

New Ways of Learning and Teaching: Focus on Technology and Foreign Language Education

Judith A. Muyskens
Editor



Heinle & Heinle Publishers
An International Thomson Publishing
Company
Boston, Massachusetts 02116, USA

Copyright © 1998 by Heinle & Heinle. No parts of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

Heinle & Heinle Publishers is an International Thomson Publishing company.

ISBN: 0-8384-7809-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Write to Speak: The Effects of Electronic Communication on the Oral Achievement of Fourth Semester French Students

Margaret Beauvois

The University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Introduction

Much has been written about the positive effect of word processing on the writing of first language students and its benefits have been confirmed by research studies (Hawisher and Selfe 1989; Selfe and Hilligloss 1994; Pennington 1995, 1996). Recent explorations into the use of e-mail to connect students in asynchronous communication attest to its distinct capacity to encourage student interaction (Walthers 1994; Warschauer 1995). Since 1992, studies have shown the affective and social benefits of electronic writing for communication on a local area network (LAN). Data collected in these studies support the contention that electronic discussion lowers the affective filter associated with student production and enhances student participation in class (Beauvois 1992a 1993, 1994, 1996a; Cononelos and Oliva 1993; Day and Batson 1995; Faigley 1992; Kelm 1992; Kemp 1993; Kern 1995; Nicholas and Toporski 1993; Slatin 1992; and Vaché 1994).

Explorations into the effective use of e-mail and other wide-area network procedures are now underway in many institutions at various levels of second language study. We are beginning to understand that both e-mail (Warschauer 1995) and LAN communication (Beauvois 1992a, 1992b, 1996b) bridge a communication gap for the student with limited linguistic skill by creating a “conversation in slow motion” that allows students time to reflect and compose before communicating—something that is not possible in oral exchanges of information. More student participation and engagement in this student-driven electronic environment has caused a radical change in the nature of classroom discussion that, while written, is in fact

also very conversational (Bump 1990; Butler 1992; Faigley 1990; Kemp 1993; Kinneavy 1991; Peterson 1989; Slatin 1991).

We are also aware that one of the essential goals of the language class in today's world is to produce *speakers* of living languages. As economic ties between countries develop, and the image of "Global Village" becomes a reality, the emphasis in the profession is on oral proficiency for very practical reasons of communication. To date, however, no data support the benefits of computer-mediated communication in a second language as facilitating the oral acquisition of that language.

In recent times, as researchers gather more data on electronic exchanges (e-mail, computer chat, MOOs, etc.), it has seemed to many that there must be a carryover from this intense writing practice to the acquisition of the spoken language. Until now, this has been mostly an intuitive assumption. The purpose of the pilot study described in this article is to examine, under controlled conditions, whether a link between written and oral communication can be established.

Description of LAN Communication

In synchronous, real-time LAN "chat" communication, each message appears on the screens of all participants connected to the network as the author writes it. The instructor stimulates discussion with a few initial questions aimed at sparking student interest in the topic and encouraging their participation and production. The on-line participants then read the messages sent by the instructor and their classmates, reflect, compose their own messages, and send them to the ongoing electronic polylogue scrolling on the monitor in front of them.

In previous studies of the effects of LAN communication on language acquisition using the *Daedalus* software, students have been given the freedom to "discuss" texts as they wish by composing electronic messages both on and off topic (Beauvois 1992a; Butler 1992; Kelm 1992; Kern 1995; Peterson 1989). The activity is characterized by its student centeredness, intense target language practice, and the freedom of expression that the process encourages.

In the present study, for the purpose of assessing student progress and achievement, the communicative activities conducted on the LAN were somewhat more controlled by instructor planning and requirements than in previous studies. Students were asked, for example, to answer all the questions posted by the professor, as they would be required to do in the regular

classroom, as well as to complete certain exercises on vocabulary. Some examples of those exercises can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

The Current Study

Participants

A total of 83 students enrolled in four sections of fourth-semester French at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), participated in this pilot study in the Spring Semester of 1995. These students had completed three semesters of French at UTK or the equivalent. Students were randomly assigned to the four sections of French 212: two sections met in the IBM computer lab for one of three weekly meetings; the other sections held all meetings in the regular classroom with no computer component. Students were not informed beforehand of the computer component in the experimental section. No students transferred out of the lab sections. No prior computer skills were required. Enrollment in the experimental group was limited to 20 students due to the number of computers available in the lab. The other classes were limited to 24 students per section with the final numbers for the experimental (computer lab) group being $N=37$ and for the control group $N=46$. Of the 83 students, 49 were female and 34 were male.

Instructors

The three instructors (two females and one male) involved in the study had all taught the French 212 course before, and all had experience with the software used in the computer lab. Two graduate student teachers taught both the experimental groups and control groups (three sections total); one instructor, a lecturer with the most teaching experience, taught one of the control groups.

Setting: Computer Lab

In the absence of a specific language laboratory, a remote lab site was used for the study. There were twenty-one networked IBM 486 computers, one station per student and one for the instructor. The instructor taught students the log-in procedures on the first day of lab class. Students experienced only minor difficulties with the technology after that. The instructor sat at a workstation at the front of the room. All communication was done electronically in French.

