Unpacking Students Chit-Chat In Messenger: Why English Is Missing In Action

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Abstract: The demand for communicative competence in the English language motioned Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach's inclusion in Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications. Remarkably, several MALL applications enable users to communicate with other language learners and teachers, and native speakers worldwide through instant messages, and audio or video chatting. Likewise, instant messaging (IM) applications such as Facebook Messenger served as an avenue for communication for students. Both MALL applications and Facebook Messenger assist and enhance the learning of their analogous demographic through their similar features. If MALL applications and Facebook Messenger have comparable features and users, can Facebook Messenger foster CLT approach too? However, according to Appel and Pieter (1987, as cited in Besa 2013), an overview of the language situation must be obtained before any further steps can be taken. Henceforward, the study aims to unpack students' chit-chat in the Messenger application to determine why conversational English is missing in action. The study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to present the lived experiences of fifteen English Major students situated in three existing group chats. The participants' personal information is not to be disclosed in lieu of the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The recorded data from the observation and interview supplied responses and insights to the themes that emerged, the materialization of New London Group's modes of communication, the language used by the students, and the circumstance of English in the students' chit-chat. The study found that conversational English was underdeveloped and displaced by conversational code-switching. The pervasiveness of conversational code-switching can be attributed to actuation of the group chats as online learning community that promoted a shared context and natural language.

Keywords: code-switching, instant messaging, learning community

1. Introduction

The demand for communicative competence in the English language motioned a shift from grammar-based to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Traditional approaches that focus on structure and form were preferred in language classrooms; however, for its failure to develop learners' communicative skills in the target language, language teachers have gradually acknowledged the strength of the CLT approach [1]. Henceforward, the need for communicative competence brought alternative ways to employ the CLT approach, predominantly using mobile devices. Mobile devices conform as the extension for learning tools that enable a new ground for learning, especially for ESL learners. The use of mobile devices in the context of learning has been given the acronym of MALL, which stands for Mobile Assisted Language Learning [2]. Remarkably, several language-learning applications allow users to interact with native speakers through chats and video calls. Reference [3] asserted that the effectiveness of these applications by describing its purely social environment that contributes to its effectiveness. The rise of social media websites, on the other hand, also has an eloquent influence

on today's generation, including the mode of education. Since online platforms are different from a face-to-face set-up, users tend to use instant message (IM) for chatting academic and non-academic related matters. These instant messaging (IM) applications include the most well-known feature of the Facebook application, Messenger. However, they are often unconscious of their language usage while communicating with their peers. Today, everyone knows the importance of learning the English language, but they do not know how and when it should be practice. If Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) applications and Facebook Messenger have the same features and users, does that mean that Facebook Messenger can foster Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) too? However, according to Reference [4], an overview of the language situation must be obtained before any further steps can be taken. Henceforward, the study aims to unpack students' chit-chat in the Facebook Messenger application to determine why conversational English is missing in action. The researchers did not disclose the participants' identity in compliance with the Republic Act No. 10173 or known as the Data Privacy Act in the Philippines, a law that protects all forms of

information, including personal, private, and sensitive contents.

The researchers sought to answer the questions:
1. What themes emerged in the students' chit-chat in the Facebook Messenger application?
2. What New London Group's modes of communication were materialized in the students' chit-chat in the Facebook Messenger application? In terms of visual, linguistic, spatial, aural, and gestural.
3. What is the language used by the students in their chit-chat in the Facebook Messenger application?
4. Where is English in the chit-chat of the respondents?

The study will be beneficial to future educators, as it will provide a resolution with the practice of the English language. In addition, the results will offer insights to teachers and professors about activities or platforms that promote the language learning of the students. The study will be of great support as related studies and reference for future researchers.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants
The researchers used the purposive sampling technique under non-probability sampling to choose the participants of the study. The subjects were chosen based on their availability or purpose of the study, and in some cases, at the sole discretion of the researcher [5]. Thus, the study administered 15 participants who were divided into three existing group chats, experiencing a phenomenon significant to the study. The researchers considered participants who were taking Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English at Rizal Technological University-Pasig Campus during the second semester of the academic year 2020-2021.

