

Spanish Acquisition: Analysis of Learner Corpora Generated through Inter-Cultural Telecollaboration

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The purpose of this three-year study is to examine the effects of internet communication on second language acquisition. Specifically, we are interested in how communicating with native speakers of the target language may affect language learning, and how that contact interacts with different modes of electronic communication. The project is being conducted by a large American university (the Pennsylvania State University) on intermediate-level students of Spanish, French and German, although the focus of this presentation is on the Spanish component of the project.

Each semester, students are asked to collaborate with Spanish students at the University of Almería, Spain on a class project. Typically the project is a co-created web-site on a popular culture theme of mutual interest to American and Spanish students. The collaboration takes place through asynchronous email and postings to a listserv, and through synchronous chat.

Through this activity a large database of learner corpora has been generated. These corpora are being analyzed using corpus analytic methods with a specific focus of marking student messages for developmental progress over time, and for comparing students' written work across the different electronic media. These student-generated texts are being compared to students' texts on the same tasks (email, chat, listserv, and

collaboration on a web-based project) with other students within their own class. That is, the comparison class engages in all the same activities, but does not have the cross-cultural experience of communicating and collaborating with a partner class of native Spanish speakers abroad.

Specifically, we will report on how the two groups of American students acquire or use clitics, tense and aspect, reflexives, lexical density, pro-drop, the appropriation of metaphor and idiom, and the lexicon. Moreover, these analyses allow us to correlate specific kinds of activity (e.g., moderated debate, free discussion), within specific communicative modalities (e.g., asynchronous threaded discussion, synchronous chat), to gains in specific skills (e.g., grammatical complexity, contextual uses of idiomatic expressions; morphological accuracy).