Email communication and language learning – an Australian case study

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a project involving the use of email exchanges between non-native speakers (NNS) in the Italian program at the Australian National University (ANU). Approximately eighty students, spanning beginners' to advanced level, participated in two iterations of a one-to-one email conversation in 2000. The underpinning rationale for the use of email was to promote interaction in the foreign language. We describe the language and content of the messages constructed by students in terms of the following features:

- the effects of email conversation on participation and engagement of the learners
- the effects of the spatial, temporal and psychological distance inherent in email communication
- the hybrid nature of electronic communication which is situated between written and spoken discourse
- the relationship of the formal and content aspects of electronic communication
- the creativity in expression of the language produced.

We discuss the ramifications the use of email communication can have for teaching and learning languages.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present study is to offer a reflection on the specific traits of text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) (in this case, email) in the context of foreign language learning in order to further the discussion of both its pedagogical implications and of online language learner behaviour, an area as yet not fully explored (Roed, 2003, p. 157, n. 2). After a description of the rationale and context of the study, we focus on certain aspects of CMC. In particular we consider:

- the effects of email conversation on participation and engagement of the learners
- the effects of spatial, temporal and psychological distance on the type of communication produced in the electronic context;
- the hybrid nature of email messages which sit somewhere between written and spoken discourse;
- the relationship between form and content;
- the creativity in expression of the language produced.

Restrictions of space make it necessary to focus the discussion on these issues. Future work will explore other aspects such as the effect of the virtual presence of teaching staff, the role of prior linguistic knowledge and language learning experiences, and the relationship between NNS-NNS versus email communication between native speakers..

2. RATIONALE

One of the perennial difficulties for teachers of languages is how to encourage interaction successfully between learners in the target language. This is especially problematic in a context such as ours where the majority of learners all share a common language (English). The need to address the problem of limited oral interaction between students in language classes, most notable in the initial stages of all courses regardless of level, provided us with a motive for considering alternative means of communication. We opted for email for two reasons. First, in the current climate of technologisation of education, some form of text-based CMC seemed appropriate. Due to its ubiquity and general

familiarity, we chose to incorporate the use of email into the teaching program across *all* levels of Italian. Second, since *all* students of Italian were to be involved, the asynchronous features of email, as opposed to either synchronous CMC or real-life meetings, were seen as more attractive.

Sproull & Kiesler describe certain aspects of email communication which are highly relevant to a teaching and learning context which aims at fostering interaction. In their words,

Ordinarily when people communicate, they aren't just exchanging information, they are projecting an image of themselves. This knowledge can make them shy in front of others, especially those whose respect they most desire. Ephemerality and plain text in electronic mail reduce the fear of appearing foolish in front of others. By removing reminders of a possibly critical audience, electronic mail induces people to be more open. (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991, p. 42)

They go on to raise a very important consideration relating to the social context of CMC, noting that "communication technologies weaken social differences apparent in face-to-face communication" (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991, p. 43). This social levelling is crucial in a teaching and learning context because interaction in language classes is often hampered by students' perceptions of their classmates: for example, "I can't possibly speak Italian in front of those people". Roed supports this position when she describes the electronic environment as one in which "there are no immediate [negative] reactions such as giggles or raised eyebrows" (Roed, 2003, p. 170).

Turning to the specific context of languages education, in the last ten years the use of email communication has been successfully integrated into the teaching of languages at university level (Warschauer & Kern, 2000; Chapelle, 2001). This has profoundly altered the dynamics of interaction creating a learning environment which can be characterised as interactive and collaborative as well as student-centred (Warschauer, 1996; Spina, 1998; Porcelli & Dolci, 1999; Leahy, 2001). Through the use of email communication, an increasing number of scholars argue that students can exercise and acquire the target language in an authentic, motivating environment which offers real communicative goals. (Beavois & Eledge, 1995; Warschauer, 1996; Porcelli & Dolci, 1999; Fedderholt, 2001). Shyness, embarrassment, difficulty or fear of expressing one's self – even in first language – represent considerable hurdles to successful language acquisition and use. Email or networked communication represents a means of interpersonal communication which, due to its physical and/or temporal characteristics can reduce these psychological barriers (Richards & Rogers, 1986; Sullivan, 1998; Roed, 2003). Kitade (2000, p. 147) supports this position noting that quiet learners are more expressive in CMC contexts compared with face-to-face interaction and that the "absence of authority" in CMC facilitates equal interaction due to a lack of intimidating non-verbal cues. Stockwell (2003, p. 38) summarises a range of advantages associated with the use of email based on previous studies. These include increases in motivation due to interaction with a real audience, reduction in stress through anonymity, opportunities for authentic communication, increased participation and development of learner autonomy. It is also possible that students feel more comfortable interacting in CMC because there is no fear of bad pronunciation. A colleague and moderately successful language learner commented that, for her, text-based CMC would be an attractive mode of interaction

precisely because no one can hear your errors of pronunciation and hesitations. Roed elaborates a similar position when she claims that “if...the language students e-mailed...their anxieties would immediately be reduced. Worries about peculiar accents – their own or the person they are addressing – are no longer an issue, and they are not present when the recipient comments on the grammatical blunders” (Roed, 2003, p. 158). Our supposition that the quasi-universality of email made it a viable and technically simple choice was confirmed. Indeed, almost all the students who participated in our project were technically capable of and familiar with communicating using email. The technical characteristics of email render it very appealing in a teaching and learning context. Namely, email allows a person to reply directly to the sender while conserving the sender’s entire original text. This facilitates dialogue in a way not dissimilar to conversation but with the advantage that each participant can decide independently on the pace and their own rhythm (Bertocchi 1999; Porcelli & Dolci 1999). Furthermore, the various “turns” can be preserved in the email allowing learners to go back and review earlier messages, providing valuable stimulus for reflection. This is a distinct advantage over oral communication which is fleeting and is not generally preserved.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

When we designed the email exchange exercise, we did not initially intend to treat it as a research exercise but rather as a moment of innovative teaching and learning. However, once we began collecting the exchanges for assessment purposes we realised that we had stumbled upon a rich source of “data” which led us to pose questions about the type of communication and language learning activities the students were undertaking.

