ABSTRACT
                This article aims to provide an overview of the various uses
for e-mail in foreign language learning. It describes the advantages that
have been referred to in the literature about the use of e-mail in foreign
language learning contexts and provides an overview of the different types of
contexts and possibilities for communicative interaction through e-mail that
have been attempted in and outside of the foreign language classroom and then
discussed in the literature. The pedagogical benefits of e-mail include the
following: extending language learning time and place; providing a context
for real-world communication and authentic interaction; extending topics
beyond classroom-based ones; promoting student-centered language learning;
encouraging equal opportunity participation; and connecting speakers quickly
and cheaply. Suggestions for incorporating e-mail into foreign language
classes include: group e-mail exchanges; intraclass and interclass e-mail
interaction; e-mailing independent groups outside of one's class; various
forms of one-on-one e-mail interaction, such as e-mail between the teacher
and the foreign language learner, between two individual foreign language
learners; and structured and unstructured exchanges. The most important
benefit of e-mail exchanges is its potential to offer learners opportunities
for much more valuable communicative interaction in the target language than
was ever possible in the traditional foreign language classroom. (Contains 38
references.) (KFT)

# E-Mailing in a Foreign Language: Learning Contexts and Possibilities

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E-mail, a form of asynchronous computer-mediated communication, has been called "the mother of all Internet applications" (Warschauer, Shetzer, and Meloni, 2000, p.3). Since the evolution of networks, computers can offer foreign language (FL) learners more than drills: "they can be a medium of real communication in the target language, including composing and exchanging messages with other students in the classroom or around the world"(Oxford, 1990, p.79). Indeed, FL teachers are just beginning to sense the impact this medium is having on their profession, through the careful examination and creative integration of this tool into their classes.

In a single decade, we have seen many innovative ideas for the use of e-mail in the FL classroom. Because there are so many, it is often difficult to keep track of what these innovations are and how they might benefit the language learner. This article aims to provide an overview of the various uses for e-mail in FL learning. In the first section of this article, we describe the advantages that have been referred to in the literature about the use of e-mail in foreign language learning contexts. Following the explanation of the possible benefits to FL learners, we provide an overview of the different types of contexts and possibilities for communicative interaction through e-mail that have been attempted in- and outside of the FL classroom and then discussed in the literature.

## Pedagogical Benefits of E-Mail

### Extends Language Learning Time and Place

As many researchers have noted, e-mail extends what one can do in the classroom, since it provides a venue for meeting and communicating in the foreign language outside of class. Because of the nature of e-mail, FL learners do not have to be in a specific classroom at a particular time of day in order to communicate with others in the foreign language. They can log in and write e-mail from the comfort of their own room, from a public library or from a cyber-café, and these spatial possibilities increase the amount of time they can spend both composing and reading in the foreign language in a communicative context. Rankin (1997) notes that the additional interaction in the foreign language provides FL learners with more input than they would be able to expect from class time, which typically amounts to not more than four hours per week in most high school or college settings.

### Provides a context for real-world communication and authentic interaction

By connecting FL speakers outside of the classroom, e-mail also provides a context for communicating with other speakers in authentic communicative situations. Interaction via e-mail lends a feeling of reality to students' communicative efforts that may seem artificial in a classroom setting. This communicative interaction is much like spoken language because of its informal and interactive nature; yet, unlike face-to-face

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communication, e-mail is in written form and this can serve the language learner well, as Schwienkorst (1998) stressed, "[t]he major advantage of written communication is ... the possibility for each learner to preserve the entire communication ..." and to have for future use "an enormous sample of his or her own efforts in the target language..." (p. 125).

### Expands topics beyond classroom-based ones.

Language teachers often have to follow a rigorous schedule in terms of content and/or grammatical topics to be presented and practiced in a semester or marking period. Large chunks of time can rarely be spared for free communication. E-mail gives learners an additional context for discussion that can be -- but does not necessarily have to be -- linked to topics being covered in class.

