

**ASYNCHRONOUS COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION
IN TEACHING TURKISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**
*YABANCI DİL TÜRKÇE ÖĞRETİMİNDE EŞZAMANLI OLMAYAN BİLGİSAYAR
DESTEKLİ İLETİŞİM*

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Abstract

Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL) has drawn a great attention of researchers because of several reasons such as business, academic and social needs, travel, and intermarriages, etc. Therefore, there have been several surveys carried out in this field recently. However, this field requires more studies on awareness of possible mistakes of learners and technology in education, one of which is the usage of asynchronous computer mediated communication (ACMC). When considered the other mostly spoken languages such as English, Russian, and Chinese, it is seen that there are countless possibilities for learners to succeed it to a reasonable extent not only via books but also via ACMC. Bearing in mind Turkish as the fifth widely spoken language and the importance of technology in education, this study aims at drawing attention of Turkish language instructors how ACMC helps learners use linguistic form and content; and to what extent it increases novice teachers' awareness for possible linguistic problems beyond learners' production.

Key words: Teaching Turkish as a foreign language, awareness, linguistic problems, asynchronous computer-mediated communication.

Öz

İş, seyahat, akademik ve sosyal ihtiyaçlar ile evlilik gibi çeşitli nedenlerle önem kazanan Türkçenin yabancı dil olarak öğretimi, araştırmacıların büyük ilgisini çekmektedir. Bu yüzden, son zamanlarda bu alanda birçok araştırma yapılmaktadır. Ancak bu alanda öğretmenlerin öğrencilerin muhtemel hatalarına farkındalık ve eğitimde teknolojinin bir alanı olan eşzamanlı olmayan bilgisayar destekli iletişim kullanımı üzerine daha çok çalışma yapmak gerekmektedir. İngilizce, Rusça ve Çince gibi en çok konuşulan diller göz önüne alındığında öğrencilerin sadece kitap ile değil aynı zamanda eşzamanlı olmayan bilgisayar destekli iletişim alanında da belirli bir ölçüye kadar başarılı olmak için sayısız olanaklardan yararlandıkları görülmektedir. Dünyada en çok konuşulan beşinci dil olan Türkçenin öğretimi ve özellikle eğitimde teknolojinin önemi göz önüne alınırsa, bu çalışma: 1)

öğrencilerin dilsel yapı ve bütüncü öğrenirken eşzamanlı olmayan bilgisayar destekli iletişimden nasıl yararlandıkları ve 2) deneyimsiz yabancı dil Türkçe öğretmenlerinin öğrencilerin yaptıkları hataların gerisinde bulunan olası problemlere ne dereceye kadar duyarlılık göstermeleri gerektiğine dikkat çekmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Yabancı dil Türkçe öğretimi, farkındalık, dilsel problemler, eşzamanlı olmayan bilgisayar destekli iletişim

Introduction

Communication is a requirement for human beings in order to understand each other, to value their beliefs, to reach information, and even to gain skills. Communication via the Internet, called "online communication" and referred to reading, writing, and communication via networked communication, is a dynamic and interactive medium to require a high degree of flexibility and interaction. Maxwell (1998: cited in Chen, 2011) mentions that using technology in a classroom is likely to provide interesting ways to connect learners with the target language and its culture as well as it builds communities of language learners around the world. To him, using technology can improve motivation and enthusiasm for language learning since communication is more than isolated sentences uttered by learners, and a whole text gives a clear sign about the reasons of mistakes. Therefore, *Computer-Mediated Communication* (CMC) has become one of the teaching techniques in language learning since the late 1980s (Show-Mei Lin, 2009; Köroğlu, 2011). In the CMC approach, the computer plays a crucial role to facilitate and enhance communication between learners, teachers, and native speakers. Therefore, via CMC-one of the tools to help learners do practical learning-learners might establish interaction with peers, teachers, and native speakers. Additionally, asynchronous-one kind of CMC to describe how communication can be transmitted intermittently-lets learners use e-mail, listservs, usernets, chat rooms, threaded discussions, and PowerPoint, which are the examples of *asynchronous computer-mediated communication* (ACMC) (Chen, 2011: 8). Other scholars such as Show-Mei Lin, (2009) and Vinther (2011) emphasize that learners focus on meaning as well as form in conjunction with the cultural content in a social interactional email-based exchange. In her study, Vinther combines autonomy and creation of a computer regarding autonomous learning environment with tasks based on metalinguistic awareness rising. In terms of theoretical frame of online communication, three theories gain importance to mention: Self-determination theory, social constructivist learning theory, and behaviorist theory.

