RAPPORT-BUILDING THROUGH CALL IN TEACHING CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Technological advances have brought about the ever-increasing utilisation of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) media in the learning of a second language (L2). Computer-mediated communication, for example, provides a practical means for extending the learning of spoken language, a challenging process in tonal languages such as Chinese, beyond the realms of the classroom. In order to effectively improve spoken language competency, however, CALL applications must also reproduce the social interaction that lies at the heart of language learning and language use. This study draws on data obtained from the utilisation of CALL in the learning of L2 Chinese to explore whether this medium can be used to extend opportunities for rapport-building in language teaching beyond the face-to-face interaction of the classroom. Rapport's importance lies in its potential to enhance learning, motivate learners, and reduce learner anxiety. To date, CALL's potential in relation to this facet of social interaction remains a neglected area of research. The results of this exploratory study suggest that CALL may help foster learner-teacher rapport and that scaffolding, such as strategically composing rapport-fostering questions in sound-files, is conducive to this outcome. The study provides an instruction model for this application of CALL.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the computer in the second language-learning classroom continues to expand in tandem with advances in and increased access to technologies. These technologies have allowed language instructors to provide what could previously only be classroom activities in new and relevant formats and contexts, as well as enabling the realisation of pedagogical practices and goals not readily achieved beforehand. One of the latter benefits of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technologies, specifically computer-mediated communication, has been the extension of the language learning experience beyond the confines of the classroom. Increased flexibility, reduced negative affect (compared to face-to-face interaction), and the ability to cater to differing learning styles have seen the incorporation of CALL into the language learning curriculum as "generally well received by learners and perceived as providing positive learning outcomes" (Ramsay, 2003, p. 17).

The above utilitarian benefits of CALL are well documented, as are those relating to its broader potential in the social-interactive realm (Chester & Gwynne, 1998; Malaga, 2000; McCormack & Jones, 1998; McKenzie & Murphy, 2000; Ramsay, 2003; Tetiwat & Igbaria, 2000; Whittle, Dal Pozzo, & Gregory, 2000). Both Bax (2003) and Warschauer (2000) for example, after having reviewed the history of CALL, agree that CALL has reached an era where it promotes interactive learning, namely "social interaction" (Warschauer, p. 1) or "genuine communication" (Bax, p. 23) in the target language. Such studies have in the main focussed on CALL's contribution to the development of "learning communities," interactive spaces extending beyond the classroom where learners "work together toward their common goals … share information in the pursuit of a meaningful, consequential task … [and reflect] on the knowledge constructed and the processes used to construct it by the learners" (Daniels & Brooks, 1999, p. 84). Less attention, however, has been given to examining another facet of the social-interactive realm that

nevertheless remains of equal consequence to the CALL experience: the phenomenon of learner-teacher rapport.

This study seeks to address the gap in research in this area. It investigates the means and extent to which the use of CALL in a tertiary Chinese language spoken-stream course contributes to the development of learner-teacher rapport, an essential element of social interaction in pedagogical contexts. In so doing, the study will present an instruction model for maximising the potential for realising this phenomenon in the language-learning environment.

Why Do Language Teachers Need to Build Up Rapport With Learners?

At the core of social interaction is the phenomenon of rapport. Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal (1990) have observed that rapport is composed of "a dynamic structure of interrelating components that have affective and behavioural implications" (p. 285), namely "mutual attentiveness," "positivity," and "coordination" (p. 285). They emphasise that "rapport exists only in interaction" and "the presence of a high degree of rapport between individuals has been thought to create powerful interpersonal influence and responsiveness" (p. 286).

Indeed, the importance of rapport has long been recognized across all walks of life: "Clinicians try to develop *it* [italics added throughout quote] with patients, sales personnel try to use *it* to make a deal, and new acquaintances try to predict from *it* the future of a relationship with one another" (Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990, p. 285). Moreover, "Hypnotists work to invoke *it* [italics added throughout quote], teachers and trainers strive to maintain *it*, some politicians and public speakers have the knack for creating *it*, and physicians are frequently chastised for not being concerned with *it*" (LaFrance, 1990, p. 318). Thus, rapport can be considered as extremely important in classroom management given that, as Cothran and Ennis (1997) have commented, "The interactive nature of the teaching process is built on a social relationship between teacher and students" (p. 542).

Ehrman (1998) has quoted a number of learners' comments from evaluations of language training programs to emphasise the importance of the role of learner-teacher rapport in language learning. Although learners do mention well-designed textbooks and a suitable curriculum as positive forces, their true enthusiasm is reserved for their teachers and the relationships the teacher establishes with them. As Ehrman has concluded,

> It is a rare end-of-training program evaluation that does not mention the teachers such as those already described. Comments such as these suggest that students recognize the contribution of the *teachers' relationship with them* [italics added] to their success in learning. (pp. 93-94)

In sum, building up rapport with learners is essential for a teacher to teach successfully for the following reasons:

(1) Rapport enhances learning: Teachers can help make learning more enjoyable by consciously building up rapport with learners. It is common knowledge that human beings are driven by emotional factors in whatever they do. Learners of language are no exception in being driven by emotional factors in their learning. It is thus worthwhile for teachers to make a special effort in developing rapport with their learners. The more successful a teacher is in developing a rapport with learners, the more likely it is that they will enjoy the class and put more effort into the course being taught (Ehrman, 1998).