### Promotes student-centered language learning.

E-mail allows for communication between students in a context where the teacher's role is no longer at the center (Patrikis, 1995). In the e-mail communication, FL learners can experience increased control over their own learning, since they can choose the topic and change the direction of the discussion. The end goal is to communicate with another person in the FL rather than to produce a mistake-free composition.

### Encourages equal opportunity participation

Beauvois (1997) reported that computer-mediated communication increased total class participation to 100%. Others have noted that students reticent to speak in face-to-face contexts are more willing to participate in the electronic context (Beauvois, 1995; González-Bueno, 1998; Warschauer, 1995).

### Connects speakers quickly and cheaply

E-mail allows students to communicate with native speakers of the target language without the high cost of traveling abroad (Hedderich 1997; Roakes, 1998). Before the advent of the Internet, it was not possible to communicate so immediately and so frequently with native speakers or with other learners.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR INCORPORATING E-MAIL INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

The benefits of e-mail for foreign language learning and teaching presented above provide little fodder for debate. Indeed, most would agree that e-mail can provide a wealth of advantages to foreign language learners and teachers. In this section we present a wide variety of activities that have been used successfully by FL teachers. We have divided these activities into group and one-on-one e-mail exchanges.

## GROUP E-MAIL EXCHANGES

E-mail offers students a practical opportunity to interact with others in the target language. Students can create their own mailing lists or the teacher can set up a class e-mail list or listserv. Allowing interested outsiders to subscribe to a class e-mail list can

create additional opportunities for authentic communication with other target language speakers beyond one's own familiar classmates (Gonglewski, 1999).

Activities can be planned for use within a class or between two or more classes in different locations. Students can also join discussion forums outside of their regularly planned course. E-mail has been described as a conversational writing medium, a crossbreed language with elements of both written and spoken language (Moran & Hawisher, 1998). Because it is separated from face-to-face contact, the high pressure of such immediate demand for production is lessened, and learners can take their time formulating their thoughts, much like they might do in written composition. As decelerated conversation, e-mail communication "provides an excellent first step to help students prepare for the face-to-face classroom discussions as well as the more carefully conceived and polished written compositions instructors ultimately expect from their students"(Van Handle & Corl, 1998, p. 129).

**Intraclass e-mail interaction**

When the e-mail communication is kept within one class, the teacher can easily connect communicative tasks to the topic currently being covered in class and thereby extend the learners' communicative time and involvement with that topic. Instructors can design e-mail assignments as pre-class, post-class, or supplementary activities. In this section, we describe e-mail tasks that fit into these three categories.[1]

● Pre-Class Activities

Frequently it is difficult for students to engage in an activity in a foreign language class without preparation ahead of time. A pre-class e-mail assignment can take care of the groundwork and save valuable class time. Examples are given of ways in which the teacher might prepare students for writing, listening, and speaking activities.

E-mail can provide a context to prepare students for longer written assignments. The teacher can tell the students, for example, that their next writing assignment will be to write a brief biography of a famous person of their choice. Through e-mail exchanges the students can collaborate on a list of potential subjects for this assignment in order to save valuable class time.

Another way learners can use e-mail for pre-class preparation is to share background knowledge on a topic before a listening comprehension exercise. The teacher can provide students ahead of time with the subject of a listening comprehension lecture, e.g. the celebration of Thanksgiving in the United States. Before listening to the lecture in class, students can share via e-mail what they know about this traditional holiday, including their own personal experience or their questions about it.

E-mail is ideal for preparing ahead of time for class discussions. Ramazani (1994) tells of an activity called "The Weekly Essay." A few days before the class meets, his students e-mail each other essays that they have written about a particular reading. In this

way the students are better prepared for the class discussion of the essays. Ramazani (1994) uses another e-mail activity to prepare his students for class ahead of time. He asks them to submit short, one-sentence summaries of a reading. Next he organizes these ideas on a handout that he then uses in class for both brainstorming and stimulating class discussions.