Self-determination theory deals with personality, individual's inherent growth tendency and motivation behind choices the individual makes without any external influence and interference. In other words, it focuses on the degree of an individual's behavior that is self-motivated and self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 2002: cited in Chen, p.10). On the other hand, social constructivist learning theory, in which the role of teacher is to serve as facilitator to guide and help learners develop their grammatical and discourse competence, considers learning an active process of creating meaning from different experiences in their world. This active learning process takes place when learners are involved in social interaction, which focuses on the dynamic nature of the interplay between the teachers, the learners, the learning environment, or the context and tasks (p. 11). Hence, e-mail usage is considered an effective tool, a form of written interpersonal communication in order to promote foreign language

linguistic development and to explore linguistic and cultural learning within a constructivist and social context. In addition to the first two theories, behaviorist theory emphasizes the mistakes should be eliminated in order to acquire the target language; highlights old habits (in mother tongue) prevent learners acquiring new habits (in target language) and these are resulted in failure, and underlines the fact of acquiring the target language. However, according to this theory, this elimination can be realized when target and native language are compared during learning process. By this procedure, similarities and dissimilarities between two languages are determined by learners to focus on the differences and to prevent some unexpected transfer during production process (Ellis, 1980; Larsen- Freeman & Long, 1991; Lightbown & Spada, 2003; and Schmitt, 2002). In the light of these explanations, it can be concluded that ACMC technique allows learners to have time to review their written products and increases formally and informally learners' participation by decreasing their anxieties to learn (Show-Mei Lin, 2009).

There have been several researches on online communication for European and other languages such as Russian, Japanese, and Chinese; however, there is no study on ACMC in teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language (TFL) except difficulties and problems of learning and teaching (Behnür, 2002; Dilidüzgün, 1995; Dilek, 1995; and Eryılmaz, 1996). To them, the reasons for difficulties encountered to learn Turkish are considered: Linguistic difficulties of native and target languages, lack of linguistic theoretical basis, lack of appropriate teaching materials, insufficient number of instructional units offered in Turkish courses per week, and different attitude of native speakers (Eryılmaz, 1996). Nevertheless, these scholars seem to fail mention about technology in education, which will be the focus of this study.

Researchers are interested in online communication surveys as their contribution is believed to be highly restrictive because of merely focusing on form rather than exclusion of content under a teacher control in the other languages. Even though some scholars state that this kind of control might allow learners to pursue their own initiatives or interests that likely cause frustration and lack of motivation, there should be an investigation on ACMC for TFL in order to see a) whether or not ACMC helps learners use linguistic form and content, b) whether or not written products occur as mistakes or errors, c) whether or not they cause failure in learning Turkish, and also ç) whether or not these obstacles can be overcome via ACMC as emphasized by Ellis (1985) that ACMC focuses on three general topic areas: (1) grammar, (2) reading and writing, and (3) impact, which is motivating and accelerating linguistic competence. These topic areas are considered significant by teachers since they obtain certain values and expose cognitive, physiological, behavioral reflections which are underlined important outcomes based on the environment, which means achievements for both teachers and learners (Açıkgöz, 2005).

Grammar: Without doubt, in order to practice any language it is necessary to study or teach its grammar. Even though it is always debated how to teach or how much to teach grammar in order to push students to speak Turkish, some researchers suggest that learners should not be expected to start learning a foreign language in a communicative way but to have grammatical accuracy when they are at the initial phases to communicate (Uzun, 2009). In this respect, probably meaningful contexts or short passages besides appropriate dialogues should be given. In terms of syntax which has dissimilarity for learners whose native language is quite different, learners of TFL have difficulty with not only the word order, but also many factors such as the agglutination system, nominalizations, subject-verb agreement, adjective phrases, complex sentences, relative clauses, nominal cases, and derivational suffixes

(Çotuksöken, 1983). All these classifications cause learners to make mistakes at the initial stages as they have different perception in formulating the structure in their minds. Even though they take the first steps of learning Turkish, word order also seems completely different from theirs such as *Hoş geldiniz* “Welcome”, in response foreign learners should say that *Hoş bulduk* (always in third person plural form as a response given by the other person and it literally means ‘*We found pleasant here.*’). This is confusing since there is no direct response in their language. In learning a foreign language, it is known that vocabulary can be difficult to learn immediately; nevertheless, it should be remembered that grammar rules in Turkish are likely to be easily learned since it is a logical language with limited exceptions.