Setting: Classroom

The classrooms for the control groups had moveable desks to facilitate small group and whole class instruction, as is customary for all French language courses at UTK. Researcher observations and video tapes of the control groups' classrooms confirm that during small group activities the instructor moved from group to group giving help and encouragement as students asked and answered questions about the texts under discussion. French was used exclusively as the language of instruction in these two sections. The same text and personal questions were used in both environments. Students in the regular classroom were given practice sheets with questions to discuss orally in small groups; students in the lab had the same questions posted on the computer screen for electronic LAN discussion.

Curriculum of French 212

At UTK, French 212 is designed to integrate all the elements of the basics of beginning-intermediate French. In this final required semester of French, it is the purpose of the syllabus to continue to emphasize the communicative aspects of language learning and to add reading as a supplementary element.

The curriculum of French 212 consists of the final chapters of *French in Action* (FIA, Capretz 1988, second edition), a video-immersion method taught exclusively in the first three semesters of French, and a selection of short stories from the reader *Les récrés du Petit Nicolas* (Goscinny and Sempé 1976) which is used in the final six weeks of the semester of French 212. Due to constraints in time and equipment the FIA classes follow a clearly-defined syllabus (after the first week) for the three class periods (50 minutes each) per week:

1. Day 1: the weekly quiz followed by the presentation of the next chapter's video teleplay;
2. Day 2: exploitation of the video material using the textbook's content and personal questions called *Mise en Œuvre* (M/O) and *Mise en Question* (M/Q);
3. Day 3: the pedagogical part of the video and workbook (grammar) exercises.

This study examines the effect of the Day 2 communicative activities (the M/O and M/Q question series and workbook vocabulary exercises) on

student achievement in oral skills. Care was taken in the planning of this study to reduce the effect of unavoidable variables in the following ways:

1. Time: Three of the four sections were afternoon classes.
2. Random class assignment: There was no prior selection of students for either the computer or non-computer sections.
3. Instructors: Two of the teachers who taught the lab sections also taught the regular class sections. The third instructor taught only one section of the control group. As mentioned above, instructors in both groups had experience with the materials used in the French 212 course. Teaching experience was slightly balanced in favor of the control groups in that the instructor for one of the control groups had been a lecturer for several years and was also coordinator of the 212 course.
4. Curriculum: The syllabus and curriculum for French 212 had the same content and assignments for all four sections. The only difference in the two groups was that the experimental group had one class a week of electronic communicative activities and the control group did these activities orally in the regular classroom.

As part of the curriculum for French 212, students took three oral exams, one each in February, March, and May 1995. These oral exams formed the basis for establishing achievement differences between the control and experimental groups.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study follows. In the control French 212 classroom students were placed in groups according to ability, interest, or personality as each instructor desired. They received written exercises taken from activities in the *French in Action* materials to use as a guide for their oral practice. These exercises/questions were exploited by the instructor to review both the content and the grammar points emphasized in the chapter. Periodically the instructor would ask the individuals from each group to report on their group's discussions. Sometimes, based on the general interest of topics, the whole class would talk about a given subject for several minutes before going back to the small group discussion.

The following example, taken from workbook lesson 38 of *French in Action*, presents a very specific vocabulary exercise that is designed to draw

student attention to the use of specific usage of “verb plus infinitive” from the lesson. The more open-ended discussion questions follow (see Appendix 1 for translation). The same exercises were used in both the control and experimental group environments and elements of this class/lab work were tested by oral exams given to both groups.

Figure 1

A sample *French in Action* Classroom/Lab Activity

Topics for Lesson 38:

Répondez à toutes les questions ci-dessous:

Exercices de vocabulaire. Ajoutez trois autres réponses à celles qui sont données comme exemples:

1. *Qu'est-ce qu'on peut perdre? (ex., 3.000F, son temps, un pari, la tête, la guerre, un match de rugby, sa place de parking, son emploi, etc.)*
2. *Qu'est-ce qu'on peut préparer? (ex., un examen, un coup d'état, une révolution, un spectacle, la Mise en Œuvre, son devoir, son diner, etc.)*
3. *Qu'est-ce qu'on peut ouvrir? (ex., les oreilles, la fenêtre, un journal, une bouteille de muscadet, un magasin, la bouche [pour parler français], son livre, la porte, etc.)*

Questions de discussion:

4. *Que pensez-vous du cinéma noir et blanc?*
5. *Êtes-vous d'accord avec Mireille qui pense que le “vrai” cinéma est le muet?*
6. *Décrivez votre film favori.*
7. *Qu'est-ce que le “vrai” cinéma pour vous?*

The methodology used in teaching the short stories was as follows: The stories in *Le Petit Nicolas* were assigned to the students to read at home before coming to class. They were asked to prepare the study questions in anticipation of a discussion in class—either in the lab or in the regular classroom. The questions were both content-based and personal. An example follows based on the story *C'est Papa qui décide* (see Appendix 2 for the translation).