Unsolicited evaluative comments made by students signalled to us the value of the exercise and the importance of writing up our observations.

During the course of the exchanges, clear research questions began to emerge. In looking back at the various email conversations, we decided to explore the following points:

- how does email communication affect the participation and engagement of the learners?
- how does the asynchronous nature of email impact on communication?
- What are the effects of distance, both physical and psychological?
- Is email communication written or spoken language, or something entirely different?
- What is the relationship between the form and content of email messages?
- What type of language is produced?

All these questions lead inevitably to a consideration of the ramifications that the integration of text-based CMC has for the teaching and learning of languages.

4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Once we realised that we would use the “data” in a research context, we sought the appropriate release to publish the exchanges from the students. We felt this was necessary because the students wrote about themselves to varying degrees in personal tones.

5. CONTEXT

The email exchange exercise consisted of two interactions of up to 5 dialogic exchanges. The first email exchange took place in weeks 4-6 of semester 1. The second interaction was held in the last weeks of the semester. At ANU, there were two semesters of 11 weeks, with the academic year following the calendar year as is normally the case in Australian universities.

6. PARTICIPANTS

The exchanges took place in semester 1 (March-July), 2000 and involved approximately 80 students across four levels (Introductory, Continuing, Intermediate, Advanced) in the Italian program at the ANU.

7. PHASES

The exercise consisted of three distinct phases.

1. Email exchange initiation

To initiate the email exchanges, a mailing list was created to which all students were subscribed by one of the instructors. Each student sent an introduction of themselves in Italian to the mailing list. These approximately 80 introductory emails arrived in the inbox of each participating student.

2. Choosing messages for the first email interaction

Students then chose the message/messages to answer and this gave rise to the first virtual dialogue with another student. This exchange took place between students via their institutional or personal email accounts, not through the mailing list.

3. Second email interaction

The second email interaction could either be a continuation of the earlier dialogue or a new virtual discussion with a different student. As a means of beginning a new dialogue, we suggested sending a review of a film/book/CD to the mailing list and then choosing the messages to answer as in the earlier dialogue.

8. ASSESSMENT

We decided to dedicate a percentage of the final mark for each level of Italian to the email exchange exercise both to motivate student participation and to ensure maximum participation in the email project. Here we invoke Ramsden's (1994:185) principle of using assessment to "encourage interest, commitment, and intellectual challenge". Each interaction was worth 5% of the overall mark to make up a total 10%. In assessing the exchanges we wanted to emphasise communication and creativity in expression and avoid the perception that the email messages could be reduced to a simple exercise of grammar. Consequently, the exchanges were evaluated with reference to a set of four criteria which was communicated to the students at the start of the project. The criteria were: communication, clarity, cohesion and correctness. We weighted the first three criteria at 30%, while the final one made up the remaining 10% of the first 5% of the overall mark. Communication, clarity and cohesion relate to the purely communicative aspects of the messages and what we were looking for in concrete terms were features such as:

- Messages which invited dialogue: not just simple statements but requests for information;
- Dialogues which demonstrated communication: clear questioning and answering; shared development of ideas;
- Topics which continued over the duration of the exchange.

Correctness referred specifically to issues such as morphological and orthographic accuracy and particularly in cases where communication was hampered.

Following the first series of email exchanges, it became clear that the four criteria were not sufficient to capture the differences in depth of content apparent across the exchanges. We therefore decided to add a fifth criterion: content. The percentages were subsequently reviewed and each of the five criteria was weighted equally at 20% of the

second 5% of the overall mark. We took both a quantitative and a qualitative approach to assessing this fifth criteria in the sense that we opted to mark more favourably contributions which were both more sustained and wider-ranging in content. Typically, these more successful exchanges focused on personally developed topics not limited to textbook style exchanges, such as descriptions of age, family, university study, etc. We also considered it appropriate to increase the weighting of correctness from 10% to 20% of the overall mark in the second exchange given that by the time the students undertook the second exchange they had all practically completed at least one semester of formal study of Italian.

9. DATA COLLECTION

The textual nature of email communication greatly facilitated data collection. All the introductory emails sent to the mailing list were automatically forwarded to the teaching staff and subsequently saved. At the end of the semester, all project participants submitted their exchanges in electronic form. The exchanges were saved in chronological order, easily accessible and available for consultation at any moment, saving time and space.

10. DISCUSSION

In this section we discuss our findings in relation to the research questions posed at the beginning of the article. Where appropriate, we have included examples taken from the email exchanges. These are provided both in their original form (i.e. in Italian) and with English translation. In our translations we have not attempted to represent spelling infelicities, grammatical irregularities or other idiosyncracies. We do, however, highlight these when relevant to the discussion.

11. PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE

Baron (1984) notes that one of the most significant social effects of CMC is a higher degree of participation with respect to oral interaction. Furthermore, she observes that many students feel more comfortable with CMC than when communicating orally. Roed (2003), almost 20 years later, reaffirms this situation. The implications that this can have for languages education are obvious and notable in relation to the current study. In our case, email communication allowed some of the shyest students, who never would have initiated a communicative exchange spontaneously, the chance to interact in Italian without the fear of embarrassment in front of the whole class. It is worth noting that a number of the least outgoing students produced messages of considerable length and expressive creativity.

In her study of the language of electronic diaries of students of Spanish, Gonzales-Bueno (1998) highlights that the act of writing that occurs outside that class context – at home or in the language lab – creates a physical and psychological distance which can be beneficial in the way in which it leads to a wider variety of topics and linguistic structures.