2.2 Design
The nature of the study was qualitative with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself [6]. The researchers ought to understand why the English language is missing in students' chit-chats in the Facebook Messenger application. Thereby, the New London Group's five modes of communication were also employed in this study. It is the concept of comprehending information and creating meaning through the manipulation of different modes, such as visual, linguistic, aural, spatial, and gestural meaning. Each mode has a unique characteristic that is used to create meaning, communicate, and represent knowledge and ideas [7]. The researchers used its notion to determine how its manifestation affected or enriched the communication between the participants of the study.

2.3 Materials
The researchers employed observation and held an interview session to obtain data for the study. The responses from the interview allowed the participants to speak for themselves, providing multiple perspectives while the recorded data of the students' chit-chat for one week provided the basis for the researchers' statements.

2.4 Procedure
Three existing group chats were used in this study. The first group chat constituted of six participants (Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, Student 4, Student 5, and Student 6), the second group had five participants (Student 7, Student 8, Student 9, Student 10, and Student 11), and the third group chat was made up of four participants (Student 12, Student 13, Student 14, and Student 15). The researchers observed a session of live chat among students that transpired during asynchronous and synchronous classes as well as during their spare time to accommodate the definition of chit-chat. The observation period was from the 24th of February to the 2nd of March 2021. A structured interview was held by the researchers in the Facebook Messenger application a week after observation. The researchers did not disclose the participants' identity in compliance with the Republic Act No. 10173 or known as the Data Privacy Act in the Philippines, a law that protects all forms of information including personal, private, and sensitive contents.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Emerging Themes in the Students' Chit-chat

3.1.1 Academic Tasks
The theme of academic tasks involved the participants asking for updates, raising queries, and sharing encountered problems to their co-participants about their academic tasks. The following were sample statements used by the participants to initiate and develop the theme: "Di ko mabuksan google docs ko sa phone" [I can't open the Google Document in my phone.] (Student 2), "Anong pagkakaintindi nyi dito?" [What did you understand from here?] (Student 3), "Hii Guysuu. Yung Poem kay Sir diba iaanalyze lng un?" [Hi, guys. The poem given by Sir is just going to be analyzed, right?] (Student 5), "may ipapasa ba ngayon kay sir???" [Is there any activity that we are going to pass to Sir today?] (Student 10), and "Pano nyo gagawin yong activity 5.2?" [How will you do the activity 5.2?] (Student 14). Most of the participants recalled participating in the discussion of academic tasks and asserted asking updates, queries, and encountered problems from their co-majors. Student 7 and 9 stated that they "ask for updates" to be "updated from time to time." The same need for updates was mentioned by Student 15, yet she "received few answers" from her co-participants. Student 3 commented that she mostly discussed academic concerns in the group chat and asked questions for she wanted to know if she "missed something in the instruction," on the other hand, Student 6 sought "to be enlightened." The discussed theme roused from the participants' need to be informed and guided with their activity's instruction after the initial instruction of their professors in both synchronous and asynchronous classes.

3.1.2 Asynchronous and Synchronous Class Schedules
The theme of asynchronous and synchronous class schedules included the participants' regular inquiring and updating of their class schedules in their corresponding group chats. The following were sample statements from the recorded observation: "Guys be ready. Mag sesend na ako ng Link" [Guys, be ready. I'll be sending the link.] (Student 3),

"Feeling ko walang class" [I have a feeling that we don't have a class.] (Student 4), "(forwarded a link)" (Student 7), "Send link nlng ah" [Kindly send the link, okay?] (Student 8), and "Wala pang link no?" [There is no link still, right?] (Student 14). The theme of asynchronous and synchronous class schedules was also much recalled by the participants as they commented that they asked for updates about their class schedules and synchronous class' link regularly. Student 1 commented that "most of the time yun yung tinatanong sa GC namin" [most of the time, that's what we ask in our GC]. Student 4 noted that they are not sure if they would have class on certain days so she would ask "if the professor won't have a class or if he would... have a class during that period." As a result, group chats of the participants contained numerous links for a meeting in various video conferencing platforms. Student 5 confirmed this as she stated that "dun kami naglalagay ng schedule and updates" [we put our schedules and updates in there]. The probable fixation of the participants on this theme is provided by Student 13 as she disclosed that she does not want "to miss any classes." Correspondingly, Student 14 revealed that missing a class is a "laking kawalan" [big loss].