Figure 2**Questions from Nicolas Story as a Communicative Classroom/Lab Activity**

Français 212 Discussion on *C'est Papa qui décide*

Questions sur Nicolas:

1. *Quels ennuis est-ce que les Blédurt ont eus en vacances l'année dernière?*
2. *Résumez les inconvénients de la villa que Papa veut louer dans le Midi.*
3. *Qu'est-ce qu'il y a d'intéressant à faire à Bains-les-Mers d'après Maman?*
4. *Pendant toute l'histoire Maman tricote un pullover. Pourquoi? Quelle est la signification de ce "pull-over"?*
5. *Est-ce que Maman est habile? Est-ce qu'elle attaque Papa de front? De qui profite-t-elle pour l'aider à convaincre Papa d'aller en Bretagne?*

Questions personnelles:

1. *Où êtes-vous allé(e) pendant les vacances de printemps? À la montagne? À la plage? Êtes-vous resté(e) à l'hôtel ou avez-vous loué une villa? Donnez une petite description de ce que vous avez fait pendant ces vacances.*
2. *Dites pourquoi vous avez choisi la plage, la montagne, Knoxville, Nashville, etc. pour vos vacances?*

The Process

In the computer lab, students logged in at individual terminals and read the posted questions based on their homework preparation as shown above. They then responded to those questions and exchanged ideas with each other and the instructor for the entire class period. In the lab sessions early in the semester, student response, while enthusiastic, was limited to specific responses to specific questions. Student production became much more creative and expressive as the semester progressed and as the tasks demanded of them went from textbook questions to discussion questions about the *Le Petit Nicolas* stories. This fact would dismiss the Hawthorne effect as a negative element to the findings since the enthusiastic use of the medium was not related to initial contact with the software. On the contrary, students seemed to consider the software more as a tool for communication than as an exciting game as time went on.

Student messages quoted here are unedited and contain errors (including typos). The researcher hypothesizes that students made no more or fewer

errors than in their oral interlanguage discourse. However, in the final study, the author will document the proportion or type of written errors carried over into the speech performance of the subjects. In this, as in previous studies of LAN communication, students were not required to include accents in their messages to avoid slowing down the rapid conversational nature of the exercise (Kelm 1992; Beauvois 1992a, 1992b; Kern 1995). The vocabulary questions for this section were based on exploration and travel themes in the textbook/video episode in which Mireille and Robert win the lottery and plan a discovery trip of France (lessons 50–52, FIA).

The first three questions of this activity were designed to practice the construction of verb + infinitive, the conditional, and the use of recent vocabulary. The translations follow the student entries.

1. *Qu'est-ce qu'on peut explorer?*

What can one explore?

2. *Qu'est-ce que Mireille et Robert devraient faire/acheter [avec leur argent]?*

What should Mireille and Robert do/buy [with their money]?

3. *Si Mireille et Robert venaient dans le Tennessee, qu'est-ce qu'il devraient faire/voir?*

If Mireille and Robert were to come to Tennessee, what should they do/see?

The last question for this session was more personal.

4. *Où voudriez-vous aller en vacances?*

Where would you like to go on vacation?

A sampling of typical responses to questions 1 through 4 follows (Initials are used in place of student names, and "Instr." indicates the instructor). The following messages are in the chronological order in which they appeared on each student's computer screen.

Question 1: *Qu'est-ce qu'on peut explorer?* What can one explore?

RT: *On peut explorer le Grand Canyon.*

One can explore the Grand Canyon.

AN: *On peut explorer les montagnes "Smokies".*

One can explore the Smoky Mountains.

ST: *On peut manger la nourriture dans la cafeteria!*

One can eat the food in the cafeteria!

LS: *On peut explorer les petits cafés a Amsterdam.*

One can explore the little cafés in Amsterdam.

- EH: *On peut explorer sous le toit de la maison de sa grand-mere!*
One can explore under the roof of his/her grandmother's house.
- PB: *Oui, EH, la cafeteria, on peut explorer!*
Yes, EH, one can explore the cafeteria!
- BL: *On peut trouver dans la maison de ma grand-mere beaucoup de photos vieux et vetements anciens.*
One can find lots of old photos and old clothes in my grandmother's house.
- JA: *Et, LS, on peut explorer les autres choses a Amsterdam!*
And, LS, one can explore other things in Amsterdam!
- BB: *On peut explorer le jardin et la maison de Monet.*
One can explore Monet's garden and house.

Questions 2 and 3:

2. *Qu'est-ce que Mireille et Robert devraient faire/acheter [avec leur argent]?*
What should Mireille and Robert do/buy [with their money]?
3. *Si Mireille et Robert venaient dans le Tennessee, qu'est-ce qu'il devraient faire/voir?*

If Mireille and Robert were to come to Tennessee, what should they do/see?

