time in their intensive course schedules
- Diverse – they come from a variety of backgrounds and majors
- Have prior knowledge – all have taken at least the autumn quarter basic Chinese course or equivalent

This class works around a major constraint – lack of class time. Grammar rules and verb conjugations occupy most of class time (50 minute class). According to American Educational Research Association (2006), effective foreign language instruction for adult learners includes direct teaching, systematic practice involving rules and grammar, and plenty of opportunities for conversation. It should be aimed at having students express and understand fully formed ideas and phrases, as well as learn the language’s structure. A balanced instructional approach is vital. Too much focus on meaning fails to create the knowledge of structure necessary for anything beyond the most basic conversational skills. At the same time, while teaching structures directly is highly productive, an over-reliance on structure, perhaps through endless mechanical drills, can lead to the “boredom
factor” students want to actually communicate in a foreign language, not labor over the nuts and bolts.

The learning lacks context (real-life situations, for example, buying food at the market or asking someone for directions). To be able to operate effectively in the real world, students need plenty of opportunities to practice language in situations which encourage them to communicate their needs, ideas and opinions (Abbs and Freebairn: Blueprint Intermediate, page 1). Where possible, language practice should resemble real life communication with genuine exchange of information and opinions (Swan and Walter 1990).

Students also lack supportive learning resource out-of-class (e.g., native speakers to practice). For almost everyone, high proficiency in a foreign language will develop outside the classroom, through conversations with native speakers made possible by the skills acquired in the classroom (American Educational Research Association, 2006). Based on the interviews, they expressed the desire for more practice time and extra help after class. Some students already access other resources like parents, friends and published language media to augment their learning. Access and use of support materials is inconsistent.

Based on the above discussion, the learning problem can be summarized in one sentence: The students of the conversational Chinese class at Stanford lack opportunities to communicate, especially with native speakers, in a real social context in which the language is really used.

2. Literature Review

Numerous projects/research studies attempted to address the identical or similar problems as presented in the conversational Chinese class at Stanford. Most of these projects/research studies are in a broader context of foreign/second language (mostly English as second language) acquisition rather than specifically in the context of Chinese language acquisition. A booming category of projects/research studies in recent years focus on the use of Internet information and communication tools to support second language acquisition between (typically) internationally dispersed groups of learners who are members of different linguistic and cultural groups. Over the past decade, the ability to link students by networked computers has opened up a variety of opportunities for language based social interaction in second and foreign language education. Language use over networks provides a variety of communicative situations, many of which are not readily available in foreign language classrooms (Cononelos & Oliva, 1993).

The use of Internet technologies to encourage dialogue between distributed individuals and partner classes proposes a compelling potential in addressing the problem encountered in the conversational Chinese class at Stanford by providing learners from classroom-based contexts the opportunities of actual interaction with expert speakers of the language they are studying. There exist numerous models in literature that make use
of Internet-mediated interaction between learners interested in one another’s expert language. They are summarized below.

2.1. Telecollaboration

It is international class-to-class partnerships within institutionalized settings. Telecollaborative projects generally involve intensive coordination that can include aligning partner class syllabi around shared information and media (literature, films, and scholarly texts) and collaborative interpretive and investigative activities. Telecollaboration models are administratively intensive to initiate and maintain due to the high level of coordination between partner classes (e.g., Belz and Müller-Hartmann 2003).

2.2. Local Experts

This kind of projects link together local expert speakers, such as diaspora, immigrant, and heritage language populations, with foreign language students in organized partnerships. Blake and Zyzik (2003) used synchronous chat to connect Spanish heritage language students in a university language course with Spanish foreign language learners on the same campus. The foreign language learners gained access to interaction with more advanced speakers of Spanish while the heritage speakers occupied expert roles that helped to affirm their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

2.3. Non-educationally Oriented Internet Communities

This model encourages (or requires) learners to participate in established and non-educationally oriented Internet communities, such as discussion fora associated with newspapers. The use of interaction in online communities as component parts of instructed foreign language courses has been shown to provide opportunities for negotiation of meaning (Tudini 2003) and to situate foreign language use in non-educational social contexts (Cononelos and Oliva 1993; Hanna and de Nooy 2003).

2.4. Tandem Learning

Tandem learning pairs individuals in complementary dyads where each is interested in learning the other’s language. Tandem learning is most associated with non-institutional learning configurations and usually requires partners to negotiate discussion topics and the balance between overt pedagogical and conversational activity. Tandem partners may not address repeated and significant linguistic errors, and if they do, they may not be capable of providing productive explanations (Kötter, 2005).

