

## ***Cross-border Telecommunication: A Task-based Collaboration at College Level***

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Learner-centered classroom practices have been emphasized greatly in recent times since communicative language learning has become the major trend in the TESOL field. With the advancement of technology, language learners are able to directly and autonomously interact with native speakers of the target language and culture. The two-way communication via electronic mediums offers learners a meaningful context to engage in natural conversations with the aid of visual display on a monitor. This study intends to investigate the effectiveness of a task-based telecommunication in which 52 Taiwanese college students are paired with 52 American students to collaborate in three culturally related learning tasks. Quantitative and qualitative data serve as the evidence that the task-based CMC allows EFL students in large classes to gain individual feedback from language models (native speakers), as opposed to solely relying on the single authority (i.e. instructors) in the classroom to give input. The Taiwanese students' learning behaviors, learning performance, and their motivations to communicate in target language had overall increased. Several suggestions with regard to online project design and execution are also presented to classroom practitioners and future researchers based on the findings of the present study.

**Key words: communicative competence, computer-mediated communication, e-mail, instant messenger, task-based language learning**

## INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, TESOL field and language education in general has gone through a paradigm shift from the grammar-focused instruction to the equal emphasis on both form and meaning of language production. In other words, English proficiency is progressively redefined as learner's ability to successfully and effectively communicate rather than merely manifesting perfect grammar control increase (Warschauer, 2000). Communicative competence focuses on the ability to accurately convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts (Brown, 2000), which oftentimes requires cultural understanding. When interacting with speakers of various communities or linguistic background, cultural sensitivity (i.e., to have the awareness of cultural differences), is an important and yet an often-overlooked aspect of communicative competence (Truscott & Morley, 2001). In other words, language learners, in a comprehensive manner, ought to simultaneously pursue linguistic competence and cultural understanding when interacting with global audience. From this viewpoint, textbooks, unfortunately, have their limitations, even though they have been the major knowledge resource for EFL learners (Chen & Shin, 2006). This problem has been the reason why networked technology—through which learners have the access to other English speakers (native or nonnative ones) and engage in free conversations—has been rapidly introduced and incorporated into classroom practices during the past two decades. Several telecommunicative studies (Lai & Zhao, 2006; Shekary & Tahririan, 2006; Smith, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) have addressed the impact made by networked learning. They empirically show the pedagogical effects during student-student dyadic interactions in online contexts. Nonetheless, these studies were limited to the interactions between nonnative speakers (NNSs).

Research suggests that incorporating native speakers (NSs) as the ideal language model will increase learners' interlanguage quality and motivation (Kung, 2002): NSs offer a norm reference for the use of target language. The reality is that most NS-NNS interactions referenced in SLA studies to date

took place between teacher and students (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001, 2002; Loewen, 2003a, 2004, 2005). Katchen (2002) and Chen (2008) emphasized how this common problem has taken root in most of the EFL regions: the teacher remains the sole knowledge authority in the classroom. Fortunately, CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication, i.e., telecommunication) nowadays allows cross-border connections between NS-NNS students. EFL learners in this day and age should no longer be constrained by the geographical distance. Hence, in the current study, a group of Taiwanese English learners (NNSs) and a group of American students (NSs) will collaborate in three tasks CMC. This student-student connection is obviously more learner-centered than student-teacher interactions. The purpose of the study is to investigate the occurrence and process of online NS-NNS online dyadic interaction and its possible effect on SLA, in the cultural and linguistic aspects.

Earlier research has indicated that online learning stands out as an effective tool for providing an authentic English learning environment and materials, especially in the environments where the input of the target language and culture is scarce (Cifuentes & Shih, 2001; Warschauer, 2001). Through CMC, such as e-mail, chat rooms, forums, bulletin boards, and blogs, English learners are connected with people on a worldwide scale at no extra expense—without confining themselves to a certain place and time. Moreover, CMC also allows English learners to engage in direct and meaningful communication with a real audience. Genuine interpersonal connections tend to increase learning motivation (Chen, Pedersen, Eslami, & Chen, 2007; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Learning languages through two-way communication is necessary for successful second language acquisition and communicative competence development (Chen, 2005; Cheon, 2003; Gass, 1997; Gu, 2002).