Student responses as they appeared on all participants' monitors:

- AN: *Ils devraient acheter un voiture.*
They should buy a car.
- JT: *Mireille et Bob devraient acheter beaucoup de vetements nouveaux!*
Mireille and Bob should buy lots of new clothes!
- BB: *Si Mireille et Robert venaient au Tennessee, ils iraient a Dollywood!*
If Mireille and Robert were to come to Tennessee, they would go to Dollywood!
- ML: *Ils devraient envoyer Marie-Laure au pensionnat!*
They should send Marie-Laure to boarding school!
- BL: *Non, BB, ils devraient visiter Graceland!*
They should visit Graceland!
- JD: *Mireille et Bob mangeraient beaucoup de bonbons!*
Mireille and Bob would eat a lot of candy!
- AW: *BB, et BL, Ils devraient aller a Opryland!*
They should go to Opryland!

Question 4: *Où voudriez-vous aller en vacances?*

Where would you like to go on vacation?

Student responses as they appeared on all participants' monitors:

- JA: *En Nice, je ferai du camping dans la montagne.*
In Nice, I will go camping in the mountain.
- EH: *Peut-etre je voyage a allemagne et visite une ou deux "tavernes". . .*
Perhaps I [will] travel to Germany and visit one or two taverns.
- MM: *Je veux voyager a velo en Europe, et je veux faire du camping un peu mais j'adore les grands hotels aussi!*
I want to travel on a bike in Europe, and I want to camp a little but I adore big hotels, too!
- YF: *Je vais aller du camping pour Spring Break avec dix amis a Pisgah Forest.*
I am going camping over spring break with ten friends in the Pisgah Forest.
- HS: *Je prepare un voyage a Australia en bateau et a pied. Je voudrais voir les animals et l'hommes de la region.*
I am preparing a trip to Australia by boat and on foot. I would like to see the animals and people of the area.
- LC: *Je voudrais aller a la Cote d'Ivoire.*
I'd like to go to the Côte d'Ivoire.
- RS: *Je voudrais aller au Allemand pour voir le campagne.*
I would like to go to Germany to see the countryside.

In addition to these rather factual responses, there were the attempts at humor based on the story line in which the hero and heroine shop at the Paris department store *La Samaritaine*, a rather impressive 19th-century building:

CC: Pour aller en France, je vais voyager en avion parce que c'est la plus vite. Je pense que je resterai dans la Samaritaine a Paris parce que c'est tres elegante. Je vais emporter tout mes vetements, et mes chaussures, et beaucoup d'argent parce que la Samaritaine est tres chere!!

To go to France, I am going to travel by plane because it is faster. I think that I'll stay in the Samaritaine in Paris because it is very elegant. I am going to take all my clothes and my shoes, and lots of money because the Samaritaine is very expensive!!

After a few straightforward messages, the exchanges became more personal in nature:

- Instr. (to student): *LC, Cote d'Ivoire. Oui. Que ferais-tu la-bas?*
LC, the Cote d'Ivoire. Yes. What will you do over there?
- PR. (to Instr.): *Quest que tu pense a les Bahamas? Est-ce que tu va ici?*
What do you think of the Bahamas? Are you going here?

- TC: *Je prepare un voyage en France. J'veis voyager en avion et en train. J'veis faire visiter la Tour Eiffel et les petites cafes des intellectuels.*
I am preparing a trip to France. I am going to travel by plane and by train. I am going to visit the Eiffel Tower and the little cafés for intellectuals.
- CC (to Instr.): *Monsieur, je voudrais aller a Caen encore parce que je connais beaucoup de gens la.*
Sir, I would like to go to Caen again because I know lots of people there.
- Instr. (to student): *TC, Vous aimez les cafes intellectuels?*
TC, you like intellectual cafés?
- PR: *pas de... activite... a mon cerveux... je suis ... morte!!!*
No activity . . . in my brain . . . I am . . . dead!!!
- Instr. (to student): *PR, j'aimerais bien aller aux Bahamas, mais on ne me paie pas assez comme instructeur de francais!*
PR, I would like to go to the Bahamas, but they don't pay me enough as a French teacher!
- JW: *Je pense que je vais aller a Paris en avion. Quand j'arriverai la, je vais aller a toutes les villes en Europe en train. Je descendrai dans des palaces. Je vais emporter mon mari et mes enfants.*
I think that I am going to go to Paris by plane. When I arrive there, I am going to all the cities in Europe by train. I will stay in palaces. I am going to take my husband and children along.
- Instr.: *Qui aime beaucoup faire du camping?*
Who likes to go camping?
- AH: *Je deteste le camping.*
I hate camping.
- YF : *AH, Pourquoi tu detest du camping?*
(student to student) AH, why do you hate camping?

This excerpt demonstrates the highly conversational, lighthearted aspect of real time synchronous LAN discourse. The advantages immediately apparent are that students are using the vocabulary and structures of the lesson to describe their own desires. Exchanges take place among students as well as with the instructor. The fact that there is no turn taking (i.e., waiting for others to respond to a given question) allows students to communicate at will and gives the instructor a wide spectrum of ideas to explore with them (*la Côte d'Ivoire, Caen, la Samaritaine, les cafés "intellectuels"*). Unanswered questions could be taken up at a later time, during a follow-up class session. In this particular study, however, there was no

follow-up session to the lab exercise.