Speaking: The goal of learning a foreign language for most learners is speaking the target language fluently. Apart from being the most emphasized skill in foreign language teaching, speaking is also the most difficult one to develop in or out classroom conditions. Upon consideration ACMC in terms of speaking, Baron points out (cited in Weinstock, 2004: 367) “technically, e-mail is a form of writing. However, its usage conventions are often closer to those of the social telephone or face-to-face conversation.”. There are also other scholars who also state that they are composed in a manner of miming characteristics of spoken language. People feel less committed to what they say, less concerned about it, and less worried about the social reception they will get.” Ultimately, the combined absence of social cues, speed of transmission, and perceived ephemerality of electronic communication “reduce the fear of appearing foolish in front of others” and lead communicators to “feel less empathy, less guilt, less concern over how they compare with others, and [to be] less influenced by social conventions” (s.367).

Reading and Writing: Reading and writing are two processes of discovering meaning. Texts not only give instructors syntactic and semantic information but also the other factors to be taken into consideration. Via writing isolated sentences, it might be difficult to realize a common framework of an outcome of a learner, but learners are far away from anxiety about making mistakes while producing a contextual discourse in e-mail messages. Stockwell and Harrington (2003: cited in Vinthel, 2011) state that learners involved in e-mail interactions demonstrate increases in both the accuracy and the complexity of the language produced’ (Levy & Stockwell, 2006, p. 104). On the other hand, the informality of e-mail consistence on both of “conversational language” and “‘errors’ in spelling, punctuation, and typos” that she considers “almost part of the medium.”. Nevertheless, Abrams (2003) finds no support for improvement in language produced. Similarly, Skehan (2003, p. 394) concludes that there are mixed results, but the tendency is that interactional exchanges produce positive outcomes with regard to improvements in learner performance.

In light of literature it is explained that in terms of grammar, speaking, reading, and writing, ACMC might have an accelerating factor for learners since their focus is to convey the message. In other words, the usage of the target language in a ACMC mode of interaction might lead to mastery as a result of the language produced. Then, learners become aware of the usefulness of grammatical rules of their target language and consequently they might be motivated to improve awareness of the connection between form and content.

Method

The participants in this study are two of 24 foreign students learning Turkish for one academic year. These participants who take Turkish lessons 3 hours per week have internet access in their hostels at Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey. The communication took place in a one-to-one asynchronous exchange of emails between the Turkish language instructor who gives homework requirements in the form of e-mails. These learners are acquainted with writing their assignments to their instructor on weekly schedules. All the e-mails written and

sent to the teacher are corrected in different highlighted letters and re-sent to the participants as soon as possible. All the participants are recommended checking the corrected texts and keeping them in their personal files to consult when necessary.

Results

In order to sort out how the problems occur in the production of Turkish learners, one of 164 e-mails written for weekly assignments is randomly chosen and taken into consideration to analyze in form and content. The main reason for choosing a written e-mail is that it is a better tool since all the mistakes might be resulted in relaxation of learners in a lower tension and without act of worrying about mistakes while writing about happenings in the learner's life. The aim of this study is to indicate how and where mistakes occur and on which categories they belong to. Even though Ozkan (1994) emphasized five categories, in this study the following added categories underlined by the researcher will be analyzed by using different research methods, including a quantitative, and a qualitative method:

Tablo 1. Categories of mistakes/errors by Ozkan (1994) and the researcher

Ozkan (1994)'s categories	The Researcher's categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overuse of the cases • wrong usage of nominal cases • failure in the usage of the vowel harmony • putting the nominal case in the wrong place in both written and spoken form • lack of nominal case 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overuse of these cases • wrong usage of case markers • failure in the usage of the vowel harmony • putting the nominal case in the wrong place in written form • using wrong word order • using verbs inappropriately • phonological problems seen in spelling • using inappropriate words • using negation inappropriately • missing or using question markers inappropriately • the wrong usage of consonants taking suffixes • making syntactic errors • exceptions in dropping vowel • translating from native language

Below is an e-mail in which the sentences are produced by a foreign learner of Turkish. The learner who is the owner of this mail left Turkey with her Erasmus friends attending the same university for her home country as they completed their education at Çukurova University. Later, she sent this mail from her city, Brno where she knows the other Erasmus students who took Turkish lessons in the preceding years from the same Turkish

teacher. In order to gather data, all the 164 texts written by the learners and sent to the language instructor via e-mail, which is one of asynchronous computer-mediated communication devices are blended. Then, this mail, which is randomly chosen out of 164 mails, is analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The results are explained below:

From: Iryna XXX
To: guldentum@xxxxxx.com
Sent: Wednesday, August 10, 2011 11:43 AM
Subject: selamlar benden herkese

Merhaba G. Hanim!