The purposes of integrating CMC into language teaching practice are to induce students to produce as much L2 input and output as possible and to motivate autonomous learning. Recent research (Darhower, 2000; Ellis, 2003; Long, 1985; Nunan, 2004; Smith, 2003a) indicates that task-based language learning (TBLL) promotes communicative competence by encouraging

teamwork, communicative orientation, meaningful and intensive social interaction, negotiation in an authentic context, and information exchange. CMC's educational capacities facilitate learners to frequently interact with their partners in order to complete learning tasks in L2. Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001) defined a task as an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, in order to attain an objective.

Very often, e-mail and IM (i.e., Instant messenger, which is a real-time chat agent allowing more than two people to talk to each other) are chosen for their prevalence among the students of younger generation for various online activities. E-mailing is reported by 91% of the internet users worldwide as their most everyday online activity (Infoplease, 2005). In the U.S., nearly 75% of teenagers (between the ages of 12 and 17) and 42% of adults use IM (J-Town Productions, 2006). Most e-mail- and IM-based communication is conducted in English, by both NSs and NNSs (Warschauer, 2000). This indicates the significance of electronic information exchange and users' ability to interpret textual representations as well as to make themselves understood.

In the present study, a task-based telecommunication project was created by using e-mail and IM as the major electronic mediums for 52 Taiwanese college-level EFL learners to collaborate in three learning tasks with 52 American college students who were all pre-service teachers from a college in Texas. The researchers intended to investigate CMC's effects on linguistic and cultural learning outcomes, specifically their L2 learning motivation and overall perceptions toward this alternative approach and context. The study design was inspired by the frequent challenges faced by Taiwanese English language learners as well as EFL learners in general: a) the lack of opportunities to engage in real and meaningful communication in the target language and b) large EFL class sizes that usually exceed 50 students in one classroom, which make language learning tedious and unfriendly. In this regard, the focus of this study is to assess CMC—as an innovative tool in educational contexts—and its pedagogical effects.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

Fifty-two Taiwanese college-level English language learners who majored in Applied Foreign Languages were paired with an equal number of American students attending a state university in the U.S. The Taiwanese students were enrolled in a “Multimedia English Learning” course, meeting with their instructor once a week for 100 minutes during each session. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20. These participants had an average of eight-year English learning experience and were mostly intermediate level learners. The American students were in a course titled “ESL Teaching and Assessment” offered in the School of Education. The researchers served as the instructors of these two classes respectively. Before the project started, the participants were informed about the research and its purposes. Students were fully aware that their coursework would become the data for research analysis and signed the consent forms to release the rights to the authors.

### **Procedure**

The project was launched in fall 2006 and lasted for 12 weeks. Although all the students were experienced with electronic communication mediums (i.e. e-mail and IM applications), corresponding with overseas partners was new to them. The instructors spent two class sessions on orientation (to form 52 Taiwanese-American dyads), as well as collecting their e-mail addresses and IM accounts. Meanwhile, the Taiwanese students also practiced chatting with each other through IMs in English. Shortly after this stage, the Taiwanese students started to receive the “ice-breaking” e-mails from their American keypals. By the third class meeting, all of the students had successfully replied to the first e-mails—some with the instructor’s assistance. The students were informed that the dyadic correspondence, from then on, would proceed outside of class. They were encouraged to set up weekly

appointments to cope with the 14-hour time difference between the two countries with their keypals for IM communication. In the final week, all the Taiwanese participants responded to a survey (see Appendix A) to reveal their overall perceptions of this online project.

A project website was created as the primary instruction delivery tool, so the two groups of students were able to review the learning tasks as needed. The website also allowed the instructors and the students to access orientation information and frequently asked questions before and during the project: participants' short introductions, the project's goals, useful resources, course materials, technical assistance, and assignments (learning tasks).

### **Learning Tasks**

Task I: In this task, you will learn how to write a formal e-mail to a professor and an informal one to a classmate. The task will help you understand and practice “netiquettes” (Internet etiquette) when you compose emails for different audiences (your readers) for different occasions (see Appendix B for more details).

Task II: You will learn to write an invitation to a very important international guest. The venue is set for a Mid-Autumn Festival (a Chinese traditional holiday) party. The purpose of this task is to incorporate cultural knowledge (e.g., the tradition of this ethnic holiday) into the task. Several external websites introducing the origin of Mid-Autumn Festival are provided for your information. This task aims at helping you introduce your native culture in English, so that people from other countries can understand about this special occasion through a written invitation.