As the semester progressed and students began the short story reader, their *InterChange* sessions became very interactive in nature. They seemed to prefer the reader over the textbook. Their messages showed a more positive response to the exercises in that there were: fewer off-topic comments; more humorous and more self-revealing messages; more questions, clarifications, and comments made to one another and to their instructor. Future studies into this type of open-ended computer-mediated activity should examine the effectiveness of certain tasks over others in such a student-centered environment.

The *Le Petit Nicolas* story, *Marie-Edwidge* (Gosciny and Sempé 1961, pp. 88–99), is about the reaction of Nicolas and his friends (all boys) to the presence of a little girl whom the mother has invited to a party. Students were asked first to describe the situation. Some of their responses follow. The reader will notice that no corrections have been made to the transcript. Once again, had there been a follow-up session to this practice, these errors could have been addressed.

Student responses are to the instructor's request that they comment on the text as the messages appeared on all participants' monitors:

- MB: *... la mere de Nicholas a servi le chocolat et les parts de gateau.*
Nicolas' mother served hot chocolate and pieces of cake.
- JW: *Alceste tout de suite alle dans la salle a manger parce qu'il veut voir ce qu'il y avait pour le gouter.*
Alceste immediately went to the dining room because he wants to see what there was for snacktime.
- HS: *Les copains de Nicolas n'aimaient pas Marie-Edwige parce qu'elle est une fille et ils ne jouent pas avec les filles.*
Nicolas' friends didn't like Marie-Edwige because she is a girl and they don't play with girls.
- MB: *Geoffroy s'est mis a manger son gateau a toute vitesse, parc qu'il est jaloux d'Alceste. Marie Edwige aime Alceste, puis Geoffroy est dans mauvais humor.*
Geoffroy began eating his cake with great speed, because he is jealous of Alceste. Marie-Edwidge likes Alcest, then Geoffroy is in a bad mood.
- RS: *Raoul voulait jouer au football parce que il est grande.*
Raoul wanted to play football because he is big.
- JW: *Marie-Edwige a besoin beaucoup de temps pour manger son gateau parce qu'elle mange par petits bouts et elle aussi offre les petits morceaux a sa poupee.*

Marie-Edwidge takes lots of time eating her cake because she is eating tiny bites and she also gives little bits to her doll.

AH: *C'était bizarre que Alceste offre les morceaux de brioche a la poupee.*
It was strange that Alceste gave some bits of his brioche to the doll.

L S: *Raoul voulait jouer au football pour montrer au marie-edwidge, et elle admirait. Mark: merci pour mon correction!*

Raoul wanted to play football to show Marie-Edwidge and she admired him. Mark: Thanks for my correction!

JW: *Geoffroy s'est mis a manger son gateau a toute vitesse parce qu'il veut manger plus vite qu'Alceste.*

Geoffroy began to eat his cake with great speed because he wants to eat faster than Alceste.

HS: *Alceste offrait des bouts de brioche a la poupee. Il est tres bizarre.*
Alceste gave bits of the brioche to the doll. He is very strange.

Instr: *C'est surtout un comportement bizarre parce que normalement Alceste n'offre a manger a personne, meme ses copains!*

It is especially strange behavior because normally Alceste doesn't share food with anybody, even his buddies!

LS: *je ne sais pas qui etait bizarre dans le comportement*
I don't know what was strange about that behavior

HS: *qu'est-ce que c'est, un comportement???????*
What does "behavior" mean???????

Instr: *Passons aux questions personnelles. A l'age de Nicolas, que faisiez-vous avec vos copains?*

Let's go on to some personal questions. When you were Nicolas' age, what did you do with your buddies?

MB: *Quand j'avais l'age de Nicholas, Je faisais beacoups de partie pour mes copains.*

When I was Nicolas' age, I had lots of parties for my friends.

Instr: *HS, comportement = behavior*

HS, comportment means behavior.

M B: *Que faisiez-vous pour impressionner vos copains, quand (to instr.) vous etiez petite?*

What did you do to impress your buddies, when you were little?

RS: *J'etais jouer au sport pour impressionner mes amis.*

I used to play sports to impress my friends.

TJS: *Tout le monde, Aviez-vous un ami imaginaire?*

Everybody, did you have an imaginary friend?

Instr: *Pour impressionner mes copains? Je crois que j'essayais de faire des choses "courageuses," comme grimper aux arbres tres hautes ou sauter dans l'eau des hauteurs qui entourait la piscine ou le lac.*

To impress my buddies? I think that I tried to do “brave” things, like climb very high in trees or jump into the water from great heights around the pool or lake.

JL: *Quand j'ai cinq ans, j'ai joué avec des petits garçons et des petites filles.*
When I was five years old, I played with little boys and girls.

MB: *J'avait un chien et un chat, mais un ami imaginaire, non, je ne l'ai jamais.*

I had a dog and a cat, but an imaginary friend, no, I never had one.