Evidence of the perception of physical/psychological distance can be seen in the introductory messages of a number of mature age students which include a comment on their age as well as an explanation of their motivation for studying Italian:

<i>Mi chiamo D^l. Sono una studente vecchia (!!) Non studio per una laurea, imparo l'italiano solo. Studio la lingua</i>	My name is D. I'm an old (!) student...I'm not studying for a degree, I'm only learning Italian. I study the language
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<i>perche mi piace la cultura e la storia d'Italia. Vorrei andare in Italia per un periodo lungo e visitare le piccole citta, e la campagna....</i>	because I like the culture and history of Italy. I'd like to go to Italy for an extended period and visit the small cities, and the country...
<i>Mi chiamo J. Dopo aver letto altri messaggi, vedo che non sono la sola vecchia donna all'università!! Coraggio alle altre !! Ho quaranta-qualcose anni..... Studio l'italiano perche siamo andati in Italia 1995 e mi e molto piaciuto la lingua, la cultura la gente.</i>	My name is J. After reading the other messages, I see that I'm not the only old lady at uni. More power to the others!! I'm forty-something years old...I'm studying Italian because we went to Italy in 1995 and I really liked the language, the culture the people.
<i>Mi chiamo R le vieux perchè sono il più vecchio studente d'italiano del mondo. Studio l'italiano perchè sono un po' pazzo. Alla mia età è molto difficile. Ho già studiato il francese un po' e sto studiando anche il latino. Voglio parlare l'italiano per conoscere degli italiani e forse per viaggiare in Italia. Ma studio la lingua anche per scoprire la letteratura italiana. Per me, la letteratura di un paese è spesso una buona finestra attraverso la quale posso guardare una società particolare.</i>	My name is R le vieux because I'm the oldest student of Italian in the world. I'm studying Italian because I'm a bit crazy. At my age it's very difficult. I've already studied French a bit and I'm also studying Latin. I want to speak Italian to get to know the Italians and perhaps to travel in Italy. But I study the language also to discover Italian literature. For me, the literature of a country is often a good window through which I can observe a particular society.

We can say that the electronic environment created the necessary distance for the students to feel free to proffer observations of a highly personal nature which they may not have expressed either in traditional writing exercises or conversation classes. These comments can be considered a positive outcome of the less anxiety-ridden atmosphere created by the electronic medium.

In relation to the physical distance noted above, it is possible to identify a series of metalinguistic traits which are not found in traditional class-based writing. The fact that the students could communicate when and where they preferred was reflected in the use of greetings and salutations which differ from those used in traditional written exercises

<i>Finero' qui perche ho niente dire, ed anche devo andare in biblioteca studiare per gli esami</i>	I'll finish here because I have nothing to say, and I have to also go to the library to study for my exams
<i>...e' tardi e ho sonno</i>	it's late and I'm tired
<i>Vado – ho lezione in uno minuto!</i>	I'm off – I've got a class in one minute!
<i>Sono le nove di mattina e ho lezione di storia l'arte fra poco!</i>	It's nine in the morning and I have an art history lecture soon!

These expressions are very similar to comments one would find in the course of a typical telephone conversation – the writer feels the need to describe her personal situation to the interlocutor (Bertocchi, 1999) – it's as if the writer is speaking in real-time with their

interlocutor. Indeed, Roed describes synchronous CMC as “a medium somewhere between a telephone conversation and a letter” (Roed, 2003, p. 169). We would make the same assertion for email communication. Furthermore, this style of communication underscores the success of email as a way of promoting dialogue.

It is also worth noting the frequent recourse to elements which contextualise a virtual physical and temporal space shared by the participants who understand that their messages can be received immediately:

<i>Ci vediamo martedì</i>	See you Tuesday
<i>Ci vediamo in giro!</i>	See you round!
<i>...ci vediamo a lezione d'italiano.</i>	...see you in Italian

11. EFFECTS OF ASYNCHRONICITY

The inherently asynchronous nature of email communication allows students individually to choose when and where to compose/respond to messages according to their personal situation and motivation. (Warschauer & Kern, 2000). This possibility encouraged the participation of the whole gamut of students from the highly motivated to the timid.

Furthermore, the fact that students had time to think about and construct their responses allowed them to produce a more personal style of dialogue than they could in the context of classroom oral interaction, where the time to reflect on each contribution is necessarily limited. Due to its asynchronous nature, email seemed to have positive effects on the language produced by students who, in most cases, would have had the opportunity to consult dictionaries and textbooks prior to sending their messages. This was clear from messages in which we observed a higher level of grammatical organisation, stronger cohesion and a better progression of ideas with respect to in-class oral interaction. The following introductory message from a first year beginner, after only four weeks of lessons, demonstrates these aspects. The presence of the conditional mode and past tense forms (underlined in the original), which had not yet been taught in the course, lead to the conclusion that the student has consulted a textbook or other source in composing his introduction.

<i>Vorrei mi presentare a tutti studenti d'italiano d'ANU. Mi chiamo WH, e ho ventitré anni; sono studente universitario. Habito a Canberra in una grande casa con la mia famiglia - la madre (che si chiama J), il padre (R), la sorella (W) e il fratello (P). Questo è il mio primo anno d'italiano, ma non è il primo anno di studio universitario. Ho già <u>finito</u> i miei studi di matematica, e questo anno insegno un po' alla questa università.</i>	I would like to introduce myself to all the students of Italian at ANU. My name is WH, and I am 23 years old, I'm a university student. I live in Canberra in a big house with my family - my mother (whose name is J), my dad (R), my sister (W) and my brother (P). This is my first year of Italian, but it's not the first year of university study. I've already finished my studies in maths and this year I'm teaching a bit at this university.
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It is possible that students had fewer distractions and the chance to check, rewrite and correct their messages before sending (Baron, 1984; Warschauer, 1999; Lapp, 2000) since the asynchronicity of email would support this. From the analysis of the exchanges, it is clear that in many cases students referred to the dictionary or textbook to verify the correct usage of lexis or grammar before posting their contributions. This is most apparent in messages which contain words, forms or expressions which had not yet been covered in formal instruction. For example, one student used the idiomatic expressions *È*

una domanda spinosa (It's a thorny issue) e *sbagliando si impara* (You learn from your mistakes). Another used *forme alterate* such as *vocabolarietto* (little dictionary) and *erbaccia* (weeds). One student explicitly describes her use of the dictionary:

<p><i>Parli dei verbi greci - beato te!</i> <i>"Eleipthen??" - mi sembra che si abbia bisogno di un "lisp" per parlare greco antico (come con lo spagnolo). Ho cercato la parola giusta di "lisp": il dizionario da "lisca", ma quando faccio il rimando, come sempre, "lisca" significa "fishbone"! (Matteo, aiutami!)</i></p>	<p>You talk about Greek verbs – lucky you! “Eleipthen??” - it seems to me that you need a “lisp” to speak Ancient Greek (like with Spanish). I looked up the word for “lisp”: the dictionary gives “lisca”, but when I check the Italian side, as I usually do, “lisca” means “fishbone”! (Matthew, help me!)</p>
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This comment serves to confirm the hypothesis that asynchronous communication has positive effects on the language produced and on the strategies students use in their language learning. Students not only have the opportunity to make use of a wider set of language-related resources (dictionaries, text books, etc.) but can also reflect *together* on particular lexical, syntactic, grammatical, pragmatic, etc. aspects of the language under instruction.

The bracketed request for assistance, directed to one of the instructors, can be taken as an index of the empowering nature of email communication. While it is clear that we have an extension of the classroom environment, we also see a shift in the power relationship between student and instructor. The student, in this case, is quite comfortable and direct in requesting help. This is perhaps not an unexpected development which needs to be factored into the choice to use CMC. It also highlights the student-centredness of the activity.

12. HYBRID COMMUNICATION: WRITTEN-SPOKEN

The hybrid nature of email communication is revealed by examining the aspects which relate to written versus oral interaction.

Written communication	Oral interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formal accuracy – morphological, syntactic, lexical • discourse coherence • progression of ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unconventional use of punctuation and capital letters • high frequency of questions • use of expressions from spoken language

While the written aspects relate mostly to structural issues, the oral characteristics are clearly an attempt to make the communication both interactive and expressive. In some senses, the unconventional use of punctuation and other written symbols serves to compensate for the lack of visual cues. The analysis of the exchanges reveals that students made use of this hybrid type of communication to develop a type of oral-like interaction which would have been less possible in a classroom context either due to shyness or fear of making mistakes, or to perceptions of unequal standing within the ecology of the classroom. As we indicated in the opening of this study, previous work has shown that CMC promotes interaction due to a levelling of power differentials owing to the lack of visual and other cues which serve to reinforce hierarchies (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991; Roes, 2003).

Baron holds that the use of email influences not only the range of ideas expressed but also the way in which they are expressed (Baron, 1984). As noted above, the

asynchronous context clearly has the advantage of allowing students to fully develop their ideas resulting in messages which are more grammatically complex and coherent from a structural point of view. Baron's conclusions are confirmed by Harrington & Levy (2000) who describe how the abilities which characterise communicative competence in an oral context manifest themselves very differently in an electronic context. It is however important to note that when students communicate electronically the style of interaction appears more spontaneous and natural, and in many ways more similar to a conversation when compared with other forms of written communication. This observation is confirmed by many studies which have examined email communication. Maynor (1994) and Bertocchi (1999) conclude that email communication represents a convergence between written and oral modes. Indeed, they describe how written conventions are subverted to better evoke a type of oral interaction. This includes a simplified orthography, emphatic or expressive use of upper and lower case letters and punctuation (for instance, exclamation marks).

Referring specifically to the current project, we noted that the convention of beginning each sentence with a capital letter was generally respected. Shield (p.c) points out that this could, in fact, be due to an automatic feature of the email editor the students used. Notably, no student abbreviated or simplified words, not even at advanced levels. Both of these features may reflect student perceptions of what is important for assessment requirements. In general, punctuation was conventional, however we did observe the consistent use of exclamation marks to convey emotional load.

Weininger & Shield (forthcoming) present a frame for analysing CMC discourse which usefully extends the notion of using the spoken/written dichotomy. Referring to a German study by Koch & Oesterreicher, they propose a "model which places all types of linguistic production on a continuum ranging from the language of proximity (*Sprache der Nähe*) to the language of distance (*Sprache der Distanz*)". In this framework, the horizontal axis moves from proximity to distance both figuratively and in space and time while the vertical axis covers specific communication contexts and coding strategies. This multidimensional model can represent in a more sophisticated fashion the relationship between email discourse and other modes of communication. In their discussion of MOO-discourse, Weininger & Shield conclude that "both MOO-discourse and oral communication are indeed located close to each other, towards the proximate end of the continuum". To this end, MOO-discourse has more in common with oral communication than written discourse. Although, further investigation is required, we surmise that a similar case would hold for NNS email communication.

13. EXPRESSIVITY

We noted above that punctuation is frequently employed in email communication to convey emphasis. Kitade comments that a "noticeable feature of [CMC] is the absence of non-verbal cues" (Kitade, 2000, p. 152). She identifies recourse to "a question mark '?' to express uncertainty, ellipsis '...' to show hesitation, smiley marks ':-)', etc. to show one's feelings, and capitalization or quotation marks to recast or emphasize a certain work/phrase of utterances". "Experienced participants", she continues "appear to compensate for such a lack of non-verbal cues using creative signals" (Kitade, 2000, p. 152). In our data, these methods for expressing that a message was "emotivamente carico" (Bertocchi, 1999) or emotionally charged are present. In the examples below we see the use of exclamation marks, capital letters and repetition to add colour:

<i>Ho bisogno di una macchina!!</i>	I need a car!!
<i>Sono in vacanza!!! Non ho lezione!!!</i>	I'm on holidays!! I don't have classes!!!
<i>Povero me!!!!</i>	Poor me!!!!
<i>...ho una presentazione domani e due test!!!!</i>	I've got a presentation tomorrow and two tests!!!!
<i>Guardo due possume (POSSUMS??!??) nel granaio.</i>	I see two possums (POSSUMS??!??) in the loft.
<i>...perchè c'è la classe alle nove il giovedì – alle nove – madonna!</i>	...because there's the class at nine on Thursdays – at nine – Mother of God!