Task III: The last task will help your note-taking skills and basic listening skills in English. You will watch a short video clip introducing the airport security in the U.S. and write down the key messages delivered. American keypals will then check the notes and offer your Taiwanese partners assistance if any key points are yet to be captured.

## Data Collection

The primary data for this study were collected through a survey consisting of four sections (see Appendix A): cyber interaction with keypals, learning behaviors, learning performance, and motivation to communicate in English. The four sections derived from the four constructs emerging from the qualitative data collected throughout the ten-week treatment: IM and email records and students' weekly reflection journals which served as the supplementary data.

In the weekly dyadic chats and reflection journals submitted by the NNS students, some of the Taiwanese learners appeared to have difficulties in engaging reflective thinking and self-expressing—one of the cultural traits mentioned by Hofstede (1986). This issue resulted in inconsistent volumes of the weekly records across the participants and throughout the 12-week duration. Some students were more elaborate than others at times. Hence, the researchers chose to use qualitative data as the foundation to develop a questionnaire—through which more in-depth reflections could be elicited from less expressive students. This questionnaire could also create a baseline for all the NNS participants and assist everyone to reflect his/her experience and share perceptions. The items in the questionnaire were mainly from the input made by students, not by the teachers. Example 1 and 2 are given to illustrate this questionnaire's developing process.

### Example 1:

An excerpt from Mimi Cheng's (this is a pseudonym, so are the other names in this paper) reflection journal:

I was worried that it would be impossible to make friends through English, but I was so excited when I received mail from my keypal and knew that I could do it.

The questionnaire items related to the comment above:

1. This project increased my willingness to communicate in English.
2. The cyber interaction boosted up my confidence to communicate with others in English. (The item designed to triangulate the answers of the previous item # 1).

Example 2:

An excerpt from Fang-Yu's reflection journal:

I have learned so many words from my keypal about daily life, which I've never seen in the books from school. My keypal really taught me many fun and useful expressions.

1. I've learned new vocabulary and language use that were not included in the dictionary from my keypal.
2. During the cyber interaction, I've learned lots of trendy colloquial expressions from my keypal. (The item designed to triangulate the answers of the previous item # 3).

However, from students' reflection journals and correspondence records, the issues of communicative motivation did not emerge. In order to expand the coverage of the questionnaire, some related items were also sourced from Gu (2002) and measured with the Likert Scale. This questionnaire was conducted in Chinese since the researchers wished to obtain the optimal response rate from the NNSs of lower intermediate English proficiency. However, the English translation of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix A in this paper.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Cyber Interactions**

This section focuses on students' use of CMC agents and their correspondence frequencies. In general, the results showed that there were very few technical setbacks with regard to the software applications, e.g., net-surfing and e-mail or IM exchange. Most of the students had easy access to computers and the Internet connections both at home and on campus. In other words, computer and the Internet availability were not too problematic for either of the groups of students.

According to the results of the survey, the students exchanged e-mails about once a week on average, in addition to IM interactions. First of all,



most of the students expressed excitement when receiving responses from their keypals and would reply immediately. However, IM exchange did not occur as often as e-mailing since the time difference had inevitably impeded the real-time interactions between partners. In the middle of the project, the Taiwanese instructor encouraged her students to converse with their keypals with the speech function built in IM programs in order to practice their spoken English. However, the students still felt uncomfortable and preferred textual communication. One of the NNSs Chia-Ling expressed her fear in a weekly journal: "I am sure I will be too nervous to talk or to think. I've never talked to a real American." This type of reasoning echoed with Warschauer's claims (1996, 1997, 2001) that textual CMC allows learners more time to process their thoughts and compose their sentences with lower level of anxiety due to the indirect human contact. This capacity of CMC's supports Krashen and Terrell's Monitor Hypothesis (i.e., conscious learning) and creates the ideal environment to meet the requirements for the learning effect to occur: 1) the performer has to have enough time; and 2) the performer has to be thinking about correctness, or be focusing on form" (1983, p. 30). In addition, Cheon (2003) reported in her study that in CMC context learners feel freer than in any type of oral situation where they are pressed by the sense of immediacy to respond or say something.