(2) Rapport helps motivate learners: Learner motivation is crucial to learning. Learners have various motivations in their learning and learner-teacher rapport is one of them. A link is strongly suggested by Gardner and his colleagues (Gardner, 1985, 1988; Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gardner & Smythe, 1975) between motivation and second language (L2) learning. They believe that "attitudes and integrativeness," being important motivational aspects in L2 learning, "determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners" (Yu, 2002, p. 21). Although facets of a learner's

motivation are beyond a teacher's control, there is still much that a teacher can do to influence the motivation of his or her students. Developing rapport with learners is an effective measure of motivating them, which is supported by Dörnyei's (1994) L2 motivation model. In this model, learner-teacher rapport, namely the "Affiliative Drive" (p. 280) is one of the important motivation components.

(3)   Rapport reduces learners' anxiety: Anxiety contributes to an affective filter, according to Krashen (1982), which makes the individual unreceptive to language input; thus, the learner fails to internalise the available target language messages and language acquisition does not progress smoothly. Price's (1991) study shows that instructors play a significant role in the amount of anxiety each learner experiences in their classes. In answering the question "How can language learning be made less stressful" (p. 106), Price (1991) offers very concrete suggestions, among which: "the most frequent observation made by these subjects was that they would feel more comfortable if the instructor were more like a friend helping them to learn and less like an authority figure making them perform" (p. 107).

Rapport building, therefore, lies at the centre of good teaching practice and successful language learning. Can this phenomenon be developed in the CALL environment? Some researchers have expressed concern that an overemphasis on technology can "dehumanise" learning, resulting in a breakdown in the learner-teacher relationship: "The possibility that the use of computers may lead to dehumanisation continues to trouble critics of computers in schools" (Nissenbaum & Walker, 1998, p. 244). In the following, we will explore the issue of rapport-building in relation to tertiary learners of spoken Chinese, evaluating the means and the extent to which CALL can be used to extend opportunities for rapport-building in language teaching beyond the face-to-face interaction of the classroom.

How Did We Make Use of Sound-Files and E-mail in Teaching Spoken Chinese?

In the second semester of 2003 computer-mediated sound-file exercises were incorporated as part of the curriculum for Spoken Chinese IIB (CHIN2120), taught by the authors at The University of Queensland, Australia. Every week for 10 weeks a sound-file question based on the theme of the weekly lesson was composed, recorded, and attached as a sound-file to a posting on the discussion board of the course's Web site on WebCT, an online platform used by The University of Queensland. Learners were required to listen to the sound-file question and reply with their own attached sound-file by the deadline stated in the discussion posting's text box. An instructor (one of the authors) listened to the learner sound-file replies each week and provided individual feedback through e-mail in a timely manner. The WebCT discussion board maintained a permanent, accessible record, which could be used to evaluate a learner's progress throughout the semester. A sample posting follows:

Subject W1 Shi...de

Reply	Quote	Download

Message no. 20 Posted by Guy Malcolm RAMSAY (CHIN2120S_5360STx) on Mon Aug 04, 2003 11:37
Hi Everyone,
Please listen to the question posed in the attached
sound file. Create your own sound file with your answer
in Chinese (25 seconds duration maximum). Make sure you
use the "shi...de" (是...的) structure in your answer.

You must post your sound file to WebCT before 5.00pm on
Friday 15th August 2003. (You will be 'locked out'
after this time and so unable to post!)
I am looking forward to hearing from you :)
Wendy

Previous Message	Next Message

Apart from sound file responses and e-mail exchanges learners had two hours of lectures and a two-hour tutorial every week for this course. The assessment included four components: sound-file exercise 15% (weekly); listening exam 30% (week 7); speaking exam 30% (exam period); and video project 25% (week 12). The video project involved learners live-dubbing a segment from a television or cable program, or a video from the library.

The CHIN2120 learners had completed three semesters of Chinese language instruction at the university, where they had started as "zero-beginners." They had not been taught Chinese by the CHIN2120 instructors previously. The learner cohort was extremely diverse. Reflecting the contemporary Australian tertiary community demographic, a broad range of ethnicity, English language competency, computer literacy, ages and gender were represented. While examination of the impact of such diversity is beyond the scope of this study, Ramsay (in press) explores how learner cultural background influences the learner experience of computer-mediated discussions.

DATA SOURCES FOR THE STUDY

Data for this study was drawn from four sources:

(1) learner sound-file responses;

(2) learner reflections recorded on sound-file 'monitor sheets' during the course;

(3) learner e-mail messages to the course instructor during the course; and

(4) learner responses to an e-mail interview conducted after completion of the course.