However, expressivity is not only limited to typographical manipulations but also, and in our view more significantly, to the use of particular expressions which students have acquired in class, found in their text-book or simply copied from other emails they have received.

From the textbook

<i>Sono in ritardo.</i>	I'm late
<i>Sono una ritardataria!</i>	I'm a latecomer.

From other sources

<i>Scrivo questo alle ore piccole</i>	I'm writing this in the wee hours
<i>Ero giovane e pronta a tutto!</i>	I was young and ready for anything!
<i>Modestia a parte...</i>	Modesty apart...
<i>...perchè ho una montagna di lavoro.</i>	...because I have a mountain of work
<i>...ma e' una domanda spinosa...</i>	... but that's a thorny issue...

All of the above appears to be an attempt to lend tone and feeling to a medium of communication which is intrinsically decontextualised – you do not see your interlocutor face to face, nor hear their voice or intonation as in an oral interaction. It could also be argued that students sought to compensate for the lack of gestural possibilities given that Italian is stereotypically recognised as a language which features this.

A notable example of creative expression can be seen in the following introductory message which carried the title “sex” in the *subject* field. This first year student clearly wished to attract the attention of the other participating students in order to begin an online interaction. The recourse to a catchy title came about after her first message had been ignored.

Subject: SEX... Date: Tue, 28 Mar 2000 07:00:21 GMT Cari studenti d'italiano Scusi, la pubblicità falsa - questo l'email non discutere 'sex', ma descrivere mi. Che peccato!	Subject: SEX... Date: Tue, 28 Mar 2000 07:00:21 GMT Dear students of Italian Excuse the false publicity – this email doesn't discuss “sex”, ma describes me. What a pity!
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14. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORM AND CONTENT

The analysis of the emails exchanged allows us to reflect on the relationship between form and content. We note that in the emails which are less elaborate and less structured from a stylistic standpoint, the content is in general more banal and superficial, with little development or elaboration of ideas. Messages of this type were mostly (but not exclusively) exchanged by students in the beginners' level who had not yet developed the

complex linguistic structures required to communicate and express themselves with originality and flair. In the case of more elaborately structured messages, we note a larger range of lexical choices as well as improved originality and coherence of content. There was greater continuity between the messages exchanged resulting in logical and coherent discussions of notable quality. We therefore identify a typological distinction between “pro forma exchanges” and “elaborate exchanges” as illustrated below. In the following exchanges, spelling mistakes are *italicised* and grammatical problems (such as lack of agreement, incorrect word order, use of incorrect form, etc.) are underlined.

Pro forma exchanges

Exchange 1

<p>Ciao a tutti!! Questa lettera e in ritardo- mi dispiace! Mi chiamo KR e ho <i>diciannove</i> anni. Abito a Fenner Hall- <i>e</i> molto pazzesco! Studio la storia <i>del</i> arte e l'italiano- <u>mi piace queste</u>. <u>Anch</u>'io studio la legge- <i>e</i> molto noiosa e <i>difficile</i>. Ho padre, madre e una sorella. Si chiama E- lei <u>e</u> molto <u>felice</u>. Ho due fratelli. Si chiamano M e L. Ho un cane- si chiama J- <u>lei e</u> molto stupida ma <i>curina</i>. A <i>piu</i> tardi, KR</p> <p>Buon giorno K, Mi chiamo EB (L). Ho venti anni. <u>Sonno Canberra</u>. Abita con <u>mia madre e padre e sorella</u>. Mia sorella si chiama R. <u>Lei quattordici anni</u> <i>Studo</i> l'italiano, la chimica, la biologia e la geografia a ANU. La chimica <u>e</u> molto difficile e non interessante. Lavoro <u>la Canberra teatro</u>. Io <u>molto amore mia posto</u>. Ciao, a <i>piu</i> tardi, L</p>	<p>Hi all!! This letter is late- sorry! My name is KR and I'm 19. I live in Fenner Hall- it's very crazy! I study art history and Italian- I like these. I also study law- it's very boring and difficult. I have a father, mother and sister. She's called E- she's very happy. I have two brothers. They're called M & L. I have a dog- her name is J- she's very stupid but cute. See you later, KR</p> <p>Good day K, My name's EB (L). I'm 20. I'm from Canberra. I live with my mother and father and sister. My sister's called R. She's 14. I study Italian, chemistry, biology and geography at ANU. Chemistry is very difficult and not interesting. I work at the Canberra theatre. I love my job. Bye, see you soon, L</p>
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Exchange 2