In the present study, the lower intermediate level learners experienced only a few difficulties comprehending the e-mails from their keypals, which was a positive yet unexpected outcome. The correspondence records showed that the confusions experienced during emailing or IM were mainly caused by the lack of topic-related lexis and intercultural knowledge. Nevertheless, the students were still able to seek help from other resources (teacher, dictionary, or peers). Moreover, Long (1983), Pica (1988), and Gass (1997) reported that NSs tend to make linguistic and discoursal adjustments in order to accommodate the NNS interlocutors' language proficiency (i.e., foreigner talk) and to make themselves better understood. During the ten-week dyadic interactions, the American keypals often rephrased their questions or their partners' problematic utterances by recast or clarifications. Most importantly,

the prompt feedback offered by the NSs helped de-fossilize learners' interlanguage which is often deficient from a large-size class instruction. This NS-NNS phenomenon echoes with the Input Hypothesis (i.e., comprehensible input) proposed by Krashen and Terrell (1983) which increase the occurrence of SLA.

**TABLE 1**  
**Survey Results of Cyber Interaction**

Prompts	Response
Weekly correspondence under one time	22%
Weekly correspondence between 1-2 times	61%
Weekly correspondence over 3 times	12%
Felt excited when getting mail from keypal	67%
Answered keypal's mail as soon as possible	60%
Used IM with keypals 1-3 times during the project	49%
Used IM with keypals over 10 times during the project	15%
CMC caused less stress than face-to-face conversations	52%
Writing gave me more time to think	55%
No difficulties understanding the mail contents from keypals	85%
Lacking knowledge of American culture caused problems with understanding	21%
Time zone difference made IM connection difficult	70%
Never used speech function	82%
New vocabulary caused problems with understanding	37%

### Learning Behaviors

This category was created to analyze the effect of the cyber interaction on the learning process—more specifically on writing and reading skills and habits. The results indicate that students would consult dictionaries when striving to fully understand their American keypals in the e-mails. Meanwhile they would also make extra efforts to double-check spelling while crafting the reply e-mails. However, almost all of the NNSs had doubts about their communication competence in L2 due to their low language proficiency. Li-Ming, a student, said: “I really have to improve my English to communicate better with my keypal. I do not have enough vocabulary to express what I want to say.” As the result of anxiety, some students expressed that they

would cautiously edit the e-mails several times on the computer before sending them; the self correction is always a desirable learning effect in SLA (Chen, 2008; Chen et al., 2007; Gass, 1997). Meanwhile, the survey results show that the students had developed a new habit of “googling” by using external web-resources like electronic dictionaries and Wikipedia, so they could better express themselves and comprehend the e-mails from their partners. They learned how to make sense out of the unfamiliar lexis within the context and use communication strategies (e.g., requesting further clarifications and comprehension check from the keypals). Long (1983) recorded the same phenomenon during the NS-NNS interactions in his study. The discorsal adjustment due to the common goal of mutual understanding helps bridge the gap between the language required to understand complex content and NNS’ current linguistic stage.

**TABLE 2**  
**Learning Behaviors**

Prompts	Response
Consulted the dictionaries when meeting the new words	79%
Consulted the dictionaries for spell check	90%
Worried about keypal not getting the meaning of my mail	88%
Drafted before sending the mail	58%
Looked into the dictionaries for miscommunication	55%
Guessed the meaning from the context for miscommunication	48%
Asked for help from my keypal for miscommunication	45%
A mail took me 11-30 minutes	64%

### Learning Performance

In the survey, learning performance mainly refers to the self-perceived improvement in L2 reading and writing abilities. Even though self-reported responses were often criticized for the lack of objectivity in terms of data validity, students’ confidence in L2 learning still serves as an indication of positive improvement. The results show that the respondents agreed that the task-based discussions enhanced deeper comprehension of the topics related to their everyday lives. Among the three learning tasks, most of the students

considered the learning task practical, and the third task on airport security check was voted as their most favorite one. The results also show that the exchanges of e-mail and IM had the capacity to increase students' reading ability as well. They consciously learned many colloquial expressions from their American keypals which were unlikely to be presented in conventional classroom context. Some participants considered that their English communicative competence, especially the accuracy, fluency, and speed in writing, was improved as the result of the one-on-one online tutoring. CMC's textual display and NS-NNS task-based collaboration facilitated NNS' linguistic input as well as improved output, and hence "defossilization" occurred (Chen, 2008; Ellis, 1997; Washburn, 1991).