Learner Sound-File Responses

Among the 10 sound-file questions posted during the semester on the course WebCT discussion board, three categories of questions were posed: *neutral, mildly rapport-fostering,* and *strongly rapport-fostering.*

Neutral questions were designed to seek information only from the learners. The answers to these questions were unlikely to involve the instructor at all. For example, the first week's question *Ni shang ge xingqisi shi zenme lai daxue de*? (How did you come to University last Thursday?) is deemed a neutral question, where the focus remains on the information from the learner.

Mildly rapport-fostering questions were designed to seek both information and emotional responses such as like/dislike or willingness/reluctance. The answers to these questions were likely to involve the instructor indirectly, for example, week 2's question *Ni xihuan zuofan ma? Ni zuofan zuo de zenmeyang*? (Do you like cooking? How well can you cook?). The potential answers to the question such as "Yes, I like cooking and I can cook very well" were likely to impress the instructor. Week 7's question *Zhe xueqi yijing dao di shi zhou le, kuai yao jieshu le. Xia xueqi ni hai xuan Hanyu ke ma?* (This week is already the tenth[1] week of the semester, which will end soon. Will you continue studying Chinese next semester?) involved the instructor indirectly as well. A positive answer, "Yes, I would like to continue studying Chinese" might imply that the instructor's teaching was good or that the learner is seeking to meet the instructor's expectation. A negative answer, "I am not going to continue studying Chinese" might imply that the instructor's teaching was not helpful and would likely be in conflict with the instructor's expectation. In short, this category of questions, apart from seeking information, had the potential to involve the instructor to a certain degree, though indirectly.

Strongly rapport-fostering questions were designed to seek both information and comments about the instructor. The potential answers to these questions could not avoid commenting on the instructor directly. For example, in order to answer week 6's question *Shang zhousi ni lai shangke le ma? Wo jiang de yufa ni tingdong le ma?* (Did you come to class last Thursday? Did you understand the grammar I

explained in class?), learners had to comment on the instructor's teaching of grammar on that particular day. In order to answer week 8's question *Shang ge xingqi wo diu le qianbao, zhe ge xingqi wo you diu le yi ben shu, ni shuo wo gai zenme ban?* (I lost my purse last week and I have lost a book again this week. What do you think I should do?), learners could not avoid commenting on the instructor's behaviour and giving advice to her. These questions are deemed strongly rapport-fostering questions since their focus is interpersonal interaction through the seeking and proffering of comments and advice.

Table 1 shows the 10 questions in three categories. Note that all the learner responses for each of the 10 questions were transcribed into romanised Chinese (*Hanyu Pinyin*) and then translated into English. Representative excerpts of learner responses from Weeks 5, 8, and 9, namely one question from each category, are provided in Appendix A.

Table 1. Three Types of Sound-File Questions

Neutral	**Mildly rapport-fostering**	**Strongly rapport-fostering**
W1: *Shang ge xingqisi ni shi zenme lai daxue de*? (Use "*shi…de* 是的" structure) How did you come to University last Thursday? W3: *Ni jintian chuan zhe shenme yanse de yifu?* (Use the verbs "*chuan* 穿and *dai*戴", plus the adverb "*hai* 还") What colour of clothes are you wearing today? W4: *Ni shuo Zhongwen shuo de zenmeyang*? (Use "*gen …yiyang* 跟…一样" or "*meiyou...没有…*") How well can you speak Chinese?[2] W5: *Ni xuexi Hanyu duochang shijian le*? (Use "verb + time + *le*了") How long have you been learning Chinese?	W2: *Ni xihuan zuofan ma*? *Ni zuofan zuo de zenmeyang*? (Use "verb + object + verb + *de* 得") Do you like cooking? How well can you cook? W7: *Zhe xueqi yijing dao di shi zhou le, kuai yao jieshu le. Xia xueqi ni hai xuan Hanyu ke ma*? (Use "*jiu* 就" or "*hai* 还") This week is already the tenth week of the semester, which will end soon. Will you continue studying Chinese next semester? W9: *Ni xihuan zuo Video Project ma*? *Weishenme*? (Use "*yinwei* 因为") Do you like conducting the Video Project? Why?	W6: *Shang zhousi ni lai shangke le ma*? *Wo jiang de yufa ni tingdong le ma*? (Use "*tingdong le* 听懂了or *tingbudong*听不懂") Did you come to class last Thursday? Did you understand the grammar I explained in class? W8: *Shang ge xingqi wo diu le qianbao, zhe ge xingqi wo you diu le yi ben shu, ni shuo wo gai zenme ban*? (Use "*ba* 把" structure) I lost my purse last week and I have lost a book again this week. What do you think I should do? W10: Best wishes from Wendy: *Ni hao, zhe xingqi women jiu ba zhe ge xueqi de ke shangwan le, xia ge xingqi meiyou ke le. Wo zhu ni tiantian kuai le, yong bu bei shang! Ni you shijian de shihou gei wo xie youjian, ba ni de hao xiaoxi gaosu wo hao ma?* (Use "*zhu ni* 祝你…") Hi, this week we have finished all the lessons for this semester. We won't have class any more from next week. I wish you every happiness for the future! Could you please e-mail me your good news when you have time?