<p>Ciao, Mi Chiamo LS. Sono in ritardo. Ho <i>diciassette</i> anni. Abito a Canberra, <u>ma da sono</u> di Sydney. <u>Abito Canberra otto anno</u>. Studio italiano, <i>scieze</i> politiche, l'inglese e <u>europa studia</u>. Ho cinque <i>fratella</i>, e tre <i>sorrella</i>, <u>sono molte grande famiglia</u>. Io lavoro <u>all liberia</u>, Angus & Robertson woden. Ciao.</p> <p>Ciao L! Mi chiamo D e ho diciannove anni. Dove a Canberra abiti tu? Abito a Curtin con mio padre. Tua famiglia e' molte grande, <u>ti piace tutti tui</u> fratelli e sorelle? Le scienze politiche sono <u>difficile</u>? Quando e' <u>tu</u> compleanno? Io non lavoro, ma sono <u>in cerca un posto</u>. Studio l'italiano come <u>tu</u>, il francese, il tedesco e</p>	<p>Hi, My name is LS. I'm late. I'm seventeen years old. I live in Canberra, but I'm from Sydney. I've been living in Canberra for eight years. I study Italian, political science, English and European studies. I have five brothers and three sisters, it's a very big family. I work at the bookshop, Angus & Roberston in Woden. See ya.</p> <p>Hi L! My name is D and I am nineteen. Where in Canberra do you live? I live in Curtin with my dad. Your family is very large, do you like all of your brothers and sisters? Is political science difficult? When is your birthday? I'm not working, but I'm looking for a job. I'm studying Italian like you, French, German and</p>
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<p>l'inglese all' universita'. A presto! D.</p> <p>Ciao D, Sono molte in <i>retardo</i> a italiano oggi. <u>Io molte retardo</u> per l'esame. <u>Italiano molte difficile da scienze politiche</u>. Scienze politiche <u>molte facile</u>, italiano <u>molte</u> difficile. <u>Oggi mio il compleanno</u>. <u>Io diciotto anni</u>. Ciao D.</p> <p>Ciao L! grazie per <u>tua risposta</u>. <u>Desidaro te dire</u>: buon compleanno! Mi piace l'italiano perche' e' <u>molta bella lingua</u>. E' come il francese, <u>c'e'</u> perche' e' facile <u>per mi</u>. Ma non <u>lo</u> so niente delle scienze politiche! Ci vediamo domani, D.</p>	<p>English at uni. See you soon! D.</p> <p>Hi D, I'm really late to Italian today. I'm really late for the test. Italian is more difficult than political science. Political science is very easy, Italian very hard. Today is my birthday. I'm eighteen years old. See ya D.</p> <p>Hi L! Thanks for your reply. I want to say to you: happy birthday! I like Italian because it is a really lovely language. It's like French, that's why it's easy for me. But I know nothing about political science! See you tomorrow, D.</p>
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In these exchange between two dyads of beginners' level students, we note the following features:

- a limited range of topics – in fact, the exchange is almost exclusively dominated by closed question-response cycles based on the students' current studies
- usage of basic Italian grammar without any evidence of attempts at extending or enriching the dialogue with new structures or vocabulary

What this description reveals is perhaps a lack of serious engagement with the exercise on the part of these students. We can surmise that they did not take advantage of the asynchronous nature of email to draft their messages and check them before sending. In reality, there is very little dialogue between the students, the questions which are posed are superficial and the flow of the dialogue does not depend on the answers. This is very clear in exchange 1 where each student simply offers parallel monologues. Neither participant seems particularly interested in the other or in their situation. In exchange 2, there is evidence of dialogue but this remains at a very superficial level.