3. Design Challenges

- How to get native speakers and experts in Chinese language who can be supporting learning resource available to the learners outside the classroom
- These native speakers and experts in Chinese language can also benefit from the learning process.
Native speakers are not necessarily good language tutors. Though experts know their disciplines thoroughly, this does not guarantee that they are able to teach others. In fact, expertise can sometimes hurt teaching because many experts forget what is easy and what is difficult for students. The content knowledge necessary for expertise in a discipline needs to be differentiated from the pedagogical content knowledge that underlies effective teaching (Redish, 1996; Shulman, 1986, 1987). Expert teachers have acquired pedagogical content knowledge as well as content knowledge. Therefore, one challenge is how to ensure the bottom line learning can happen even if the native speakers do not have pedagogical expertise specific to Chinese language.

- How to provide rich simulated language application context in learning activities

3. Approach

My design of the solution will be primarily based on the following two second language acquisition approaches.

3.1. Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes communication and real-life situations. Language is used for communication. For this reason, CLT makes use of communication to teach languages. The essence of CLT is the engagement of learners in communication to allow them to develop their communicative competence. Whereas traditional language teaching places a lot of emphasis on grammar rules and verb conjugations, CLT emphasizes real-life situations and communication in context (Galloway, 1993). While grammar is still important in the CLT classroom, the emphasis is on communicating a message. In CLT, students practice real-life situations, for example, buying food at the market or asking someone for directions. In these exercises, the goal is for the student to communicate his or her needs and thoughts, without worrying about having perfect grammar.

Multimedia is an ideal way to teach language using CLT as the theory. It allows for realistic simulations of communicative situations. Many such programs are games, such as "A la rencontre de Philipe" or "Who is Oscar Lake?". They place the learner in a situation in which understanding basic communication, and social and cultural contexts are vital to advancing in the game.

3.2. Intercultural Communication Perspective

Intercultural communication focuses on interactions among people from different cultures” (Kecskes, 2004). It involves “the study of distinct cultural or other groups in interaction with one another” (Scollon & Scollon, 2001.).

4. Technology

Technology should be simple. Technology is a tool to support learning. The students and teachers should not have to invest in learning new tools or IT support. It should incorporate every day tools available on the internet that student’s may already be using.
Internet and Web as learning delivering platform

Wikis: Wiki is a web-based environment that supports collaborative writing. They feature a loosely structured set of pages which anyone can edit any page. Many wiki engines track each addition, deletion, and modification. Prior versions of a given page are recoverable so regression to earlier drafts is always available. A given wiki’s current content is but the top layer of a temporally stratified stack of texts that precisely display the history of the writing process. The reasons why wiki is used:
* Easy to use and the tech entry bar is low
* Read/write
* Has the capacity of harnessing collective intelligence of distributed learners interested in one another’s expert language
* Collaborative writing itself is a way of learning
* Tentative final content can work as learning aids used in chatting room

Chatting Room (Voice and Text):
* Has the capacity to connect distributed learners interested in one another’s expert language to develop communication competence
* Free
* Easy to use

Blog as a place to hold the learners’ e-portfolio for peer assessment.

5. Design Goals

* Address a local learning problem, but scalable and generalizable to the larger and similar population.
* Focuses on the acquisition of basic conversational Chinese to survive in the streets in China, but can be modified for intermediate and advanced oral Chinese
* Not intend to replace classroom, rather to complement classroom learning
* Use communicative language teaching and intercultural communication perspective to inform the design of the learning environment: focus on developing the learners’ communicative competence and intercultural competence.
* Use Internet and Web 2.0 as platform to build an online community for service of learning
* Harness learner-generated content to meet the learner’s needs and release the burden imposed on teachers/developers

6. Anticipated "Product"

The anticipated product is a web platform “Talk to Learn, Learn to Talk” providing the following services/features:

Bilingual Scenario Skit Center: It is wiki-based and uses collective intelligence. All content is user-generated. It is organized scenario by scenario. Each scenario skit
ED229C Master Project Proposal  Wu ping Lu at Stanford University

simulates a real-life situation in a specific social context, for example, having meals at restaurants. One scenario can have different level skits (e.g., basic, intermediate, and advanced) and each level have different versions to accommodate different number of participants. Any user can edit and create content. The skit’s content is written in English, Pinyin, and Chinese Character. Except the skit body, there are also user-generated learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment, and culture related issues specific to the scenario. The content is contributed by native English speakers and native Chinese speakers. The skit center also works as a supporting tool when the learners are chatting in the chatting room.

**Audio Dictionary:** the learners can look in the meaning of new vocabulary and check for pronunciation for both English and Chinese.

**Chatting:** there is chatting software installed in each learner’s desktop/laptop with recording device. The software provides both voice and text chatting for either one to one or group format. The learners can use the information inside the Skit Center and audio dictionary to support their chatting. They need to negotiate when and how long for English/Chinese.

**Blogs:** each user has a blog to post his or her reflection on learning, learning strategies, and learning products in the form of text, video, audio, etc., actually anything related to learning. There is a learner list inside the Skit Center which has a link to each learner’s blog. Blogs work as a place to hold the learners’ e-portfolio for peer/self-evaluation.