Learner Reflections Recorded on Sound-File "Monitor Sheets"

Sound-file monitor sheets were designed to record learner reflections each week on the recording of the sound-files. This was undertaken because we were concerned about learner acceptance of this teaching practice since it was the first time that it had been employed in the course curriculum. Learners were asked to note how they felt when they recorded their sound-file replies and what they thought the advantages and disadvantages were in using sound-files in this way. A sample of the monitor sheet is provided in Appendix B of this paper.

Learner E-Mail Messages to the Course Instructor

A course instructor (one of the authors) listened to the learners' sound-file replies carefully and provided them with individual feedback via the WebCT e-mail tool every week. In the feedback, the instructor took the opportunity to encourage them individually and usually picked out one or two errors from their sound-file replies for them to improve on. Learners could in turn seek further clarification by replying to the e-mail. When posting their last sound-file during the last week of semester, many learners of their own accord e-mailed comments to the instructor, which serves as complementary data.

Learner Responses to an E-Mail Interview Conducted After Completion of the Course

After the course, the instructor conducted an e-mail interview with learners specifically requesting interviewees to comment on the extent to which they agreed with the statement: "Sound files help develop learner-teacher rapport." Quotes from their e-mail interview responses serve as the final source of data for the study.

Evidence of rapport-building drawn from these four sources of data are collated and discussed below.

RAPPORT-BUILDING THROUGH CALL

Sound-File Responses to the Three Types of Questions: Strongly Rapport-Fostering, Mildly Rapport-Fostering, and Neutral

Chinese is a tonal language and smooth communication relies crucially on correct pronunciation of tones, which frequently poses difficulties for native English-speaking learners. At the end of semester, the instructors noted that learners' pronunciation and tones in using the target language had improved considerably. Although this research design does not allow us to gauge the exact contribution of sound-file exercises to learners' improvement, the authors believe, based on past experience where sound-file exercises were not employed, that the sound-file exercises played an important role. Both the learners and the instructor also found that the communication between them through this medium was enjoyable and profitable. For example, whenever learners posted their sound-file replies, they frequently took the opportunity to greet the instructor. Likewise, the instructor often encouraged learners when she gave them feedback on their sound-file replies.

The learner sound-file data also demonstrated differing learner responses to the strongly rapport-fostering, mildly rapport-fostering, and neutral questions. The responses to questions posted on Weeks 5, 8, and 9 (one question from each category) are taken as examples. Apart from providing information according to questions asked, learners also include comments that indicate rapport. These rapport expressions have been categorised according to the deemed communicative intent of the responses: address instructor, show sympathy, try to comfort, offer help, "scold" instructor, and engage instructor. Table 2 presents detailed examples of these categories in expressing rapport.

Table 2. Comparison of Rapport Expressions Elicited Across Strongly Rapport-Fostering, Mildly Rapport-Fostering, and Neutral Questions

	Strongly rapport-fostering (W8)	**Mildly rapport-fostering (W9)**	**Neutral (W5)**
Reply items	26	24	27
Word count	1,615 words	1,170 words	897 words
Address instructor	15: Hello, Teacher … (6)* Hello … (5) Wendy … (3) Teacher ...	4: Hello, Teacher … (3) Hello, Wendy	0
Show sympathy	5: I feel sorry for you. What a shame! I often forget my purse as well. I often lose my purse too. I lost my purse last week.		0
Try to comfort	12: No worries. (3) Don't worry too much! (2) Don't worry! Don't cry! Don't feel too bad! Please take it easy! It doesn't matter! That's all right! Not a big deal!		0
Offer help	7: I'll help you … (2) You can put your purse and book in my bag. I give you some money, … We can go there together … We can ask … I have found your purse and the book you lost.		0
"Scold" instructor	4: Don't carry important things with you! You need a new brain! You are a bit absent-minded, aren't you? How careless you are!		0
Engage instructor		4: Do you agree? You are right. Do you like my comedy? Thanks for offer[ing] this opportunity.	0

*The number in brackets indicates where more than one person used this expression.

As shown from Table 2, in addition to providing information in answering the strongly rapport-fostering question from week 8, learners also included other comments and advice indicating rapport. Among the 26 replies, 15 people addressed the instructor; 5 people showed sympathy; 12 people tried to comfort the instructor; 7 people personally offered help; and 4 people scolded the instructor for her carelessness. In answering the mildly rapport-fostering question from week 9, among the 24 replies, only 4 learners addressed the instructor, with 4 people seeking to engage the instructor. In contrast, none of these categories of comments were evident in the replies to the neutral question from week 5. This demonstrates how sound-file exercises can be used in language teaching to extend opportunities for rapport-building beyond the face-to-face interactions of the classroom. It also suggests that asking strongly rapport-fostering questions has more potential for rapport-building, especially for eliciting the expression of rapport. Sometimes rapport does exist between teachers and their students, however, they might not find an opportunity to express it. Actual expression of rapport is very important for rapport-building since rapport can be seen, felt, and strengthened through its expression.