Similarly, the teacher can assign a debate topic and ask the students to begin to discuss it via e-mail. When the time comes to form debate teams in class, the students will already have a satisfactory understanding of both sides of the issue and will be able to make a more informed decision about where they stand.

- Post-Class Activities

Teachers can create e-mail assignments to reinforce or extend what students have done in the classroom. This encourages students to revisit class discussions, giving them the opportunity to reiterate or clarify opinions expressed in class or to offer an opinion they were not prepared to express in class. In post-class e-mail activities, students can also utilize new vocabulary or structures that they were exposed to in class. Here we provide some sample activities following this line of thought.

Bauman (2000) provides an example of how he extended a conversation activity into a second class session by using email between classes. During the first class session, he gave his students a handout in which three criminal cases were described (including details of the crimes and suspects). In small groups the students discussed the cases and reached a decision as to the appropriate punishments for the suspects. As homework, he asked each student to write an original case and send it to him via e-mail. He then e-mailed two cases to each student with instructions telling them to study the cases and to decide the punishments before coming to class. In the second class session, students who had received the same cases got together and discussed their judgments and tried to come to an agreement as to the appropriate punishment. Overall, Bauman found the e-mail option effective. He writes, "By exchanging material between class, both the writing of material and the initial judgements about the material are done outside of class" (Bauman 2000, p. 55). Through such exercises, valuable class time is saved for face-to-face interaction.

Manteghi (1995) suggests another e-mail task to build on an in-class reading task. Students in her German class first read and discussed a German fairy tale, its features and linguistic structure. They then collaboratively created a fairy tale via e-mail, each student composing a new portion and adding it to the tale as his turn came. Here, a cooperative writing was made easy through this electronic medium, since writers could simply add their own text to the bottom of the story they received via e-mail and then forward it.

- Supplemental Activities

With e-mail, teachers can assign supplemental activities for which students are responsible but which are not directly linked to class activities.

One such supplemental learning activity is a reading circle. Many teachers like to encourage their students to do as much extensive reading outside of class as possible but find that there is not enough class time to discuss the readings. A solution is to have the discussion take place outside of class via e-mail. The teacher can divide the class into small e-groups of four or five students each. Then the students are given a reading (groups may be given the same or different readings). After they have completed the reading (e.g., a magazine or newspaper article, a poem, or a short book) or a part of it (e.g. a chapter of a book), they can e-mail their reactions to it to the other members of their e-group (Ron Corio, personal communication).

MacNeill (2000) has his students submit weekly summaries of news stories to a class e-mail list. Students share their opinions on the issues raised in the stories and relate these issues to their own experiences and/or to society in general.

**Interclass e-mail interaction**

Since e-mail makes time and space/place immaterial for fast and easy communication, teachers have also explored its use for communicative interaction between learners outside of the immediate language learning context, for example at another university, in another city, or even in another country. Such a context makes it possible to exchange ideas with a new audience and focus on communication. In this section we highlight collaborative projects between classes in different locations.

• Collaborative Projects: Focus on Reading and Writing Exchange

Van Handle & Corl (1998) report on an exchange between intermediate German learners at Ohio State University and Mount Holyoke College. The students in the two institutions exchanged e-mail over the course of one semester, to "promote participation and language skill development in the intermediate level classroom"(p.130). Students were assigned readings that they then discussed on a joint e-mail list. These e-mail contributions initiated and fed class discussion in the class periods and later became the basis for written papers. Instructors noted that participation increased in the class discussions for which students had prepared via e-mail with the other class. Some additional benefits observed included increased use of risk-taking strategies in class and experimentation with new vocabulary and structures introduced in the readings. In this context, both groups were still learning German and may have felt less intimidated than they would have if they had been interacting with native speakers of German.

Corio and Meloni (1995) report on the Guidelines Net Project that linked two EFL reading/writing classes at George Washington University and Virginia Commonwealth University. The classes had a common syllabus and common textbook, *Guidelines: Strategies for Reading and Writing* (Spack, 1990). Students were divided into Net Groups, comprised of three students from each university. In these groups they discussed the course readings and exchanged drafts of the writing assignments. Motivation was

high because of the need to write well for a distant audience. The improvement in writing skills over the semester was clear to the instructors and to the students.