7. User Scenario

Angel is enrolled in the class of Conversational Chinese at Stanford this quarter. She experienced a learning problem - lacking opportunities to communicate with native speakers in a real social context in which the language is really used. Fortunately, one of ldt students created an online community which connects distributed learners interested in one another’s expert language to develop communicative competence and intercultural communication competence. Currently, 30 native Chinese speakers in China who are interested in learning English are active participants in this community. Angel and her classmates (14) in conversation Chinese are registered too. On the community’s wiki site, they created 9 bilingual scenario skits by using collective intelligences. Angel regularly chats with her language partners through Skype. Today, she will chat with Wu at 9 pm. It is 8:30 pm now and she opens Skype and logs in. Wu has not yet come. Angel opens the wiki site and finds that some entries she created in Pinyin have been changed with annotation for a grammar rule. She then edits some English entries. After a while, Wu logged in. they start free chat first without any aid. Soon Angel finds that it is hard for her to keep a meaningful conversation with Wu due to her very limited communicative competence. She decides to use a skit to aid her conversation. She also uses the audio dictionary tool to quickly find pronunciations. With the aid Angel now feels confident and the conversation becomes fluent. Now it is Wu’s turn to communicate in English. Although Angel does not has pedagogical expertise specific to English, with pedagogical supports associated with the skit on the wiki, the process of tutoring Wu in English is
pretty smooth. The whole chatting process is recorded. Then Angel uploads the chatting into her blog for instructor or peer assessment or her own review.

8. Assessment

Assessment includes two parts: community participation and learning outcome. Each learner’s participation will be assessed based on the amount of entries and chatting time. The learning outcome will be evaluated based on the improvement of communicative competence over time by analyzing the learner’s recorded chatting. The learners posted the recorded audio file on their blog. The language partners and the instructor will give feedback.

3). Milestones and deliverables

07/07 Wiki demo site with an example of skit collaboratively developed with Angel and possibly other Chinese learners and English learners.
07/15 Demo video showing the use of chatting room for language learning and the recording of chatting.
07/22 Demo Blog to show how blog can be used as e-portfolio
07/25 Prototype
07/28 PowerPoint Presentation and Poster
08/16 Final prototype (website) and design rationale

4). Time Budget
Independent work. Please see above

5). Supporters

Yuhwa Liao Rozelle: provide an opportunity to observe her conversational Chinese class
Angel Inokon: provide information about the conversational Chinese class

6). C.V./Resume
Please see appendix.

Reference:


Appendix: Resume

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EDUCATION:

9/05-present  Stanford University, School of Education, Stanford, CA. Pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Education with a focus on Learning, Design, and Technology.

1/03-8/05  Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN. Graduate study in Human Performance (Curriculum and Instruction).

8/00-12/02  Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH. M.Ed. in Recreation and Leisure Studies.

9/86-7/94  Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China. M.Ed. (1994) and Bachelor of Education (1990) in Health and Physical Education.

EXPERIENCE:

5/06-present  Research Associate, Project “Teaching Teachers to Use Technology: What Works and Why” (Co-Directors: Susan Goldman and James Pellegrino), University of Illinois at Chicago, IL. Conduct the faculty, student, student teacher, and new teacher interviews and classroom observations and collect data.

1/06-present  Instructional Design Intern, Academic Computing, Stanford University, Stanford, CA. Design and deliver promotion plan, tutorial, demo, and workshops to students and faculty to promote the usage and popularity of GroupSpace on campus - a collaborative learning space. Design and conduct user study to improve the design and implementation of GroupSpace.

12/05-3/06  Assistive Technical Assistant, School of Education, Stanford University, Stanford, CA. Identified appropriate assistive technologies and integrated them into a disabled researcher’s research activities. Prepared tutorials and provided training to the client.

1/03-8/05  Instructional Designer/Instructor, Media Center for Language Acquisition/Faculty Instructional Technology Center/Department of Health & Human Performance, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN. Designed instructional materials and media for Chinese language learning. Developed/assisted faculty to develop WebCT courses and educational websites and conducted WebCT workshops. Worked at help desk for instructional technology consulting. Taught Technology Applications.

8/00-5/02  Webmaster, School of Human Movement, Sport, and Leisure Studies, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH. Developed and maintained the department’s website.

7/94-8/00  Instructional Designer/Researcher, Center for Learning, Instruction, and Curriculum, Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences, Beijing, China. Designed educational media. Developed Health and Physical Education curriculum. Conducted educational research. Taught Curriculum Design.
SKILLS: Technical: HTML, CSS, Dreamweaver, FrontPage, Firework, PhotoShop, iMovie, MS Office, WebCT
Language: Proficient in Chinese

SAMPLES OF DESIGN: http://ldt.stanford.edu/~luwuping/ (containing educational products/prototypes/projects/websites developed at Stanford)