3.1.3 Developing Camaraderie

The theme of developing of camaraderie involved sharing of notes and reviewers, teasing co-majors, and checking their well-being or routine. The following were statements from the observation's recorded data: "pisti HAHAHAHAHA nakaka lift up ng spirit" [What a pest; it lifts up my spirit.] (Student 1), "MISS KO NA MATULAK SA TRIC" [I miss being pushed in the tricycle.] (Student 5), "MGA NAATWAG UNDAW MGA YUNYAMAN SA FUTURE" [Those who have been called would be rich in the future.] (Student 8), "ano ulam niyo" [What's your viand, guys?] (Student 10), and "Basta sama sama tayo" [We should be all together.] (Student 12). The participants stated that they are at ease with their co-majors. Hence, teasing them and sharing of academic-related information and materials were to be expected. Students 3 and 6 stated that they are at ease with their co-majors for "we are like sisters in our squad" and "we are close" respectively. Student 4 said that they practiced the sharing of notes to "help our friends in answering or if they do not attend to the class." The sharing of academic materials was illustrated by Student 11 with her statement of "if our professor shared his/her PPT is too fast and some of us can't follow during discussion, we would ask somebody from the group message if they have notes or screenshot of the lesson." As a result, certain students like Student 14 acted as "the one who is sending or providing the resources or the files."

3.1.4 Concerns About Professors

The theme of the concerns about professors contained the complaints and appeals that the students were not able to tell their professors in person. The following statements contained the participants' input in the theme: "Si sir feeling priority kaloka" [Sir feels like he's a priority. This is crazy.] (Student 2), "Kasi naalala ko nung nagtanong si (classmate's name) kung paper yun, nabara lang sya ni sir" [I remember when (classmate's name) asked if it is a paper, Sir just ridiculed him/her.] (Student 3), "Ang gulo kasi daning ideas na binibigay ni sir" [It's confusing because Sir kept on giving ideas.] (Student 6), "Lahat mmn ng pinapasukan nya nag papa leave yan" [All of his/her class involved kicking a

student out.] (Student 8), and "Ang gulo kase ni mam sana ineexplain muna bago pasagutan asap" [Ma'am is unpredictable. She should have explained it first before asking us to answer ASAP.] (Student 15). When interviewed, Student 1 openly commented that her co-majors would rant in their group chats to "ilabas nya yung galit or inis just like that" [release anger or irritation, just like that]. Correspondingly, Student 14 admitted that she ranted because their professors were "giving us too much assessment or task—giving us too much load." Student 15 also disclosed that she partook in the theme as she "shares what's on my mind with regards to this." Relatedly, Student 8 and 13 sequentially disclosed that "after Zoom or GMeet, we talk about it," especially "if the professor assigned some activity within that day." The emergence of this theme may be answered with Student 2's statement of "we have concerns about all our professors." The emergence of the themes revealed how the participants' group chats in the Facebook Messenger served as an online learning community or online study groups, wherein the students were constantly in touch with each other and were reminded of their education. Student learning communities are often cited as a high impact practice in efforts to improve student success in higher education [8]. Reference [9] argued that IM conversation offers a means of sustainable peer support among undergraduate students through digitally mediated communication and collaborative activities that cross formal and informal boundaries.