Learner Sound-File Monitor Sheet Reflections

Of the 28 students enrolled in the course, 12 completed and returned the sound-file monitor sheets collected at the end of semester. The monitor sheet was given to learners during the first week when they recorded their sound-file. They were requested on a voluntary basis to record how they felt each time they posted their sound-file. It was explicitly stated that this was not compulsory, which could partly account for the low return rate (12/28) of the monitor sheet. It seemingly required great effort and patience to keep this record until the end of semester as quite a number of learners could not find their monitor sheets when prompted to hand them in.

On the whole, learners expressed some difficulty during the first one to two weeks in recording and posting their sound-file replies. From week 3 onwards, learners expressed more ease in performing the task.

As discussed above, learners responded differently to the three categories of questions posed, exemplified by the strongly rapport-fostering question from week 8, mildly rapport-fostering question from week 9, and the neutral question from week 5. The learner reflections from these three weeks, as recorded on their monitor sheets, are compared in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Learners' Reflections From Weeks 5, 8, and 9**

Week 5	Week 8	Week 9
1. Easy, I got used to doing it.	1. Easy, I got used to doing it.	1. Easy, I got used to doing it.
2. I want to be more familiar with the structure with *jiu*	2. **It is interesting that I would respond in my own way to teacher.**	2. This answer could be really creative.
3. Reinforcement	3. Interesting, involved not only language ability but also creative thinking.	3. (blank)
4. Useful structure, so I was glad to make a recording.	4. Very confusing, so **very keen to get feedback. Nice challenge.**	4. The question was easy.
5. Good consolidation of the use of LE.	5. Was unsure of my answer at first, but **the feedback helped heaps!**	5. **Wow,** what an intense week (a sound file and a presentation) though both were good practice!
6. Easy	6. Hard!	6. Pretty easy.
7. Very simple.	7. Didn't know what to say in replying at the beginning.	7. Simple
8. I feel confident in recording answers because I am getting good feedback. Good to practice the grammar use learnt.	8. **You made me feel sorry**	8. Good!
9. This week's was fine. It's also really good listening to		9. I almost forget to do it this week, luckily I did it.
		10. I think sound file is so practical.
		11. I was with my friends, so it

my classmates' entries. 10. I wanted to have handout on "how to use sound file". 11. The answer is simple, but paying attention to pronunciation needs some effort. Now I am able to make a sound. 12. Tried to make my answer clear, and hope my tones are ok!	**for you Wendy, very good acting!** I feel confident about posting my answers. 9. **Wendy made me feel very sorry for her this week ---- she is a very good actor!** It was good to practice using the ba structure. 10. I have got used to it now. 11. Now I don't care about others in the lab. I just did it again and again. 12. **Poor Wendy, I really feel like helping her this week**.	is ok to try many times. 12. Felt confident in providing my answer.

**Each number indicates a particular learner.

The reflections are records of learners' feelings each week about the sound-file exercises as a whole. It includes comments on the sound-file questions and answers, e-mail exchanges between the instructor and the learners, any problems encountered, and so forth. As shown from Table 3, their reflections were very much influenced by the question posed during that week.

Monitor sheet entries in week 8, when a strongly rapport-fostering question was asked, show higher incidence of emotive comments indicative of learner-teacher rapport-building (highlighted in **bold**). This demonstrates again that sound-file exercises can be used in language teaching to extend opportunities for rapport-building beyond the face-to-face interactions of the classroom. It also suggests that asking strongly rapport-fostering questions has more potential for rapport-building, especially for eliciting the expression of rapport. The monitor sheet data, therefore, lends support to the findings drawn from the weekly postings.

Learner E-Mail Messages

Unsolicited learner e-mail messages, mostly sent toward the end of the semester, also contained comments indicative of rapport, as follows:

> Thank you for a wonderful semester!

> Dear Wendy, I am so sad I won't be having anymore classes with you! Just let you know that you're a great tutor and made class really interesting.

> Thank you for your great teaching this semester.

> Thanks for being a great teacher this semester.

> Thank you for this semester! I learned a lot from you.

> Thank you very much for your help! I really had a good time in your class!

In addition to sound-file responses, the e-mail exchanges between the instructor and the learners also played an important role in rapport-building. For 10 weeks, the instructor listened carefully to each of the learners' sound-file replies and wrote them encouraging individual feedback each week via e-mail. Learners normally greeted the instructor every week while posting their sound-file. However, with week 10's sound-file replies, a number of learners sent the instructor the above complimentary comments instead of the weekly greetings. That these comments are proffered via e-mail rather than verbally is of particular note here. These learner e-mail messages demonstrate that opportunities for rapport-building and its expression are extended by CALL.