Nasılsınız? Tesekkurler biz iyiyiz. Sizi çok **özliyoruz**. Hersey **beni** için **havalimanida** iyi oldu. Ama biz son **dakikalar icuga** bindik. Ama yazık ki Jana ve baska 3 **ogrenciler** Istanbulda kaldı cunku **kimse hic** para **kaldı cesa** için, biz de herseyi **verdi** ama bu 4 kişi için bu para **yeter degildi**. Bu yuzden onlar **daha** 2 gun **havalimanida** kaldı. Sonra onlar da Prag'a geldi. İlk hafta ben Brno'da ailem ile kaldım. Ozur dilerim **ki** size haber vermedim cunku **yurta tasinerek** meşgul **idi**. Herkese sizden çok selam **diyorum**. Sizin **e-posta** basmam lazim **kimse konustunu** unutmamak için. :)

Okula eski arkadaşlarım size de çok selam **diyor**. Onlar benim sizin **hakkında anlattilerimi** çok sevindi. Herkes **ilk** soruyor "Ve Gulden **Hanim'le gorustumunuz?**" Ben herkesi çok **ozledum**. Herkese çok çok selam **diyer** ve opuyorum. Turkiye'den çok hoslandım. İnsallah **yeni orada gelecem**. Biz bir çalışma Türkiyeye geleceğiz. Biz **degiliz** çaresini **bulurmasak**, bulmayı tasarlıyoruz.

Siz nasıl **duşunuyorsunuz**, sizin **şehrinizde** bir çalışma **bulabilireceğiz?**

Gule gule,

Saygılarizla,

Turkcemiz dogrumudur? Lutfen soyleyiniz.

İrina ve Olga.¹

As seen in the e-mail above, it could be emphasized that computer-mediated communication allows the recording of all messages and provides a wealth of easily accessible data for learner and the teacher. Studies related to foreign languages indicate that computer-mediated interaction has facilities for learners at the linguistic characteristics of messages, the linguistic modification that occur, and the patterns of participation that emerge. When

¹Bold ones indicate problematic structures. Considering some special letters (ı,ş,ğ,ü,ö,ç) in different key boards of learners might be hard to insert, unless some spelling items block comprehension, they were ignored as computer keys. The reason for this is that learners are recommended ignoring Turkish keys not to lose time if it is hard for them to download or insert during their writing process.

considered the structure in the e-mail, it is observed that the learner has no linguistic pressure while writing and this manner results in several mistakes as also found in the result of some studies. Accordingly, most of the mistakes seem to occur on relevant suffixes in the inflectional and derivational forms in Turkish grammar. Especially, the linguistic differences between two languages (her mother language and target language(s) she learnt) are clearly viewed. The most important mistakes done in this text is observed as the failure in the usage of the vowel harmony (%7.6), and then the phonological problems seen in spelling as %7.0. The wrong usage of case markers is followed by % 5. The using inappropriate word is %3.8. It is observed that using negation inappropriately, using question markers inappropriately, and making the syntactic errors are observed equally done as %3. On the other hand, the wrong usage of consonants taking suffixes % 2.5, and the usage of wrong word order is observed fewer (% 1.9). The least made mistakes are observed as putting the nominal case in the wrong place in both written and spoken form (% 0.6) and the overuse of cases is observed (% 0.2). These results have an harmony with the study carried out by Uhlířová (cited in Weinstock, 2004), who stated that e-mail is characterized by “various types of ellipsis” including “subject deletion, auxiliary deletion, or object deletion” that position e-mail communications as “nearer to speech than to written texts.”