3.2 Materialization of New London Group's Modes of Communication

3.2.1 Visual Mode

The visual mode of communication refers to the images and characters that people see [10]. The recorded data from the observation showed that the participants were able to experience sending and receiving this mode of communication through images of themselves, screen shot of their devices, graphics interchange formats or GIFs, emojis, and their classes' materials. Student 4 noted that pictures and memes "convey the message that we want to say." Correspondingly, Student 14 stated that she used pictures "in different purposes." As an illustration, Student 6 noted her use of visual mode for informational and entertainment purposes by sending "screenshot of some announcements with regards to our assignments, activity etc." and using her classmate's pictures "for making memes for our group chat only." On the other hand, Student 9 and 3 revealed that "it's easier to convey a message through pictures" especially if "kapag hindi na namin kaya i-explain" [we can't explain it anymore].

3.2.2 Linguistic Mode

The linguistic mode of communication refers to written or spoken words and it includes word choice, the delivery of written or spoken text, the organization of words into sentences and paragraphs, and the development and coherence of words and ideas [10]. The recorded data from the observation showed that the communication in the Facebook Messenger application heavily relied on written communication. Student 6 asserted the abundance of written texts as she and her co-majors "used written words through our chat to convey our messages." Student 3, on the other hand, disclosed their comfortable and "informal way of

talking" stemming from "intimate relationship as friends." Student 5 also mentioned conversing in a language that have "mga words na kami lang nakakaintindi" [words that only us understand]. Similarly, Student 8 disclosed that "they tell whatever they want even if it's nonsense" in their group chats. Student 14, on the other hand, noted that their group chat is "more into casual conversation" as they "no longer think of the grammar."

3.2.3 Spatial Mode
Spatial refers to the arrangement of elements in space. It involves the organization of items and the physical closeness between people and objects [10]. In the recorded data from the observation, spatial mode of communication entailed the digital layout and organization of the written texts and of the group chat itself. The three groups of participants utilized varied themes of the Facebook Messenger application in their chit-chats. On the contrary, Student 2 and Student 3 claimed that the spatial mode of communication is non-existent as "we are utilizing… online communication," and "we are only communicating in Messenger." Relatedly, Student 6 claimed and there is "no physical closeness" as "we don't meet personally and physically" respectively. On the other hand, Student 14 referred to another kind of "closeness" to be seen "on the way we are talking to each other."

3.2.4 Aural Mode
The aural mode of communication focused on sound including, but not limited to, music, sound effects, ambient noises, silence, tone of voice in spoken language, volume of sound, emphasis, and accent [10]. The recorded data from the transcription included transcription of voice messages. When interviewed, most of the participants spotted the aural mode of the application as they exchanged voice messages and engaged in video calls. Student 2 noted that their voices "are often energetic" in video calls since "we're always prepared to talk to each other especially when we have something or to gossip about." On the other hand, Student 10 and 12 respectively stated that they used voice messages to "tell our opinions" and add-on "explanation about the specific topic." Correspondingly, Student 1 and Student 9 disclosed that they are more likely to use the aural mode "kapag ka may gusto silang iexplain na mahaba tapos hindi kaya… ng written reply" [when there is a long matter that they want to explain, but they can't… in a written reply] since "it's tiring to type messages especially if you are telling a story."

3.2.5 Aural Mode
Gestural refers to the way movement is interpreted. Facial expressions, hand gestures, body language, and interaction between people are all gestural modes [10]. It works with linguistic, visual, aural, and sometimes even spatial modes in order to create more detail and communicate better. The recorded data from the observation included the exchange of images, emojis, and voice messages, as well as the employment of the reaction feature of the Facebook Messenger application. Likewise, Student 2 and 5 commented that during their video calls they "show different gestures…and movements" and "nakikita ko naman mga facial expression nila" [I can see their facial expressions] respectively. Student 3 and 4 mentioned that they utilize video calls to discuss "about the groupings in reporting" and