Elaborate exchanges

Exchange 3

<p>Buona sera K Come sta? Non abbiamo parlare <u>per poco tempo</u> fa! Questo il secondo "email exchange" <i>esercizio</i>. Le piace parlare con me ancora una volta? Per questo <i>esercizio</i> devo mandare quattro messaggi. Forse <u>discutiamo gli altri sogetti studia al' universita'</u>? O forse i viaggi <u>d'Italia ieri anno</u>, o altri paesi.</p> <p>Forse ha veduto un buon film recentemente, o ha letto un buon libro? Non ho <u>molto tempo leggere</u> libri, ma mi piace <i>leggerre</i> durante le vacanze. Che cosa fa <u>alla pasqua</u>?</p> <p>Che cosa fa di solito il sabato o <u>domenica</u>?</p> <p>Ieri sera <u>ho andato</u> un concerto di "Australian Chamber Orchestra". Il concerto e' stato molto speciale, e</p>	<p>Good Evening K How are you? We haven't spoken for a while! This is the second "email exchange " exercise. Do you want to talk to me again? For this exercise I have to send four messages. Perhaps we can discuss the other subjects you study at University? Or maybe the trips to Italy last year, or other countries.</p> <p>Maybe you've seen a good film lately, or have read a good book? I don't have much time to read books, but I like reading during the holidays. What are you doing for Easter?</p> <p>What do you usually do on Saturday or Sunday?</p> <p>Last night I went to a concert of the "Australian Chamber Orchestra". The concert was very special, and</p>
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<p><u>spettacolo- perche</u> l'orchestra ha suonata "Peter and the Wolf" di Prokofiev. Era bellissima l'esecuzione e il presentatore era Peter Garrett (dello gruppo "Midnight Oil"). <u>Gli disegni di Michael Leunig</u>. Anche l'orchestra ha <u>suonato</u> "Carnival of the Animals" di Camille Saint-Saens. Che <i>bello</i> concerto. Era molto, molto simpatico!! Ti piace ascoltare la musica da camera?</p> <p>Forse <u>abbiamo</u> il caffè <i>al'</i> università un giorno. Ho lezione <u>d'Italiano</u> ogni <i>martedì, mercoledì e giovedì</i>, <u>alle</u> mezzogiorno. Forse <u>incontriamo</u> un venerdì, <u>alle</u> mezzogiorno- A presto A</p> <p>Ciao A Penso <i>que</i> lei non abbia ricevuto <u>mio</u> e-mail che ho spedito venerdì. Anche se ho premuto "reply", ora ho notato che <u>mio</u> messaggio e' <u>andata</u> a "r@cyberone.com.au". Non so perché. Sto mandando <u>altra volta in questo messaggio</u> ma <u>questo tempo</u> ho dattilografato <u>sua</u> indirizzo di lavoro.</p> <p>Sono molto felice che stiamo continuando <u>nostra</u> comunicazione.</p> <p>Mi dispiace che non sono andata al concerto che mi ha <i>menzionata</i>. Ovviamente e' stato fantastico. A volte vado ai concerti di musica da camera - i concerti di Musica Viva o concerti alla vecchia Parliament House.</p> <p>Questa settimana mio marito ed io siamo andati al balletto "The Merry Widow" - era bellissimo! La danza, la musica, i costumi, <i>i sceni</i> - tutto era molto bello.</p> <p>Ha visto il film "American Beauty"? Mi sembra che <u>sia stato</u> molto interessante e con molti aspetti che potremmo discutere. Per <i>esempio</i>, penso che il messaggio sia stato, alla fine, ottimista (<i>perche</i> il protagonista <u>ha deciso cercare</u> cose che erano importanti <u>per</u> lui stesso). <u>Anche</u> penso che sia stato molto divertente. Alcuni dei <i>mei</i> amici non sono d'accordo con me.</p> <p>Se non ha visto "American Beauty",</p>	<p>spectacular-because the orchestra played "Peter and the Wolf" by Prokofiev. The playing was really beautiful and the compere was Peter Garrett (of the group "Midnight Oil"). The designs by Michael Leunig. The orchestra also played "Carnival of the Animals" by Camille Saint-Saens. What a great concert. It was really, really nice!! Do you like listening to chamber music?</p> <p>Perhaps we can have a coffee at university one day. I have Italian every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, at midday. Perhaps we can meet one Friday, at midday- Talk soon A</p> <p>Hi A I think you didn't receive my email that I sent on Friday. Even though I pressed "reply", I've just noticed that my message went to "r@cyberone.com.au" I don't know why. I'm sending this message again but this time I've typed your work address.</p> <p>I'm very happy that we're continuing our communication.</p> <p>I'm sorry that I didn't go to the concert that you mentioned to me. Clearly it was fantastic. Sometimes I go to chamber music concerts – Musica Viva concerts or concerts at Old Parliament House.</p> <p>This week my husband and I went to the ballet "The Merry Widow" – it was great! The dancing, the costumes, the sets – everything was really beautiful.</p> <p>Have you seen the film "American Beauty"? I think it was very interesting and has many aspects that we could discuss. For example, I think the message was, in the end, optimistic (because the protagonist decided to look for things that were important to him). I also think that it was entertaining. Some of my friends don't agree with me.</p> <p>If you haven't seen "American Beauty",</p>
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<p>possiamo parlare di <u>una o piu'</u> dei <u>soggetti</u> che ha suggerito.</p> <p>Il martedì' ho una lezione <u>da</u> 2.00 <u>a</u> 3.00 e il giovedì' <u>da</u> 9.00 <u>a</u> 11.00.</p> <p>Quindi possiamo prendere un <i>café ante or dopo</i> la sua lezione. O, se e' piu' facile per lei, possiamo <u>incontrare</u> un venerdì' <u>al mezzogiorno</u>.</p> <p>A piu' <i>tarde</i></p> <p>K</p> <p>Grazie K</p> <p>Penso e' meglio <u>per andare</u> il suo <u>messaggio a</u> indirizzo di lavoro. Ho molto <u>difficili</u> con <u>mio email indirizzo</u> a casa. Dunque, usiamo questo indirizzo, va bene?</p> <p>Anch'io, sono molto felice che stiamo continuando <u>nostra comunicazione</u>.</p> <p>Il <i>baletto</i> "The Merry Widow" mi sembra <u>anche</u> una <u>fantastica esperienza</u>! Non vado al <i>baletto</i> spesso, ma mi piace andare ogni tanto, per la <i>varietà</i>. Ma, <u>mio marito non piacciono baletti molti</u>, dunque, non andiamo spesso. Preferiamo la musica da camera o l'orchestra.</p> <p><u>Sabato scorso sera</u>, siamo andato al concerto alla vecchia Parliament House, per <u>la festa</u> di musica da camera. <u>Sa la festa</u> di musica da camera? <u>E'</u> ogni anni a Canberra, a maggio. Il concerto era bellissimo! Anche, questo <i>venerdì</i> andiamo <u>altro</u> concerto, <u>di</u> Australian Chamber Orchestra, con la cantante Yvonne Kenny. E poi, questa domenica sera, andiamo <u>altro</u> concerto alla vecchia Parliament House, per <u>la festa</u>. Siamo molto <u>impegnato questa il fine settimana</u>, ma i concerti sono molti <u>simpatici</u>! D'accordo?</p> <p>Ho visto il film, "American Beauty", tre mesi fa. E' un buon film, particolarmente per un film d'americano. Non mi piacciono sempre i film <u>d'americani</u>. Io preferisco <u>un film d'inglese, d'italiano o di francese</u>. Ma penso "American Beauty" <u>e' molto</u> aspetti; <u>ha commedia ed anche tragedia, e' descrive</u> la situazione <u>di umano</u>.