In addition to the quantitative analysis, there is also qualitative analysis done on this text. As also stressed by Goksel and Kerslake (2005), the most common mistakes irrelevant suffixes. These mistakes are based on consonant misspelling or the wrong usage of consonants taking suffixes (yurta/yurda, which means ‘to the hostel’ cesa/ceza, which means ‘fare’, mesgul idi/meşguldüm, which means ‘I was busy’). Besides being unfamiliar with even greeting at the initial stages, forming of words of Turkish origin is generally euphonic and based on vowel harmony rules [*front vowels* (e,i ö,ü) and *back vowels* (a,ı,o,u)]. Phonological problems are absolutely seen in spelling or failure in the usage of the vowel harmony (ozliyoruz/ özliyoruz, which means ‘we are missing’, icuga/uçağa, which means ‘to the plane’ ozledum/özledim, ‘I missed’, düşüniyorsunuz/düşünüyorsunuz, ‘you are thinking’, gelicem/geleceğim, ‘I will come’, taşınerek/taşınarak, ‘taşınmak’ means “to move” -arak/-erek means converbial suffix in participles, and it means *by moving*. In Turkish, the other problem observed in the production of the text is the wrong usage of case marker, missing, overusing, or making syntactic errors (okula/okuldan, ‘from the school’, havalimanida/havalimanı-n-da, ‘at the airport’, beni/benim, ‘my or for+me’ öğrenciler/öğrenci, ‘student’, dakikalar/dakika, ‘minute’, e-posta/e-postanızı, ‘your e-mail’ hakkında/hakkınızda, ‘about you’, orada/oraya, ‘to there’, diyer/diyor, ‘s/he says’ verdi/verdik, ‘we gave’, kimse/kimsede, ‘at someone or noone’, konustunu/ konuştuğunuzu, ‘what you have talked’); using verbs inappropriately (selam diyor/ selam söylüyor, ‘s/he is giving best regards’); using inappropriate words (ilk/önce, ‘first’ yeni/yine, ‘again’, ve/yani ‘you mean’, Gule gule/ Hoşça kalın, ‘Good Bye’); missing or using question markers inappropriately (gorustumunuz?! görüştünüz mü?, ‘Have you seen each other?’) Bulabilireceğiz?! Bulabilecek miyiz?, Will we be able to find..?’); using negation inappropriately or making syntactic errors (Biz degiliz çaresini bulurmasak/ Biz çaresini bulamazsak, ‘If we can not find a solution’, hic para kaldı/hiç para kalmadı, ‘There is no money left’); using wrong word order (daha 2 gun/ 2 gün daha, ‘2 days more’); exception in dropping vowels (Sehirinizde/şeh-Ø-rinizde, ‘ in your city’); making syntactic errors (yeter/yeterli, ‘enough’, kimse/kimle, with whom, konustunu/konuştuğunu, ‘what you have talked/ with whom you have talked’); transferring from the native language even though the same structure is not used in the target language (Ozur dilerim ki [.....]/Özür dilerim [.....], ‘I am sorry that’[.....]. Another example for phrases that may not exist in the other language is

Güle güle (written *gule gule* in the e-mail text because of key board problems of the learner) or *Hoşça kal* means “Good Bye” for the person who remains and the one who leaves might be the same in the other language. However, in Turkish “*Güle güle*” is uttered by the one who remains and “*Hoşça kal*” is used by the leaver. Thus, when used by that person leaving, it will result in ambiguity since the leaver requires to say “*Hoşça kal*”; and finally putting the nominal case in the wrong place in both written and spoken form or making syntactic errors (*Saygılarizla/ saygılarımızla*, ‘with our best regards’). These findings indicate that when a word or root word is considered in terms of grammatical rules, many words could be monitored, manipulated, and formulated regarding inflectional, derivational, mood, and tense rules for learners.

In light of data gathered in the e-mail above and it is also stated by Hatipoğlu (2004), it is clearly seen that the language in this e-mail text is less formal than the one in traditional writing. Nevertheless, even though there are several mistakes or errors in the text, the findings of this study indicate that the technology addressed affective factors, such as reducing threatening feelings and enhancing motivation to communicate.

Conclusion and Suggestions

In the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, instead of taking into consideration the isolated statements of learners, a full text is analyzed. The purpose was to investigate whether asynchronous computer-mediated communication is an effective and beneficial technique for learners or not. Since, an e-mail context contains several statements giving a striking opinion on how any language is acquired and produced without having stressful environment, an e-mail contextual analysis is presented regarding different points such as phonetics, syntactic and semantic features. Based on the analysis of the study, it is concluded that APMC is a useful strategy to improve foreign language to some extent. As also found out in the other studies (Egbert, 2005: cited in Köroğlu, 2011), learners can check exercises after they are done, learners are encouraged by language instructors to use APMC technique. Thus their improvement is seen gradually from easier to more difficult exercises according to their levels and abilities. When learners fail to perform activities correctly, the computer can simulate, drill or explain the phenomenon. In full satisfaction, it might not be accelerating factor in terms of linguistic features since learners write their texts in informal forms that stick with the formal rules. Even though only one text is presented in this study, the other written texts, which are not presented in statistical findings in this one, are also checked and found similar results. In this respect, there might be further studies analyzing all the written products in statistical forms. Nevertheless, whatever is observed in this study is merely speech-like texts written by learners when they attempt to write their assignments to their instructors via APMC.

In order to get benefit from APMC in education, technological advances in language classrooms should be included, language teachers should be trained by regular technological training and most importantly opportunities for practice and interaction should be emphasized in and out classes. The attention of learners in classes should be paid to written data raising awareness to traces of established language awareness in the process of self-correction and correction of other peers in a collaborative effort towards greater accuracy.

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