LS: *J'avais un garçon imaginaire qui appelle “philip le philipino”*
I had an imaginary boy who was called “Phillip, the Philipino”

Instr: *Qui d'autre avait un(e) ami(e) imaginaire quand ils étaient petits?*
Who else had an imaginary friend when they were small?

JL: *Quand j'AVAIS cinq ans . . . !*

TJ: When I WAS five years old . . . !

JW: *J'avais un petit chien imaginaire dans ma poche.*

I had a little imaginary dog in my pocket.

LS: *“Philip le philipino” habite dans ma placard et ses enfants habitent dans mes “shoes”.*

Phillip the Philipino lives in my closet and his children live in my shoes.

Instr.: *MB: J'avais (vous aviez), etc.*

MB: I had, you had, etc. [direct correction of verb forms]

T.J. S: *Je n'avais pas un ami imaginaire.*

I did not have an imaginary friend.

TS: *Je n'était pas “imaginative” avoir un ami imaginaire.*

I was not imaginative [enough] to have an imaginary friend.

The corrections made by the instructor in this case were directed to an individual student and simply stated. To explain vocabulary:

1. “HS, *comportement* = behavior.”
2. To correct a verbal expression he was focusing on, but not all incorrect use of verbs. In this case, he was working on correct use of the expression “avoir + age” in the imperfect tense: “TJ: *Quand j'AVAIS l'age de Nicolas...! L'age avec avoir.*” “Terry: *J'avais (vous aviez).*”

The quantity, candidness, and conversational quality of LAN discourse has been described in previous research (Beauvois 1994, 1996a, 1996b; Bump 1990; Kelm 1992; Kern 1995; Peterson 1989). These excerpts from the transcripts of French 212 demonstrate once again the positive elements documented previously, such as freedom of expression, full class participation,

openness and honesty of messages, etc. Although these aspects of LAN discourse are interesting to explore, as they are not the focus of this article, further discussion of them will not be included here.

Findings and Discussion

In February, mid-March, and May, all students in both the control and experimental groups took oral exams on the material studied in the lessons. These exams were held during the instructors' office hours and lasted approximately ten minutes per student per exam. The exams included questions about the stories and personal questions taken from the oral activities that the students had been doing in class (M/O and M/Q from FIA, and questions at the end of each chapter in *Le Petit Nicolas*). Grading was based on a 20-point system: five points for pronunciation, five points for correct grammar usage, five points for correct vocabulary usage, and five points for content (accuracy of response). The grading was subjectively based on the instructor's own evaluation of the student's performance in these areas. However, as the same instructors taught students in both groups, it is assumed for the pilot study that the rating was not done to favor any one student over another. In the final study, tests of inter-rater and intra-rater reliability will be calculated.

At the end of the semester, a t-test was done on the final averages of the three oral-exam scores of the experimental and the control groups. A significant difference in achievement was found in the group using the LAN (see Table 1 below for a breakdown of the data):

Group	N	Mean	StdDev	t	Prob
Control	46	84.15	12.63	2.20	0.03
LAN	37	89.19	8.15		

Key:

Control Group = 2 sections with only oral in-class discussion. A total number of 46 students.

IC Group = 2 sections of *InterChange* (the *Daedalus* LAN communication module) discussion in the lab. A total of 37 students.

The data show a significant difference at the 0.03 level in the scores of the experimental group over the control group. The finding of an overall superiority of the oral expression in the exams of the experimental group surprised the researchers and teachers, and gave rise to some speculation as to its cause. A discussion of contributing elements follows.

Linguistic Elements

The intense practice afforded by the LAN exercises is certainly an important contributing element to the high oral test scores of the students in the experimental group. The fact that students can and do participate at will, without having to wait on others for a turn at “speaking,” allows them to share all their ideas. The low-stress atmosphere encourages experimentation with the language and being able to write something in the second language is less inhibiting to most than having to say it. Reading vast amounts of input from classmates and from the instructor also contributes to more contact with the target language than is possible in the traditional classroom. In previous research using LAN exercises, students report that they perceive progress in all four skills of language learning: reading, writing, comprehension, and speaking (Beauvois and Elledge 1996). More input, or more intake (Lee and Van Patten 1994), leads to more proficiency in the target language.

Technological Elements

The physical aspects of the technology cannot be discounted in a discussion of the features of this exercise. The compelling character of the computer environment plays a part in the activity: the computer monitor itself (today’s students are accustomed to looking at screens), the rapidity of the transfer of information, and the commanding nature of the messages flashing on the screen—all demand attention. Students accustomed to other computer applications, such as games, generally have a positive attitude toward technology. Even among students not very familiar with the use of computers, there is still a certain interest in experimenting with this innovative environment. It is probable, however, that this powerful initial “novel effect” might disappear after a few sessions. As mentioned above, students seemed less amused by the technology as time went on and more adept at using the program as a tool toward expressing their ideas. This software is a generic package with no “bells and whistles” to capture student interest. It is the author’s opinion that the Hawthorne effect had little influence on the experimental group’s overall performance in this pilot study.