E-Mail Interview Responses

The CHIN2120 course was run between July and November 2003. An e-mail interview was conducted on 6 May 2004. The instructor e-mailed all the twenty-eight learners who had enrolled in this course, but only fifteen e-mails were received and the rest bounced back. Most likely the bounced e-mail addresses were no longer available to those learners, perhaps due to their graduation.

Out of 15 e-mail interviews successfully sent out, 12 responses were obtained to the questions, "We are to decide whether we are going to use sound-files for the students next semester; what is your opinion?" and "If I say sound-files help develop tutor-student rapport, would you agree with me?" Table 4 shows the 12 responses:

Table 4. E-mail Interview Responses

Learner	Rapport Fostered by...	Response***
1	sound-files	I **agree** that the sound files are a **good way** to build rapport and that they are a **good tool** to practice speaking.
2	sound-files	About the sound file, I **agree** that it certainly did **facilitate** the relationship between tutor and student. And I do believe that it should be incorporated into the course that you are about to begin next semester. I think that not only did you get to know us but we got to know you too and knowing you on a friendly level made us less afraid to approach you when we had questions.
3	sound-files	I really think my experience in UQ last year was really great and memorable in my life, especially Chinese class with you!! I got great motivation from that class, which makes me keep studying till now in Japan. So, I want to thank you for that great class. And if I say something about the sound file, I think it really **contributes to great communication** in the class. I'm sure students including international students like me will enjoy the class. So, hope you can make greater class this year as well.
4	sound-files	I really liked your lessons. I want to go back to AUS and study at UQ. Sound File was **excellent way** of improving our Chinese pronunciation and recognize our level. definitely. we all became closer. I strongly recommend to use Sound File system for this year too.
5	sound-files	In response to your question, yes I would say that the sound files **helped** develop student/tutor rapport, but possibly more so from the teachers' perspective than that of the student. Personally i thought the feedback on the soundfiles each week was **great**.
6	sound-files personality	I think that the sound file was **brilliant**! I enjoyed to make it last semester, and for sure, it helped me to feel being touch with you. However, it was not only the sound file to build up a good relationship with you and students. It was your personality.
7	personality	In response to your question I thought the sound files were annoying but **useful** and I disagree with your statement that sound files help develop tutor-students rapport, it is your personality that helps develop tutor-students rapport. I've noticed that if you are outgoing and are involved with your students then it occurs if you are quiet and just get the lesson done and nothing else then that's exactly what you get --- nothing else. So I don't agree with your statement, it wasn't the sound file that developed it, it was you.
8	no indication	Yes, I think the sound files were very **useful** because they really encouraged us to use the new words that we learnt, and to practice our sentence structure and

		tones. I think you should definitely keep on doing sound files for next years second year students.
9	no indication	Yes, the sound file was **good** as you gave us feedback on our pronunciation and grammar that we wouldn't have received otherwise, so that was good.
10	no indication	The sound file was a **great way** for you to assess our grasp on a certain sentence structure and enable you to hear our tones; I felt it was an important part of the course.
11	no indication	I **liked** the sound file last semester because every week you gave us comments about the tones and the sentence structures … …
12	no indication	I think the sound files were **definitely a good idea and worked well**. As a weekly task it really helped expand my vocabulary and helped even more so with sentence structures.

**These responses were quoted directly from the replying e-mail messages. Emphasis was added by the authors.

Based on the responses in Table 4, it appears that all 12 respondents think positively of employing sound-file exercises (as indicated by the key words in **bold**) although two responses (5 and 7) could arguably be considered reserved. Six respondents supported the statement that "sound-files help develop tutor-student rapport," with two noting the contributing role of the instructor's personality. Thus, the solicited data adds weight to the earlier findings, namely, that CALL can be used as a means in language teaching to extend opportunities for rapport-building beyond the face-to-face interactions of classroom, at least for many learners. In addition, the comparatively high response rate (12/15) to our e-interview itself indicates an enduring rapport between our past students and ourselves, to which CALL may conceivably had contributed to.

CONCLUSIONS

Building on this exploratory study, the potential for future research is vast. Most pressing is a controlled study that compares cohorts of learners who undertake the CALL exercise (as an adjunct to face-to-face instruction) with those who do not. This would control for the contribution of instructor personality to perceived rapport outcomes, allowing more solid conclusions to be drawn as to the actual extent of benefit provided by CALL. A controlled, diachronic study would also be of use in evaluating the effect of the 'time leading to acquaintance' factor. Such a study would seek to compare learner expression of rapport in response to rapport-fostering questions posed at the beginning of the semester with that in response to questions posed in the latter weeks. This would lead to greater strength of claim in relation to CALL's potential for rapport-building over time.