**TABLE 3**  
**Learning Performance**

Prompts	Response
Comprehension of the topic enhanced by the Discussion with the keypals	72%
Learned many new expressions of English	75%
English writing ability was improved	41%
English writing speed was improved	38%
English communicative competence was improved	53%
English reading ability was improved	32%

### **Motivation to Communicate in English**

In this section, communication motivation in L2 was measured by using the Likert five-point scale, with 5 being the highest score suggesting strong agreement. The overall mean score was 3.88 (n=52, SD=.5). The percentages of positive responses to all items in this section were over 50%. This section dealt with students' readiness and attitudes towards communication in the target language. The results show that this unconventional learning experience had enhanced participants' affirmative attitudes and confidence in using English. They viewed this project as an alternative means to make net friends and to practice their English through a meaningful activity in the long run. The task-based collaboration with keypals not only raised students'

willingness to do extra readings but also promoted their interests and awareness of culture exchange. Students enjoyed participating in this program and considered it a fun and practical way to learn real English from real people (NSs) as opposed to textbooks or movies.

Most of them appreciated the opportunity to make friends over the Internet and viewed it as a safe environment where they could experiment with new words and make mistakes without feeling embarrassed. Loewen (2003b, 2005) asserted that L2 learners should be given the opportunities to test their linguistic hypothesis during natural conversations in order to attain SLA. Most importantly, they were willing to make extra efforts to perfect their works to exceed the instructor's standards and expectations (rubrics). Two students' commented in their weekly journals:

I had never had this kind of experience. The desire to share many things with my keypal boosted my enthusiasm for learning. I want to learn more so we can have broader discussion.

I have learned so many new words from my keypal about daily life which I've never seen in the textbooks from school. My keypal really taught me lots of fun and useful expressions.

**TABLE 4**  
**Motivation to Communicate in English**

Prompts	Response
The willingness in extra reading was increased by the collaboration with keypals.	55%
Discussing articles with keypal increased my knowledge about the United States.	58%
Discussing articles with keypal helped him/her know more about my country.	67%
This project increased my willingness to communicate in English.	73%
This project increased my confidence in communicating through English.	64%
I would like to make friends online to practice English.	61%
This project gave me an interesting experience.	85%
I would keep in touch with my keypals after this project is over.	61%
Participating in this project is a good way to learn English.	88%
In general, I liked this project.	79%

Unfortunately, some of the participants had less successful experiences. Certain problems occurred and impeded students' learning performance. Several dyads were unable to finish the project. Based on their reflection journals, the causes for their discontinuance included the following:

1. The workload outside of class was too much for the students' busy schedules.
2. Students with lower language proficiency were not able to follow the timeline of the tasks since every email or IM exchange was a strenuous assignment.
3. The dyads did not have common interests to share with each other.
4. One side of the dyad did not contribute equally.
5. One side of the dyad dropped out of the project for personal reasons.
6. The different schedules of the two schools and time zones often confused the dyads, especially in the case of real-time online chat.

The lack of the intersubjectivity (common ground, e.g., shared cultural background) between the keypals as well as the low confidence on NNSs' part had psychologically hindered the continuation of interaction. Students' high "affective filter" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 38) had a negative impact on the learning attitudes. They felt anxious due to their low English proficiency and thought this project was overwhelming and intimidating and hence closed their communication with their keypals. Huei-Fu commented: "I have to improve my English to communicate better with my keypal. I do not have enough vocabulary to express what I want to say." Other students also shared similar feelings like Jin-Chu: "I felt the language barriers between me and my keypal, so we did not interact well. I felt sorry for the discontinuation of our correspondence". In addition, others complained about their keypals for not showing up for their IM appointments.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The findings of the current study corresponded to other empirical studies

in SLA (Chen, 2005; Cheon, 2003; Cifuentes & Shih, 2001; Gu, 2002; Truscott & Morley, 2001; Warschauer, 2001) with regard to CMC's pedagogical capacities of language learning through natural conversations as well as conscious-raising of intercultural knowledge. In most cases, CMC language learning increases students' motivation to communicate in the target language and their linguistic competence by interacting with a real audience in authentic context. In this study, the participants desired to interact with their net friends through e-mail and IM exchanges; their eagerness to learn and to apply their linguistic and cultural knowledge was naturally increased. This driving force enhanced the participants' intrinsic motivation to study about and use the target language and thus is likely to have a long-term influence on their future learning. All these phenomena were shown through the learning strategies employed by the students in reading and writing tasks. Their communicative competence and their interpersonal bond with their American counterparts gradually developed during the process of intensive negotiation for task completion.