Social Elements

This computer-mediated communicative environment fits the social constructivist view of language learning as a collaborative effort resulting in the construction of knowledge. L. Vygotsky's (1978) powerful image of "scaffolding," the creation of support systems among speakers to facilitate language learning, applies very well to this process. Students, usually with the aid of the instructor, build such support structures for one another as they exchange ideas, answer each other's questions, and negotiate for meaning in their study of texts.

Network technology, instead of isolating users, connects them affectively and intellectually. In addition, by including those students sometimes marginalized in the traditional classroom by their race, gender, a handicap, or their own timidity, the pool of scholarship is augmented—the entire discourse community is enhanced by the addition of each student's participation. The instructor as well as the other class members often "discover" a member of the class on-line—one who might be too shy to speak up in class (Beauvois 1993). As students become adept participants in this LAN communication activity, they see themselves as members of a community who share a common language. A sense of belonging that can only be beneficial to the language acquisition process is established (Smith 1988). All of the above reasons and perhaps others constitute some response to the "Why?" behind the finding that writing leads to increased skill in speaking. Only more research will enlighten us further. As a result of this pilot study, we can say that there seems to be a link between the use of real time, synchronous, networked communication and achievement in oral skills at the beginning-intermediate level of the study of French.

Limitations

The limitations in this pilot study lie in the relatively small number of subjects (total = 83 students in four sections). Furthermore, the computer sections were limited to 20 students each throughout the semester, whereas the other sections were limited to 24 students. The smaller numbers in the LAN sections might have influenced student achievement. It is also true that as each class has its own character and atmosphere, two sections of a course are never absolutely identical in their classroom activities, even with the same teacher. In the final study, the researchers will study the rate and type of error made in the written and oral interlanguage to determine whether written

errors are carried over into the speech performance of the subjects. In addition, the tapes of the oral exams will be used to determine inter-rater and intra-rater reliability. Furthermore, the research will calculate the results on each of the three exams as separate dependent variables to see if students made progress over the course of the three exams as a result of the treatment.

Nevertheless, given the rigorous effort to control for variables in this pilot study, the outcome can be considered interesting as an initial investigation of the practical use of LAN communication as an effective means of improving student oral expression in a second language.

Future Research

Follow-up studies using larger populations and investigating achievement at different levels of language study would add to the data concerning the use of synchronous computer-mediated communication in language learning. Exploration of this new medium in the light of individual differences such as motivation, personality, learning styles, and so forth, would also provide important information to language professionals seeking to understand the language learning process. In addition, although only oral achievement was the focus of this study, the effects of so much on-line real time reading and writing practice on the acquisition of these skills should be measured in future studies.

Conclusion

This article has described the effects of computer-mediated communication on oral acquisition of a second language. As a pilot study, it uses limited numbers of students and does not pretend to generalize to all second language learners or all second languages. More studies on the transfer from written electronic communication to oral skill development are needed to confirm the findings of this study. However, as language professionals explore the possibilities of effective uses of technology in language teaching and learning, the results of this study cannot be ignored and might encourage us to explore the possibilities of including this relatively simple communication technique in our language curriculum.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank the instructor Annette Alix who collected the data in all four sections and whose dedication and help was fundamental to

this pilot study. Grateful thanks also go to the 83 students who participated in the study and to the two graduate student instructors: Michelle Le Gault and Ben Lee for their cooperation and goodwill. An appreciative *merci* goes to Dr. Dolly Young for her editorial comments and continuing support, as well as to our statistician Mike O'Neil at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. We are also most grateful to the Spencer Foundation Small Grant Program, whose funding of this research made this study possible.

Works Cited

- Beauvois, Margaret H. 1992a. Computer-Assisted Classroom Discussion in French Using Networked Computers. Ph.D Diss., The University of Texas at Austin.
- .1992b. "Computer-Assisted Discussion in the Foreign Language Classroom: Conversation in Slow Motion." *Foreign Language Annals* 25: 455–464.
- .1993. E-Talk: Empowering Students Through Electronic Discussion in the Foreign Language Classroom. *The Ram's Horn* VII: 41–47.
- .1994. E-Talk: Attitudes and Motivation in Computer-Assisted Classroom Discussion. *Computers and the Humanities* 28: 177–190.
- .1996a. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC): A Link to Improved Communication and Oral Skills in Second Language Learning. In *Technology-Enhanced Language Learning*, edited by Michael Bush, 165–184. *The ACTFL Volume on Technology*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook.
- . 1996b. "Conversations in Slow Motion Revisited." Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Beauvois, Margaret. H., and Jean Elledge. 1996. "Personality Types and Megabytes." *CALICO Journal* 13, 2, 3: 27–45.
- Butler, Wayne M. 1992. The Social Construction of Knowledge in an Electronic Discourse Community. Ph.D diss., The University of Texas at Austin.

