Chapter 11
Social Presence Functions in Task-Based Language Activities in a Virtual Classroom in Second Life

Sedat Akayoglu
Abant Izzet Baysal University, Turkey

Golge Seferoglu
Middle East Technical University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

As the developments occurred in terms of technology, new tools and platforms started to be used in classroom settings. However, there is a need for discourse analysis of these tools and environments in order to better understand the flow of communication. This study aimed at determining discourse patterns in terms of social presence observed in a course carried out in a 3D environment, Second Life. At the end of the study, it was found that the most frequently used social presence functions were expression of emotions, vocatives and asking questions respectively; the least frequently used social presence functions were phatics and salutations, referring explicitly to the others’ messages and quoting from others’ messages. The findings of this study were found to be in parallel with the literature. This study might be helpful for researchers, educators and students in order to better understand the contexts created in 3D virtual worlds.

INTRODUCTION

The pedagogy has always been influenced by the technology of its era. In earlier times, the use of audio tapes, cassettes and videos in classrooms were considered as a revolution and new methods and approaches emerged as a result of the technological developments. In today’s world, the rapidly changing and developing technology is the Internet without any doubt. The reflections of this development and spreading of the technology, computers and the Internet are so obvious that educators cannot ignore the
use of the technology in classroom settings. Based on the recent developments, researchers, educators and teachers are trying to integrate computers into the classroom settings, the institutions are equipped with technological devices and teachers and learners are expected to utilize technology in teaching and learning process. As a result, the ways students learn and teachers teach have changed a lot. There are many differences between the traditional classrooms and a classroom that is supported with technology or virtual classes. However, as Kern (2006) stated the effects of technology use depend on how it is used, who uses it and what is used. Thus, it cannot be claimed that technology affects teaching and learning processes in a positive or negative way; but we can easily state that it has changed the pedagogy a lot.

In addition to the effectiveness of technology in education, the interaction among the learners in a foreign language classroom is quite crucial for learning. Instead of just measuring the outcome of the learning, the process should also be studied in order to see how students interact with each other and with their teachers. This issue has been studied in real classrooms; however, the investigation of online platforms has become quite important with the emergence of technological tools into the classrooms.

In this study, it was aimed at determining the patterns of discourse produced by the advanced learners of English at an English medium university in Turkey, an EFL context, in a virtual environment called Second Life in terms of social presence. This study focused on the data obtained by means of text-based computer mediated communication (CMC) and the findings of this study might help the researchers, educators, teachers and learners to better understand what is happening in these environments in terms of social presence.

**Background**

The most commonly used tools in language teaching are Web 2.0 tools, which enable ordinary Internet users to become the authors of the Internet. They could design web pages, create the content of the web, and communicate with other users of the Internet. It is possible to share the content very easily by means of Web 2.0 tools. New online tools like blogs, wikis, podcasts and virtual classes are considered as the sharing platforms. Briefly, it could be mentioned that all users are the creators of the content on the Internet and the authorship is quite important.

Although there are many Web 2.0 tools used in learning environments, the most developed one is 3D virtual worlds as they include audio-visual elements, enable users to create his second lives through avatars, and help them to experience many things that they cannot do in their real lives. Users can come together with the native speakers of the target language and organize discussions. They can visit many places like hotels, cities and buildings virtually and they have the chance to discover these places in a 3D environment. They can even touch the objects and interact with them. 3D environments have been used since the early 1990s; however, the most developed version was started in 2003 and its name is Second Life. Before SL, there were some other 3D environments like Active Worlds and Quest Atlantis; however, they were not as good as SL in terms of visual quality and when compared to SL and they looked much simpler. In addition to this, voice based messaging is not available in either of these environments. Nevertheless, these features of SL require better computers in hardware and this is one of the disadvantages of SL.

Second Life is a 3D environment in which there are users from all over the world and users join through the avatars. It is possible for users to create and design buildings in this environment. Moreover, it is not required to create something, users can also walk or fly around and communicate with other users.
Related Content

Integrating Technology on Initial Training Courses: A Survey Amongst CELTA Tutors
www.igi-global.com/article/integrating-technology-initial-training-courses/53801?camid=4v1a

Do Students Wish to ‘Go Mobile’?: An Investigation into Student Use of PCs and Cell Phones
Simon Bibby (2013). *Explorations of Language Teaching and Learning with Computational Assistance* (pp. 306-317).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/students-wish-mobile/67477?camid=4v1a

Chinese Students' Perceptions of Using Mobile Devices for English Learning
www.igi-global.com/article/chinese-students-perceptions-of-using-mobile-devices-for-english-learning/117192?camid=4v1a

Vocabulary Learning and Consolidation with Mobile Application
www.igi-global.com/article/vocabulary-learning-and-consolidation-with-mobile-application/109833?camid=4v1a