- Collaborative Projects: Focus on A Joint Product

Andrew Hess of New York University designed the first "Cities Project." He brought together EFL teachers in three different US cities - New York, Washington, DC, and Richmond, Virginia. Students at each university were divided into five small groups of three students each. Each group then chose one of the following topics: Museums, Monuments, Historical Places, Restaurants, and Universities. Then each "local" group connected via e-mail with the two groups in the other cities that had chosen the same topic. These Net Groups discussed via e-mail how they would write their particular sections of the guide for their city. The students then did research for their pieces in their own cities and e-mailed drafts of their writing to their Net Groups. At the conclusion of the project, each teacher sent a photocopy of the individual city guide to the other two teachers who put all three guides together into one publication. The final product was a tri-city guide.

Two other "Cities Projects" followed. One involved EFL classes in New York, Hong Kong, Paris, Washington, DC and Trondheim, Norway (Meloni, 1995) and the other connected classes in Paris and Washington, DC (Meloni, 1997).

Ruth Vilmi, a professor of English at the Helsinki University of Technology, designed an ambitious e-mail project. Eleven teachers and 220 students from eight countries participated in the project. Students were divided into topic groups of eight students each (no more than two from the same university) and collaborated via e-mail on a research paper. Since then Vilmi has organized numerous e-mail and web projects for students around the world including the Robot Competition and the Environmental Project. (Complete descriptions of the projects that Vilmi has initiated can be found at her website http://www.hut.fi/~rvilmi)

Junghans (1995) describes another collaborative project in which two groups of English and German native speakers jointly composed a bilingual slang dictionary via e-mail. Each group acted as the authority on its native language and learned a great deal about the target language in the process.

**Independent Groups Outside of One's Class**

Students can also participate in group e-mail projects beyond regularly planned intra-class and inter-class activities. E-mail lists are very appropriate for more independent student group activities and allow students to explore language and topics outside of the purview of the instructor and a carefully planned curriculum. This type of activity can link students both to other native speakers and to other learners and increases input from a variety of sources.

In 1994 Holliday and Robb created the SL-Lists: International EFL/ESL E-mail Student Discussion Lists. The purpose of these lists is "to provide a forum for cross-cultural discussion and writing practice for college, university and adult students in English language programs around the world" (Holliday & Robb, n.d.) Students may sign up for one of the nine lists that currently exist: two general discussion lists (one for low level and the other for advanced students) and seven topic lists including business, current events, learning English, cinema, music, sports, and science, technology, and computers. Teachers can sign their classes up for the lists or, with permission, students can sign up independently. Interested teachers can visit their web site at http://www.latrobe.edu/au/www/education/sl/sl.html for complete information.

Teachers will find the List of Language Lists at http://www.egt.ie/langlist.html a useful resource for a variety of foreign language lists.

## ONE-ON-ONE E-MAIL INTERACTION

While e-mail interaction between groups is almost always motivating and productive, exchanges between two individuals can also provide a very valuable language learning experience that is potentially – indeed, almost unavoidably - more time-intensive and more personal. In this section suggestions are offered for one-on-one exchanges between the language learner and three possible partners: a teacher, a fellow language learner, and a native speaker of the target language.

### E-mail between the teacher and the foreign language learner

An exchange with the teacher "may serve as a transition toward the use of foreign language in a real-cybernetic-world context"(Gonzales-Bueno,1998, p.55). Gonzales-Bueno (1998) points out that in addition to building up learners' confidence in their language skills, "[t]he initial opportunities to interact in the foreign language via electronic communication, as offered to students by their foreign language teachers, may provide the necessary first steps to render the learner capable of navigating the Internet autonomously in a foreign language"(p.55). Thus, the secure environment through one-on-one e-mail exchange with the teacher helps learners gain self-assurance as well as experience using electronic media in the foreign language.