Additionally, the learners exerted extra efforts to improve themselves and acquired more idiomatic English from the American keypals than from their classroom materials, which had helped students gain additional confidence and sense of accomplishment. This demonstrated the concept proposed by Warschauer (2000) and Chen (2008) that the most effective language courses involve a great quantity of peer interaction. The keypal connection had enhanced the interpersonal interaction absent from large-group instruction in EFL environment. Each dyad was able to adjust their own learning pace and modify the instruction as needed, which is particularly essential for a multi-level group. This is the unique strength of this task-based CMC project.

This positive experience should help transcend learners' online communication to face-to-face conversation (i.e., the "real action") with global audiences (Shin, 2006; Warschauer, 2001). After all, NSs are the best resource if learners wish to pursue ideal language models (as a norm reference) or to understand more about the target culture and the people in the target society (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004). In addition to the language improvement, both

groups of students had gained cross-cultural awareness through this project and their keypals. During the times when students noticed that the cultural barrier had affected their comprehension the content of e-mail or IM from the keypals, they recognized the importance of intercultural understanding in language learning, which was a giant leap towards being culturally literate (Truscott & Morley, 2001). The cross-cultural elements incorporated in the learning tasks had raised students' cultural sensitivity as well as mutual appreciation and respect, which, in turn, lured them to further explore other cultures.

Several suggestions based on this exploratory experiment are offered to classroom practitioners of future CMC practice. Aside from the stimulating, detailed task design, instructors can also incorporate supplementary activities in the class meetings to facilitate and sustain the online correspondence. For example, some small-talk or warm-up activities can be introduced to the students to simulate the online dyadic discussions, e.g., popular movies or music. For instance, the American students and the Taiwanese students in the current study exchanged small gifts and cards in late November for Christmas, through which the correspondence was pumped and sustained during the holiday season. Moreover, as a warm-up, each student can share the highlights (e.g., achievements or exciting news) of their dyadic correspondence with the whole class. These activities enable students to discuss in-depth with their keypals and may stimulate learners to generate new ideas. Lastly, guided reading activity should give new input to the learners, e.g., useful phrases and sentence patterns, and hence facilitate the cyber communication.

This empirical study introduces an exemplary blueprint of online projects to classroom teachers with the intent of promoting CMC in language classroom practice. This project provided students with a fun and innovative experience of language learning. In addition, it connected the language learners and their overseas keypals through task collaboration. The meaningful and authentic cyber interaction helped EFL learners step out of their comfort zones, conquer their anxiety and join the global village with a better



communicative competence. Computer-mediated learning projects like the one implemented in the present study can serve as a preparatory step for learners to expand their learning environment outside of class time. More CMC tools other than IM and emails, such as discussion forums, educational chat rooms, or even distant learning courses, are prevalent and available nowadays to the students of the e-generation. Based on the findings of the current study and pertinent literature, the advancement of technology should significantly empower EFL learners to join more rigorous forms of online learning.

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## Appendix A Questionnaire

### Background Information

1. Gender: ( )M ( )F
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Places where you use computers often: ( )Home ( )School ( )Internet Cafe ( )Other \_\_\_\_\_(please specify)
4. Length of time on the computer everyday: ( )less than an hour ( )between 1-3hours ( ) between 3-5 hours ( ) more than 5 hours
5. Activities you do online ( )IM ( ) playing online games ( ) browsing ( ) online learning ( )Others \_\_\_\_\_(please specify).
6. (Continuing the last question) Please also rank the activities that you chose from the above list from the most to the least frequent  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Cyber Interaction

1. I used ( ) email ( ) IM more often to contact with my American keypal.
2. (Continuing the last question) My reason was \_\_\_\_\_ .
3. At average, I emailed my keypal \_\_\_\_\_ times: (1)less than once (2) 1-2 times (3)3-5 times (4) everyday.
4. During the project, we interacted\_\_\_\_\_times: (1)1-3 times (2)4-6 times (3)7-12 times (4) more than 12 times.
5. Whenever I received the emails from my keypal, I was ( ) very excited ( ) stressed ( ) No particular feelings.
6. Whenever I got the emails from my keypal, I ( ) responded immediately ( ) discussed with my classmates before responding ( ) wrote when I am not busy.
7. After receiving an email from my keypal, I ( ) responded to every one of them ( ) I responded to most of them ( ) I sometimes responded ( ) I seldom responded.