There is also a need to determine whether learner adjustment to the mechanics of the technology in the early weeks has any bearing on expression of rapport. Such a study would need to compare data obtained from a learner cohort with whom the instructors have already developed rapport, for example, learners whom the instructors have taught previously. The study could compare rapport data obtained from the previous teaching encounter, where CALL was not utilised, with data obtained during the initial period of the CALL exercise, in order to determine whether the expression of rapport, as opposed to the already established rapport itself, drops while the learners' attention is centred on the mechanics of the technology rather than the learner-teacher interaction.

Finally, a more nuanced study of the learner cohort is also indicated. Park (1997), for example, has found differences in learning style preferences of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, and Anglo-American learners in American settings, noting the "great implications" that cultural diversity has "for teachers, teaching educators, and curriculum development" (p. 75). Such diversity clearly needs to be explored in the CALL environment as well. Ramsay (in press), for example, has taken steps toward addressing the issue of cultural scripts by examining the extent to which the phenomenon "face," a seminal attribute of

Confucian-heritage cultures, influences the learner experience of computer-mediated discussions undertaken as part of an Australian university curriculum. Other learner variables requiring further study include educational background (e.g., duration of education in a cultural setting), gender, age, academic achievement level, personality type, and computer literacy and confidence. Studies will need to explicate carefully the extent to which each of these variables impact in the social-interactive realm.

In sum, the findings of this exploratory study suggest that the social-interactive benefits of CALL can extend opportunities for fostering learner-teacher rapport, an important element in successful pedagogical practice, beyond the face-to-face interactions of the language learning classroom. In so doing, the study has proposed an instructional model for maximising the potential for fostering rapport in the CALL environment.

The study concludes that sound-file responses and e-mail exchanges are seen as an effective CALL technique suitable for the Chinese language classroom. They are likely to contribute to the building of learner-teacher rapport, especially through asking rapport-fostering questions. In addition, the sound-file practice provides learners with an opportunity to listen to the target language from an authentic and familiar voice and to use the target language to respond to the question composed in the sound-file, which, together with extending opportunities for rapport-building, enhance learning, motivate students, and reduce learner anxiety in the L2 acquisition process.

The authors wish to emphasise that the successful employment of CALL requires scaffolding from the instructor. Most important for the CALL techniques utilised in this study are the following five scaffolding measures: appropriate weighting in assessment; a friendly and measured approach to learners' handling of the sound-file; strategic composition of rapport-fostering questions; considered and timely feedback on learner sound-file replies; and limiting the sound-file to a certain length.

(1) Appropriate weighting in assessment: The sound-file e-discussions accounted for 15% of the final grade in our CHIN2120 course. We felt that this percentage was appropriate since it was the first time for the learners to use the medium. They needed practice to get used to listening to the sound-files, responding and recording their own sound-file and posting it on the discussion board. A comparatively smaller percentage of the final grade helped relieve the anxiety that may have emerged due to the newness of the medium.

(2) A friendly and measured approach to learners' handling of the sound-file: Learners were asked to practice for the first week and no credit was counted. In the second week, credit was given to learners who tried responding to the instructor's sound-file, regardless of their success in recording and posting their sound-files. From the third week onwards, successful posting was the criteria for receiving credit.

(3) Strategic composition of rapport-fostering questions: Rapport-fostering questions create further potential for involving learners more immediately and emotionally. They are important rapport-building devices in the employment of sound-files and are considered as a key to the success of this teaching technique.

(4) Considered and timely feedback on learner sound-file replies: In the feedback, keeping a balance of encouragement and error correction is important. Encouragement in the feedback is necessary for the learners to develop confidence and error correction is a specific requirement for them to improve. Learners tend to rely on teachers' positive evaluations to gain a sense of achievement and esteem, which also helps to motivate learners to learn more actively and effectively.

(5) Limiting the sound-file to a certain length: We limited the sound-file length to 25 seconds in our CHIN2120 course, which we found fairly appropriate for our group. Teachers who plan to make use of sound-file exercises should be aware that the longer the sound-file, the larger the computer memory required, the more work created for the instructor and the greater the difficulty for the

learners. An optimal balance needs to be found to benefit learners while not overworking them and their instructors.

NOTES

1. To provide preparation and training so that the use of the technology became transparent to the learners, the summative sound-file exercises did not start until week 2 of semester. We did not have sound-files for another two weeks due to mid-semester exams and mid-semester break.

2. Although the two questions in week 4 and week 2 seemingly belong to one category, we do have our reasons for them to be classified into "neutral" and "mildly rapport-fostering" respectively. "How well can you speak Chinese" is classified as "neutral" for two reasons. One is that the instructor knew the learners' Chinese level and the seeking of responses mainly is to provide a chance for the learners to practice their language. The other is that learners are required to use "*gen ...yiyang* 跟…一样" or "*meiyou…*没有…" to answer the question asked. Therefore, learners' responses were in a way expected. In other words, there was no new information in the responses to "impress" the instructor. While in the responses to "How well can you cook", there was new information that could potentially "impress" the instructor.