"clarify something that we don't understand." Student 14 also asserted the manifestation of the mode in video calls. However, she said that "madalang lang kaming magvideo chat kasi madalang yung internet, so emojis can do and GIF" [we don't usually video chat since the internet is unstable, so emojis and GIF can do]. The recorded data from the observation reflected that even though there are varied modes of communication, the participants were able to make meanings out of them and have a smooth flow of chit-chat as they actuated the group chats as online learning communities. The recorded chit-chat showed their immediate feedback and transmission of social cues in a personalized platform. Reference [11] have found that both text and IM are useful and viable tools to augment the communication among peers and faculty in higher education. In a multimodal sense, modes such as audio, visual, or spatial do not only expand, exemplify, or modify the linguistic meaning but work simultaneously in representing meaning in order to empower the way people communicate [12]. Hence, the presence of multimodality further affirmed the actuation of the group chats as online learning community.

3.3 Language Used by the Students in the Chit-chat

3.3.1 Conversational Code-switching
The data from the recorded observation showed that the participants used their first language (Filipino) for most of their chit-chat alongside with insertion of a few English words. This occurrence is called code-switching. Code-switching is the practice of alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation [13]. The following were statements taken from the recorded data of observation that showed the participants' utilization of code-switching: "Guysss may plano na po, ta-type ni student 8 pero mag call tayo, for ony 20 minutes para ma explain, mga 1 pm po ahh" [Guys, we have a plan. Student 8 will type it but we first need to have a video call that will last for only 20 minutes. The meeting is around 1 PM, okay?] (Student 7), "Mag recorded nlang tayo dto kay sir para play nlng ng play" [Let's just record a video for Sir so we can just play it.] (Student 8), "Sama ako wala ko alam schoopll here" [Let me join. I don't know any school here.] (Student 13), "Mag popost daw si Queen about don" [Queen said that she would post something about that.] (Student 14), and "Lets go with san juan nalang" [Let's just go with San Juan.] (Student 15). When interviewed, Student 4 stated that she tends to code-switch during the times that "hindi ko siya ma-explain in English" [I can't explain it in English]… I would transfer it in Filipino then that's it." On the other hand, Student 6 and 9 remarked unconscious practice of code-switching as they stated that "I don't even notice that I'm combining both the phrases and the words" because "that is how we communicate with each other even in a face-to-face basis." Moreover, Student 7 and Student 3 stressed that they "cannot avoid code switching" as "there are here are phrases or words that do not have a direct translation in L1 or L2." Some reasons why people use the method (code-switching) is for them to convey thoughts and concepts that might be easier to explain using that specific language, to fit in with a group, and sometimes a force of habit [14]. On the same vein, Reference [15] found that communication media that support simultaneous communication of any sort, whether they use voice or text, would be expected to foster the creation of shared context, and hence favor codeswitching.

3.3.2 Underdeveloped Conversational English

The recorded data from the observation also showed use of the English language when Student 3 reminded the other participants with their activity by sending: "Technical Communication * Each group will present a manual in introducing their groups. *Each member must contribute by providing individual information in every category. *Be Creative in creating your manuals. Categories: 1. The best ways to communicate with us. 2. The times and hours we like to work. 3. Things we love, 4. Things we struggle with. 5. Other things to know about us. 6. Personal advices for myself." Also, Student 8 informed the other participants in her group about their distribution of tasks by sending: "Reporting MOTIVATION (Student 7 –Student 8) Defining Stories (Student 9) Define different genres. (Student 11) Different types of short stories (Student 8) (Freystag pyramid) Student 7   Applying the choosen story (novel) In element of story -Characters, setting, theme, ETC. (Student 10) COMPILING OF PPT THURSDAY (march 4, 2021)." Lastly, Student 14 constructed a message to be sent to a professor and asked the other participants to check her planned message comprising: "Good morning, Ma'am. Are we the one who will process our internship in the school that we will be choosing po? How about the branch that we will be residing po in 4th year? Is it still in pasig or boni?" As the participants made ample use of conversational code-switching, English was shown to be limited in their chit-chats. However, the utilization of English in the recorded data cannot be considered as conversational English as they were no turn-taking. A turn is the basic unit of conversation [16]. Relatedly, Reference [17] sustained that there should be an exchange of views, a dialogue, that consists of connected remarks. Hence, conversational English in the chit-chats of the participants was underdeveloped. However, the participants claimed to practice conversational English when interviewed though their explanations from the said practice may be alluded as misperception of conversational code-switching as they periodically insert English words and phrases in the chit-chats. The participants of the study are non-native speakers of the English language and regard English as their second language. Reference [18] stated that all language learners are natural translators because they map L2 directly on the mother tongue to shortcut the process of learning. Relatedly, Reference [19] said that language learners have to respond to the requirements of life and function as translators in everyday situations. The current study did not examine the cognitive function of the participants, but it is probable that the substantial use of the conversational English required translation or preparation. Hence, the participants' natural language in their chit-chats involved conversational code-switching instead of conversational English.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings above, the researchers were able to found the following:

1. The study revealed that the participants were mostly concerned with their academic lives and used group chats as an online learning community platform.
2. The researchers discovered the participants' understanding of the various modes of communication in Facebook Messenger. It demonstrated their immediate feedback and social cue transmission in a tailored avenue. It also affirmed the actuation of the group chats as an online learning community platform.
3. Conversational code-switching pervaded in the chit-chat of the participants. Its pervasiveness can be attributed to actuation of the group chats as online learning community that promoted a shared context and natural language.
4. Conversational English was found to be underdeveloped and displaced by conversational codeswitching, denoting that it is not missing.

5. Recommendations

The researchers extend the following recommendations in relation to the important points found in the study:

1. The researchers thrust the merit of employing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach through conversational English to promote the language skills of the students. The supposed use of conversational English in Facebook Messenger will promote the communicative competence of the language learners outside the classroom.
2. The study revealed that conversational code-switching is used by the participants in chit-chat in Facebook Messenger. With this, further study about the language used in online communication is suggested.
3. Lastly, the researchers recommend the current study to be used as a related study and references for future researchers.

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Author Profile

Jonalyn Abad was the secretary of the Supreme Student Government in high school, a member of the Sports Writing Journalism club, and even a varsity athlete in Sports Volleyball. Throughout her academic years, she participated in a variety of extracurricular activities, gaining knowledge and experience. She is now an aspiring educator who strives to better herself for the sake of her future students. She intends to enter the field after graduation and pursue a master's degree in language or something related to it.

Joeza Aquino was an active and leading member of various student organizations in her junior and senior high schools, such as the school paper and Supreme Student Government. During her college years, she dedicated her service to the office of the College of Education in RTU-Pasig. Her academic life centered on establishing academic excellence and providing service to the institution to which she belonged. At present, her interest in the English language fuels her desire to be a language teacher and aspiration to study the interdisciplinary fields of linguistics.
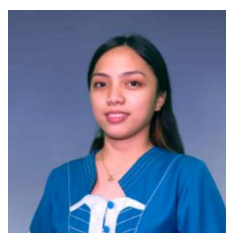
Claire Joy Arcillas graduated with honors from RTU-Pasig Senior High's academic strand Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). She decided to pursue a career in education after completing her basic education, which was a departure from the path she had previously chosen. She is currently preoccupied with completing the requirements of her major courses. Her plan was to graduate, then take the Licensure Examination for Teachers and possibly pursue a Masters degree.

Jasmin Clarianes, because of her love in dancing back in Senior High, became a member of a dance troupe in RTU called Kultura Rizalia Dance Troupe. She has numerous hobbies such as watching movies, playing mobile games, etc. Having the dream of becoming a flight attendant, she is doing her best to finish school and lend a helping hand on her family.

Rimma Datiles, throughout her academic journey, was able to serve her co-students as a former Secretary of the Supreme Student Government (SSG) in her senior years, a former Secretary and Vice-Chairperson of the College of Education Student Council (CEDSC) Pasig Campus. She has been an active officer, a science writer of Campus Journalism in her previous Alma Mater, with this, she was able to compete in district, division and regional level press conference. At present, she is pursuing her passion to be a future English teacher.