8. I IM my keypal \_\_\_\_ times a week: (1) less than once (2) 1-2 times (3)3-5 times (4)everyday.
9. During the project, we interacted via IM (1)1-3 times (2)4-6 times (3)7-12 times (4) more than 13 times.
10. Every time when we IM, it usually lasted ( ) less than 10 minutes ( ) 10-30 minutes ( ) 31-60 minutes.
11. I \_\_\_\_\_ talked to my keypal via the voice chat on IM: ( ) never ( ) less than 5 times ( ) 6-10 times ( ) often.  
(If you answered “never” to the last question, please continue answering the following questions or please skip to Question 13)
12. I never used the speech function on IM to talk to my keypal, because ( ) I was afraid of speaking English ( ) I was nervous ( ) I preferred more time thinking when writing emails/messages.
13. I used the speech function on IM to talk to my keypal when ( ) s/he asked ( ) I initiated.
14. I used the speech function on IM to talk to my keypal, because ( ) I wanted to practice English ( ) it was fun ( ) It was too much trouble to type messages.
15. When I was on IM with my keypal, the problem(s) that occurred most often was : ( ) I could not understand the email. ( ) I did not know what to talk about. ( ) I composed/responded too slowly. ( ) I often wanted to go off the assigned topics. ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_  
(please specify).
16. The times when I could not understand the emails/messages from my keypal, it was because ( ) too much vocabulary ( ) too complex of sentences ( ) too many idiomatic expressions ( ) too much colloquialism ( ) too much net lingo ( ) lack of the cultural understanding.

(5-Very agree; 4-Agree 3-It's OK.; 2-Disagree; 1-Very disagree)

17. During our interaction, my keypal initiated most of the time.

5 4 3 2 1

18. Most of the time I could understand the emails from my keypal. 5 4 3 2 1
19. Most of the time I could understand the messages from my keypal. 5 4 3 2 1
20. There were not any communication problems. 5 4 3 2 1
21. The time difference got in the way. 5 4 3 2 1
22. I felt it was easier to talk to native speakers online than in person 5 4 3 2 1

### Strategies

23. During online communication, I often confirmed with my keypal to see if I understood her correctly, which I would not have to worry about if it was in person. 5 4 3 2 1
24. When there was a communication problem, I often ( ) ignored ( ) asked questions ( ) used different words/synonyms to confirm with her ( ) guessed within the context ( ) looked up in the dictionary ( ) asked others (you can choose more than one answer).
25. If I still could not understand her after I tried once, I would ( ) give up ( ) ask again.

### Writing Behaviors

- (5-Very agree; 4-Agree 3-It's OK.; 2-Disagree; 1-Very disagree)
26. When reading the emails/messages from my keypal, I only targeted general comprehension as opposed to checking with the dictionary all the time. 5 4 3 2 1
27. I would look up words in the dictionary when I could not understand something my keypal said in the emails/messages. 5 4 3 2 1
28. I often worried about misspelling words during our interactions. 5 4 3 2 1
29. I often worried that she could not understand me when I wrote emails/messages. 5 4 3 2 1
30. I would draft my emails first before sending it out to my keypal.

- 5 4 3 2 1
31. I would make sure that there were no grammatical errors in the emails/messages before sending them out. 5 4 3 2 1
32. I was worried about not typing fast enough in English. 5 4 3 2 1
33. When writing on computers, ( ) it got easier ( ) it was harder ( ) it didn't make any difference from writing on paper.
34. It usually took ( ) less than 10 minutes ( ) around 10-30 minutes ( ) around 31-60 minutes to finish writing an email.