- Informal Messages

A teacher/student e-mail exchange can be simple and unstructured. Teachers can require that their students send them periodic e-mail messages. They must first decide on the frequency (e.g., once a week, once per chapter, twice a semester) and the content of the messages (e.g., course- or chapter-related, open). Linking the e-mail messages to course content encourages integration of new vocabulary and forms and also discourages overuse of the dictionary which can lead to frustration and discouragement. As teachers should respond promptly to the student messages, they should keep in mind how much time they would like to spend on the exchange and design the assignment accordingly.

- Electronic Feedback on Writing Assignments

Teachers can offer their students the opportunity to confer with them electronically about their writing. This possibility is very useful, especially when a class meets only once or twice a week. Students can e-mail their questions to the teacher, without having to wait for the next class session.

Students can also utilize e-mail to submit their composition assignments as soon as they are finished. The teacher can then make comments and return the assignments to the students electronically. The teacher's comments may have a more notable effect on students' revising process when the feedback is received shortly after the writing is completed.

- Dialogue Journals

The traditional dialogue journal carried out between teacher and student written in a paper notebook was and still is a popular way to assist students in developing their fluency in writing in the target language. The electronic dialogue journal offers the same advantages as the paper journal as well as additional ones, such as providing immediate response and saving time and paper. Teachers can require students to write one entry per week or one per lesson. They can require that the content be related to the current lesson or allow students to write on any topic they choose.

Writing only to the teacher through an e-mail journal provides a communicative outlet while keeping the language private. Gonzales-Bueno (1998) notes that "[s]tudents benefit from the advantages of a safe writing environment to communicate their messages while maintaining a conversational format"(p. 58). Another advantage to intensive communicating individually with the teacher at the early stages of language acquisition is the extent of authentic input and corrective feedback learners receive in this context as contrasted with the type of input learners would receive from the language and content their peers might send (Gonzalez-Bueno, 1998).

While the benefits of individual e-mail exchange with the teacher are obvious, the potential problems with such intensive e-mail communication must also be acknowledged. To begin with, student-teacher e-mail interaction might give the teacher a nearly impossible amount of work (Warschauer, Shetzer, and Meloni, 2000). While the student has one partner with whom to correspond, a single teacher could have as many as one hundred, and the responsibility to answer each e-mail – or even one per student per semester – would quickly become a formidable task.

Furthermore, the type of communication between teacher and student is likely to be different from that between peers. As evaluator, the teacher holds an authority that may skew the relationship and arguably also the communicative interaction. Students may pay more attention to form than content, knowing that the teacher's role is often to correct form.

There are, however, other alternatives that preserve the high level of feedback and input on an individual basis.

**E-mail between two individual FL learners**

The word coined for the partners in this type of exchange is *keypals,* i.e. penpals who correspond via the computer keyboard. Teachers contemplating the introduction of keypals into their curriculum will find Robb's (1996) online article, "E-mail Keypals for Language Fluency" very useful. Teachers can assign their students keypals who are in the same class or who are in a distant location. Needless to say, student motivation is higher when the keypals do not know each other and are unable to communicate face to face.

Teachers can find keypals for their students by consulting one of the many lists posted on the Web. They can visit, for example, Kenji and Kathleen Kitao's (2000) website, "Keypal Opportunities for Students." A teacher may also have a friend or acquaintance in another location teaching the same target language to students of the same age and proficiency level and can then set up a partner exchange.

The e-mail exchange can be very closely integrated into the course by basing the topics for discussion on the content of the curriculum. The partners would engage then in discussions that would further their understanding of course materials as well as improve their language ability. The exchanges can also be structured so that students have specific tasks to carry out with their partners that are not specifically tied to course content but that assist the language learning process and are enjoyable and challenging. Thornton (1997) suggests information gap activities. She describes one such activity: "Give each partner a different picture. Have the partners write and e-mail sentences or questions to find the similarities and differences between two pictures"(p. 73).

In the sections that follow we consider three types of keypal e-mail exchange: (a) between keypals learning the same target language; (b) between keypals learning each other's native language; and (c) between a language learner and a native speaker.