APPENDIX A
Representative Excerpts of Learner Responses From Weeks 5, 8, and 9
(Note: The underlined parts indicate an error either in pronunciation or structure and the message in brackets in bold that follows indicates the error type or an option to replace the underlined part. The pinyin added in bold without brackets indicates an incorrect omission that needs to be included there.)

Week 5 Question: *Ni xuexi Hanyu duochang shijian le?* [How long have you been learning Chinese?] Please use "verb + time + LE" to answer my question.

S16. *Wo xuexi le er (**liang**) nian le.*
      I have been learning Chinese for two years.

S17. *Wo xue Hanyu xue le liang (**tone 3 instead of 2**) nian le.*
      I have been learning Chinese for two years.

S18. *Wo xue Hanyu xue le yi nian duo le.*
      I have been learning Chinese for more than one year.

S19. *Wo xue Hanyu xue (**tone 2 instead of 1**) le dagai liang nian le.*
      I have been learning Chinese for about two years.

S20. *Wo xue Hanyu, cong ba nianji qi, dao xianzai xue le liu nian le.*
      I have been learning Chinese for six years since I started in grade eight.

Week 8 Question: *Shang ge xingqi wo diu le qianbao, zhe ge xingqi wo you diu le yi ben shu, ni shuo wo gai zenme ban?* [I lost my purse last week and I have lost a book again this week. What do you think I should do?]. Please use Chinese "*Ba*" structure to answer my question.

S7. *Ni hao laoshi, wo de jianyi (**pronunciation**) shi: Ni bu yao ba zhongyao de dongxi dai zai shen shang.*
Hello, teacher, my advice is: don't carry important things with you.

S8. *Shang ge xingqi wo (**ni**) diu le qianbao, zhe ge xingqi wo (**ni**) you diu le yi ben shu. Ni keyi hui ba difang ni diu le dongxi ranhou zhaozhao (**Ni keyi dao ni qu guo de difang zhaozhao**). Ni xia ci xiaoxin yidianr.*
      You lost your purse last week and you have lost a book again this week. You may want to check the places you have been. Please be careful next time.

S9. *Er,* Wendy, *zhen daomei! Keshi ni fangxin ba, yinwei wo hui bangzhu ni. Zanmen xian qu kankan Guy Laoshi, gaosu ta ni ba ni de qianbao he nei ben shu diu le. Zanmen zai wenwen tongxuemen kanjian le mei you.*
Oh, Wendy, what a shame! However, please don't worry because I'll help you. Let's go to see Teacher Guy and tell him you have lost your purse and book. Then we can also ask our classmates and see whether they have seen them.

<u>Week 9 Question</u>: *Ni xihuan zuo* Video Project *ma*? *Weishenme*? [Do you like conducting the Video Project? Why?] Please use "*yinwei…*" to answer my question.

S1. *Laoshi hao! Yinwei wo xihuan gen tongxuemen zuo zuoye, suoyi wo hen xihuan zuo Video Project. Keshi wo juede yi bian shuo Hanyu yi bian kan<u>kan</u>* (**omit one *kan***) *dianshi hen <u>you</u>* (**omit *you***) *nan.*
Hello Teacher! I like the Video Project because I like to work together with my classmates. However, I think it is difficult to speak Chinese while watching TV.

S2. *Ni hao Laoshi! Wo xihuan zuo Video Project, yinwei zhe ge <u>shi</u>* (***zuo***) *ye you you yisi you hen hao wanr. Women keyi yong women xin xue de yufa he cihui.*
I like the Video Project very much because this assignment is interesting to do and I can have fun doing it. We can draw on our newly learnt grammar and vocab.

S3. *Wo hen <u>xihuan</u>* (**tone 3 and 1**) *zuo* Video Project. *Yinwei wo**men** hui <u>zuo</u>* (***chengwei***) *hen hao de pengyou.*
I like the Video Project very much because we (group mates) can become good friends.

S4. *Wo xihuan* (**tone 3 and 1**) Video Project. *Yinwei women keyi zuo renhe women xiang zuo de shi, he women hui xue **hen** duo xin de danci.*
I like the Video Project very much because we can do what we like and we can learn lots of new words.

S5. *Wo hen xihuan zuo Video Project. Yinwei wo juede wo keyi gaijin wo de Hanyu, erqie, zuo* Video Project *hen you yisi.*
I like the Video Project very much because I can improve my Chinese and have some fun doing it.

APPENDIX B
Sound-file monitor sheet

E-discussion ---- Sound File Monitor Sheet   **Name**_____

How did you feel when you recorded your answers?	
W1	
W2	
W3	
W4	
W5	
W6	
W7	
W8	
W9	
W10	
According to you, are there any advantages and disadvantages in using sound file in teaching and learning a foreign language like Chinese?	
Advantages:	Disadvantages:

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