

# Cyberdiscursive Tug-of-War: Learner Repositioning in a Multimodal CMC Environment

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Computer-mediated communication (CMC), defined as “communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers” (Herring, 1996: 1), has been viewed by proponents of its use in language classrooms as a tool for enabling greater amounts of interaction among students (Kern, 1995; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Warschauer, 1997). Challenging this stance is a body of research on CMC interaction outside the classroom which has demonstrated that interaction in virtual environments is not unaffected by gender and social inequality (Hall, 1996; Selfe & Meyer, 1991; Yates, 2001). At the same time, however, elements of this virtual and dynamic environment may provide some interlocutors with tools for mitigating these social inequalities.

To this end, this paper reanalyzes data collected during multimodal (synchronous voice and text-chat) computer-mediated task-based interaction between two English language learners, a Korean woman and a Japanese man, to investigate their use of the multiple modes of CMC to renegotiate their positions. What appeared to transpire during this 20 minute exchange was a near reversing of positions. By relying on the text-chat mode to ensure that her contributions were acknowledged and remained in visual memory, the initially less dominant member was able to gain a foothold in the conversation and shift to the more dominant position. Analysis of excerpts from the interaction also indicated a gradual shift from speaking to writing as both participants contributed their respective information to arrive at a task solution.

**Key terms:** cyberdiscursivity, computer-mediated communication, positioning, discourse analysis

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