(a) E-mail between keypals learning the same target language

The question is frequently raised: How useful is it for learners of the same target language to engage in e-mail exchanges? Since their language is evolving, the learners will certainly make mistakes in accuracy, and some worry that they may learn each other's mistakes. In a form- or grammar-driven curriculum, where accuracy is the top priority and content is secondary, this concern may prove too daunting to the teacher for her to allow for the free communication (and error production) that can take place on e-mail.

If, however, one believes that authentic communication is first and foremost a *negotiation of meaning* between communicators, then it is indispensable to encourage FL learners to practice communicating with each other, in spite of their formally imperfect language, in unplanned, unscripted, unrehearsed contexts. Only in this way will students

learn how to function in the language as they will eventually need to do in the foreign culture.

This same question arises in FL classrooms where instructors encourage learners to interact, asking students to form small groups for conversation, to make oral presentations, or to review each other's writing. While learners' oral and written production is not always formally accurate, learners benefit from interacting in communicative situations with other learners and, in the end, can even learn from their peers' mistakes. This holds true with e-mail. Though admittedly oral-like, e-mail is an asynchronous written medium, which allows not only for more time in preparation but also more time in comprehension. The 'frozen' language can be printed out and studied for grammatical or content-based input. In order to avoid unintelligible messages or ones with a high number of mistakes in an elementary e-mail exchange, Livesey (1995) had students print out incoming messages and write a draft of a reply that the class would rework together.

(b) E-mail between keypals learning different target languages: Language learning in tandem

To some, the ideal for a language learner is to communicate with a native speaker. Unfortunately native speakers are not always motivated to carry out an exchange with learners. While the benefits for the learner are obvious, the native speaker might question what she will gain from the experience.

A "tandem exchange" offers an interesting alternative. In this type of exchange individuals are studying each other's native language and, therefore, they play both the role of native speaker and of language learner. The most important principle of tandem learning is that the exchange must be mutually beneficial to both learners. Each learner serves as the native speaker or "expert" of the language that the other is currently learning. Therefore, using the native language is key, because in doing so, "the learner provides an important model to his or her partner. If both provide this kind of modeling, both sides benefit"(Hedderich, 1997, p.142).

In tandem exchanges learner autonomy plays an equally essential role; learners themselves decide the ground rules for the exchange, i.e., "what they wish to work on and how they want to go about improving each other's foreign language skills"(Hedderich, 1997, p.142).

*A French-English Tandem Exchange*

An example of a tandem exchange is that carried out between JP, a native speaker of French living in France, and C, a native speaker of English living in the US (Meloni, 2001). The two learners met on the listserv of the French-English subnet of the International E-Mail Exchange Network (cf. Benenson, 1997; Brammerts, 1995) and began a one-on-one correspondence. They established no fixed schedule but they tended to exchange e-mail messages once or twice a week. Each message that JP and C wrote

was bilingual, half in French and half in English. The focus was more on content than on form; however, they did occasionally ask each other language questions or point out recurring or irritating language errors.

*An English-German Tandem Exchange*

Söntgens (1999) describes several tandem e-mail exchanges that took place between British and German university level students. Responding to the difficulty students had in working autonomously, he introduces the concept of "double-tandems" which paired up two sets of partners in e-mail correspondence. While the innovations eliminated problems in typical tandem arrangements (e.g., one partner slacking off in writing), the double tandem created some confusion regarding guidelines on the order and frequency of correspondence with the different partners and who should correct whom (Söntgens, 1999).

(c) E-mail between an individual foreign language learner and a native speaker

Being involved in an e-mail exchange with a native speaker may be the most advantageous type of exchange for a language learner, since, while maintaining the unrehearsed communicative context, learners receive plenty of authentic target language input from their exchange partner. In this context, the learner's comprehension can soar. In addition, teachers have reported that language learners writing to native speakers are more eager to self-correct their own grammar because the communicative aspect motivates them to make themselves understood (Kendall, 1995).