- Bump, J. 1990. Radical Changes in Class Discussion Using Networked Computers. *Computers and the Humanities* 24: 49–65.
- Cononelos, T., and Maurizio Oliva. 1993. Using Computer Networks to Enhance Foreign Language/Culture Education. *Foreign Language Annals* 26: 525–534.
- Capretz, Pierre J. 1998. *French in Action: The Capretz Method*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment*. 1988. The Daedalus Group, Inc. 1106 Clayton Lane, Suite 248W, Austin, Texas 78723.
- Day, M. and T. Batson. 1995. The Network-Based Writing Classroom: The ENFI Idea. *Computer Mediated Communication and the On-line Classroom*, 2.
- Faigley, L. 1990. Subverting the Electronic Workbook: Teaching Writing Using Networked Computers. In *The Writing Teacher as Researcher: Essays in the Theory of Class-Based Writing*, edited by Daiker and Morenberg, 290–312. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.
- . 1992. *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Gosciny, René, and Jean-Jacques Sempé. 1961. *Les récrés du petit Nicolas*. Paris: Denoël.
- Hawisher, Gail, and Cynthia Selfe. 1989. *Critical Perspectives on Computers and Composition Instruction*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

- Kelm, O. R. 1992. The Use of Synchronous Computer Networks in Second Language Instruction: A Preliminary Report. *Foreign Language Annals* 25: 441–454.
- Kemp, F. 1993. “The Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment.” *Educators’ Tech Exchange*, Winter: 24–30.
- Kern, Richard G. 1995. Restructuring Classroom Interaction with Networked Computers: Effects on Quantity and Characteristics of Language Production. *Modern Language Journal* 79, 4: 457–476.
- Kinneavy, James L. 1991. I Won’t Teach Again without Computers. Invited paper presented at Conference on College Communication and Composition. Boston.
- Nicholas, M. A., and N. Toporski. 1993. Developing ‘the Critic’s Corner’: Computer-Assisted Language Learning for Upper-Level Russian Students. *Foreign Language Annals* 26: 469–478.
- Lee, James F., and Bill VanPatten, B. 1994. *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Pennington, Martha C. 1995. The Way of the Computer: Developing Skills in an Electronic Environment. In *Multimedia Language Teaching*, edited by S. Fotos. Logos.
- . 1996. *The Computer and the Non-Native Writer*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Peterson, N. 1989. The Sounds of Silence: Listening for Difference in the Computer-Networked Collaborative Writing Classroom. In *Proposal Abstracts from the 5th Computers and Writing Conference*, edited by T.W. Batson, 6–8. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University.
- Selfe, Cynthia, and Susan Hilligoss. 1994. *Literacy and Computers*. New York: Modern Language Association of America.

- Slatin, John. 1991. Is There a Class in this Text? In *Sociomedia: Multimedia, Hypermedia, and the Social Creation of Knowledge*, edited by Edward Barrett, 27–53. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Smith, Frank. 1988. *Joining the Literacy Club: Further Essays in Foreign Language Education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Vaché, Jean. 1994. Using Computers to Monitor Students' Performance in Essay Writing. *ASP: La Revue de l'Anglais Spécialité*, Université de Bordeaux II, June: 45–57.
- Vygotsky, Lev. 1978. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Process*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walters, J. B. 1994. Anticipated Ongoing Interaction Versus Channel Effects on Relational Communication in Computer-Mediated Interaction. *Human Communication Research* 4: 473–501.
- Warschauer, Mark. 1995. *E-Mail for English Teaching*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Appendix 1

Translation of Topics for Lesson 38

Answer all questions below:

Vocabulary exercises: Add three other responses to those already listed as examples.

1. What can one lose? (ex., 3,000F, one's time, a bet, your head, a war, a rugby game, one's parking place, a job, etc.)
2. What can one prepare [for]? (ex., an exam, a government takeover, a revolution, a show, chapter questions, homework, one's dinner, etc.)
3. What can one open? (ex., your ears, the window, a newspaper, a bottle of Muscat, a shop, your mouth [to speak French], one's book, the door, etc.)

Discussion questions:

4. What do you think about black and white movies?
5. Do you agree with Mireille that the only “real” cinema is silent movies?
6. Describe your favorite movie.
7. What is “real” cinema for you?

Appendix 2

Figure 2

Questions from Nicolas Story

French 212 Discussion on *C'est Papa qui décide*

Questions on *Le Petit Nicolas*:

1. What problems did the Bledurts have on vacation last year?
2. Summarize the drawbacks to the villa that Papa wants to rent in the South of France.
3. What is interesting to do at Bains-les-Mers according to Mama?
4. During the whole story Mama is knitting a sweater. Why? What is the significance of this sweater?
5. Is Mama clever? Does she attack Papa directly? What does she take advantage of to help convince Papa to go to Brittany?

Personal questions:

1. Where did you go for Spring Break? To the mountains? To the beach? Did you stay in a hotel or did you rent a house/cabin? Give a short description of what you did during this vacation.
2. Tell why you chose to go to the beach or mountains, to Knoxville or Nashville, etc. for your vacation.