### Learning Results

#### A. Performance

(5-Very agree; 4-Agree 3-It's OK.; 2-Disagree; 1-Very disagree)

35. I had a better understanding of the reading materials after discussing them with my keypal. 5 4 3 2 1
36. Through the online interaction, I learned a great deal of English vocabulary. 5 4 3 2 1
37. I learned many word expressions from my keypal. Those were usually not seen in the dictionary. 5 4 3 2 1
38. I learned more from my keypal than in class. 5 4 3 2 1
39. I wrote faster than before in English. 5 4 3 2 1
40. This project helped improve my overall English communication ability. 5 4 3 2 1
41. My keypal helped me a lot regarding my ( ) listening ( ) speaking ( ) reading ( ) writing in English.
42. Please also rank the aspects that you chose from the above list from the most to the least improvement \_\_\_\_\_ .

#### B. Motivation

43. The discussion topics suggested by my teacher were ( ) boring ( ) practical ( ) fun ( ) updated and trendy ( ) various ( ) weird ( ) too easy ( ) helping me practice the language



use I leaned before.

44. My favorite learning tasks among the three was ( ) Task 1 ( )  
Task 2 ( ) Task 3

(5-Very agree; 4-Agree 3-It's OK.; 2-Disagree; 1-Very disagree)

45. I felt that the online discussion promoted my willingness to do the reading assignments 5 4 3 2 1
46. I had a better intercultural understanding after online discussions. 5 4 3 2 1
47. I made my keypal understanding my culture better after online discussions. 5 4 3 2 1
48. This project promoted my willingness to communicate in English. 5 4 3 2 1
49. This project promoted my confidence of my English. 5 4 3 2 1
50. I liked to talk to people all over the world on computers in English. 5 4 3 2 1
51. I was not worried that my English for not being good enough to express. Myself. 5 4 3 2 1
52. This project offered me a fun experience. 5 4 3 2 1
53. I would stay in touch with my keypal after the project. 5 4 3 2 1
54. This project is a good way to learn English. 5 4 3 2 1
55. I liked this project, in general. 5 4 3 2 1

## **Appendix B**

### **Description of Tasks**

#### Task I: Write Emails for Different Audience

- You are writing an e-mail to your professor to explain about your absence from a midterm. Is this a formal or an informal e-mail, and how are you going to write this?
- You are writing an e-mail to invite some classmates who are really good at math, for a state/city project funded by Board of Education. Is this a formal or informal e-mail, and how are you going to write this?

#### Rubrics:

1. The formality of different styles being used appropriately.
2. The basic components and netiquette of e-mail writing.
3. The efficiency of the e-mails (they should help get your point/request across in an appropriate manner).
4. Each e-mail will be less than 250 words.

#### Task II: Writing an Invitation

Your father is asking for your help with drafting an invitation to Michael Dell ( the CEO of Dell Corporation). He is your father's boss. Currently he is visiting Dell's branch in Taiwan. Therefore, your father is inviting him to come to your house on mid-autumn festival gathering. Your father wants to show his hospitality on the behalf of his office. However, he doesn't know about Mr. Dell's likes and dislikes. In this invitation, you will help your daddy explain about this holiday, the occasion, the activities your family have planned, and some signature gourmet dishes your family will prepare for the big feast. Note though, Mr. Dell is a very important person. You will do your best helping your father draft this invitation.

#### Rubrics:

1. The venue, occasion, time...etc some basic components are included in the invitations.
2. Organization and the clarity of the e-mail.

3. Friendly introduction of the local culture.
4. The inter-cultural sensitivity toward an international person (make the use of Michael Dell's background).
5. Each e-mail will be less than 400 words

Task III: Airport Check-In Security

Step 1: Activate background knowledge by asking about travel experiences and the check-in process at either airline counters or gates.

Step 2: Get ready to take notes while watching the 6-min video clip. There are several key ideas introduced in the film, e.g., a photo I.D. and boarding pass are needed to pass the checkpoint. Pay special attention to the important information like this.

Step 3: Choose one of the following task products based on your language proficiency.

Write down the key messages conveyed in the clip. (Easiest level) Recommended!

Summarize the content of this video clip. (Intermediate) Strongly recommended!

Transcribe the whole video clip. (Advanced level) Optional!

Step 4: Checks the errors and reintroduce some keywords or expressions used in the video clip.

Step 5: Share your opinions with each other on why it is so important to have such a complicated security procedure in the airport.

Rubrics:

1. How well have you grasped the information from the video clip?
2. Did you understand the special vocabulary/expressions used in this topic?
3. What is the precision/accuracy of retelling the content (information) of the video clip by writing?