Such exchanges can be unstructured or structured. Three descriptions of unstructured exchanges and one structured exchange follow.

**Unstructured Exchanges**

*Spanish Learners and Native Speakers of Spanish*

An individual e-mail exchange was conducted between Spanish learners and native speakers of Spanish in Mexico (Leh, 1999). The U.S. students voluntarily linked up with university students in Mexico studying math, and the topics for discussion were left up to the students. While the quantitative results of the study indicated no significant difference in the skills of students who wrote e-mail and those who did not, qualitative results indicated that the exchange motivated learners by providing personal interaction and creating a cultural connection to the target language culture. Leh (1999) strongly recommends that e-mail exchanges be integrated into course instruction so that instructors can link course content and daily class work to the questions which can be posed in the correspondence with the native speaker.

*A German Learner and A Native Speaker of German*

In their work entitled "Language Learning via e-mail: Demonstrable success with German," St. John & Cash (1995) describe an individual e-mail exchange between a native German speaker and an English speaker over a period of almost six months. Prior to the study, the learner's proficiency in German was at the novice level. During the study, the learner attended a weekly German intermediate class. The e-mail correspondence was conducted only in German and developed into discussions about hobbies, work, different mentalities, stereotypes, and private lives.

The evaluation of the study is very positive, noting that the learner made enormous progress. By the end of the exchange, he had gained confidence in the target language and was able to produce longer and more elaborate sentences using idiomatic expressions in the right context and correct grammar. His style had become more sophisticated and he was no longer falling back into literal translation of the mother tongue.

The learner was also able to use the appropriate register and an increased vocabulary. He writes,

> It was obvious to me that I was using more vocabulary, better phrases, and I knew what I was copying ( except for typing errors on either side) was correct.. The German I encountered via e-mail was harder in my opinion than that of the course, and it was never interrupted with English. Also the course was only two hours, once a week, whereas at times I was writing e-mails nearly every day (p.196).

*A Learner of French and A Native Speaker of French*

A learner of French in the United States engaged in an intensive e-mail exchange for a period of six weeks with a native speaker of French in Paris. The primary purpose of the activity was to improve the learner's French, in particular her fluency. No specific guidelines were given to the participants except that the exchange had to take place completely in French and that the minimum number of messages per participant per week was to be five. The focus was to be on the content, not the form. The native French speaker made no explicit corrections, only some explanations on the meaning of words were given when requested.

At the end of the e-mail exchange, a team of researchers carried out an error analysis of the messages of the learner of French. The results of this analysis showed a steady improvement of the learner's ability to communicate in the target language. The conclusions were very similar to those of the German project. The grammatical errors decreased significantly, the sentences became more complex, and the vocabulary more accurate and varied. It appears to be obvious that such an informal and spontaneous exchange of messages contributed to giving the learner more confidence in using new

structures and expressions, either by copying from the native speaker or by creating her own sentences with a better feel for the language (Brant, Gonglewski, & Meloni, 2001).

## Structured Exchange

*Japanese Learners and Native Speakers of Japanese*

Ishida (1995) initiated an e-mail exchange between native English speakers learning Japanese and Japanese teachers in training. In this exchange, the students of Japanese sent their compositions via e-mail to an individual teacher in training, who returned the essays with corrections and personal messages. Aside from increasing the motivation of the learners on both ends, this project benefited the language learners by providing them with authentic feedback from a communication partner, and it benefited the teachers in training by giving them "concrete practice in responding to students' writing"(Ishida, 1995; p. 186).

## Conclusion

While e-mail is now already considered a relatively "low-tech" medium, it can bring effective benefits to the process of learning a foreign language. The most important benefit is its potential to offer learners opportunities for much more valuable communicative interaction in the target language than was ever possible in the traditional foreign language classroom.

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[1] An electronic mode that allows for synchronous rather than asynchronous communication via computer that is increasingly incorporated into foreign language classrooms is Chat. (For further information on Chat in the foreign language classroom, see Beauvois, 1995, 1997; Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1995.)

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