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## **Learning Languages On-Line: The Role Of Interpersonal Relations**

### **ABSTRACT**

The paper reports on a pilot study examining how the communication patterns of second language learners may change in the course of one semester using a synchronous text-based Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) environment.

The pilot study aims to evaluate the role of CMC in encouraging students to participate in open-ended tasks by providing opportunities to engage in the negotiation of meaning. This study is part of a wider investigation exploring the relationship between social interactions, learners' perceived self-efficacy and the development of communicative competence. Preliminary results suggest that the time delay in composing replies and the development of a sense of community are important mechanisms leading to increased interaction and changes in participation patterns in terms of use of communicative strategies.

Several studies have stressed the importance of interactive participation and the negotiation of meaning within the Second Language Acquisition process. Language learning does not occur in isolation, it is linked to emotional and social phenomena, and interpersonal relations enhance learning when learners are engaged in supportive social interaction. This social interaction emerges through language, and in order to use language, students create their own identity within the identifiable culture of the classroom.

This paper examines the dynamics of interpersonal interactions and social processes of a cohort of forty-three university students, with an intermediate level of competence in Spanish. The students participated in five synchronous CMC discussions in small groups. The paper also considers how CMC can provide an additional context for the creation of a learning community by providing opportunities to engage in meaningful social interaction in a non-threatening and supportive environment.