</p> <p><u>Penso in questo film</u>, Kevin Spacey <u>e'</u> un attore dinamico, ed <u>anche</u> questo film ha molti aspetti <u>di famiglia vita, di lavoro e di vita moderna</u>.</p> <p>Ha <u>vista</u> altri film? Spesso vedo i film,</p>	<p>we can talk about one or more of the subjects that you suggested.</p> <p>On Tuesdays I have a class from 2.00 to 3.00 and on Thursdays from 9.00 to 11.00.</p> <p>So we can have a coffee before or after your class. Or, if it's easier for you, we can meet one Friday at midday.</p> <p>Talk soon</p> <p>K</p> <p>Thanks K</p> <p>I think it's better to send your message to the work address. I have a lot of problems with my home email address. So, let's use this address, is that ok?</p> <p>I'm really happy that we're continuing our communication too.</p> <p>"The Merry Widow" ballet sounds to me like a fantastic experience! I never go to the ballet often, but I'd like to go every now and then for variety. But my husband doesn't like ballet much, so, we don't go often. We prefer chamber music or the orchestra.</p> <p>Last Saturday night, we went to the concert at Old Parliament House, for the festival of chamber music. You know the festival of chamber music? It's every year in Canberra in May. The concert was great! Also, this Friday we're going to another concert: the Australian Chamber Orchestra with the singer Yvonne Kenny. And then, this Sunday night, we're going to another concert at Old Parliament House for the festival. We're very busy this weekend, but concerts are so nice! Don't you agree?</p> <p>I saw the film, "American Beauty", three months ago. It's a good film, particularly for an American film. I don't always like American films. I prefer an English, Italian or French film. But I think "American Beauty" has many sides; it has comedy and also tragedy, it describes the human condition.</p> <p>I think in this film Kevin Spacey is a dynamic actor, and also this film has many aspects of family life, of work and of modern life.</p> <p>Have you seen other films? I see films often</p>
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<p>dunque posso discutere altri film.</p> <p>E' piu' facile per me incontrare un venerdì' <u>al</u> mezzogiorno. Forse <u>prossima</u> settimana, o <u>l'altro</u> settimana?</p> <p>a presto</p> <p>A</p> <p>Ciao A</p> <p>Va bene. <i>Usaro'</i> il suo indirizzo di lavoro.</p> <p>Altri anni ho assistito alla <u> festa </u> di musica da camera ma non posso quest'anno. Il concerto con Yvonne Kenny sarà, senza alcun dubbio, meraviglioso. <u>Mio marito non piace</u> molto il <u>ballo</u> ma <u>era felice venire</u> a "The Merry Widow" perché gli piace la musica di Lehar.</p> <p>Come lei, non mi piace molto, <u>generalmente</u>, i film americani - "American Beauty" era <u>un</u> eccezione. Mi sembra che era molto intelligente, era serio, era divertente ed era un po' bizzarro (mi piaceva molto il sacco di plastica!). <i>Si</i>, sono d'accordo che Kevin Spacey era molto buono in questo ruolo.</p> <p>Mi <u>piace</u> anche i film <u>francese</u>. <u>Ho visto</u> due durante l'ultimo mese - "An Autumn Tale" e "The Dinner Game". Non mi piace molto il secondo ma "An Autumn Tale" era molto buono - uno di <u>questi</u> film francesi dove non succede molto ma e' affascinante. <u>Ha visto</u>?</p> <p><i>Si</i>, posso incontrar<u>le</u> venerdì' 26 Maggio (la prossima settimana).</p> <p>Se mi spedira' un e-mail domani <u>per la</u> mattina, rispondero' nel pomeriggio.</p> <p>A presto</p> <p>K</p> <p>Buon giorno K!</p> <p>Che settimana! Sono molto <u>impegnato</u> al lavoro ed anche molto <u>impegnato</u> a casa! Ma <u>questa</u> fine settimana era <u>bellissima</u>. <i>Venerdì</i> sera siamo <u>andato</u> al concerto di Australian Chamber Orchestra con Yvonne Kenny, con mio marito ed anche con mio padre e mia madre. Mio padre gli piace Yvonne Kenny <u>moltissima</u>! Il concerto e' stato buonissimo, e' elegante e molto <u>simpatico</u>. Ha cantato "Les nuits" di Berlioz. La musica e' <u>stato</u> molto romantica. L'orchestra <u>anche</u> suona la musica di Haydn e Ravel. <u>Bellissima</u>! L'orchestra e'</p>	<p>so we can talk about other films.</p> <p>It's easier for me to meet on Fridays at midday. Maybe next week or the week after?</p> <p>see you soon</p> <p>A</p> <p>Hi A</p> <p>Ok. I'll use your work address.</p> <p>In other years I've gone to the chamber music festival but I can't this year. The concert with Yvonne Kenny will be, without a doubt, marvellous. My husband doesn't like ballet much but he was happy to come to "The Merry Widow" because he likes Lehar's music.</p> <p>Like you, in general, I don't really like, American films – "American Beauty" was an exception. I think that it was very clever, it was serious, it was entertaining and it was a bit odd (I really like the plastic bag!). Yes, I agree that Kevin Spacey was very good in this role.</p> <p>I also like French films. I've seen two in the last month – "An Autumn Tale" and "The Dinner Game". I didn't like the second one much but "An Autumn Tale" was really good – one of those French films where nothing much happens but it's fascinating. Have you seen it?</p> <p>Yes, I can meet you on Friday 26 May (next week).</p> <p>If you send me an email tomorrow in the morning, I'll reply in the afternoon.</p> <p>Talk soon</p> <p>K</p> <p>Good day K!</p> <p>What a week! I'm really busy at work and very busy at home! But the weekend was lovely. Friday night we went to the Australian Chamber Orchestra concert with Yvonne Kenny, my husband and also my father and my mother. My father likes Yvonne Kenny a lot! The concert was excellent, it was elegant and very nice. She sang "Les nuits" by Berlioz. The music was very romantic. The orchestra played the music of Haydn and Ravel. Beautiful!The orchestra is</p>
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<p>brillante. Penso siamo <u>fortunati avere</u> questa orchestra <u>visita a Canberra spesso</u>.</p> <p>E poi, sabato sera ho cucinato cena per dieci amici! (Oggi sono molto <u>stanco</u>, <u>perche</u> non <u>dormiro</u> fino a domenica mattina, alle due.) Sta sera <u>siamo andare</u> <u>altro</u> concerto per la <u> festa</u> di musica da camera, alla "Old Parliament House". Ma andare ai concerti e' <u>buon divertimento</u>, e mi piace andare quando e' possibile</p> <p>Ha visto "A Midsummer night's dream"? <u>Spero andare</u> questa settimana, forse mercoledi' sera, dopo lavoro. Ma, se non vado, forse vado al cinema <u>vedere</u> il film "Mifune". E' a Electric Shadows per due settimane, solo. Penso abbiamo <u>molto buon e prima qualita divertimento</u> a Canberra, d'accordo?</p> <p>Pero', oggi devo studiare l'italiano; e' <u>fortunata studio una materia</u> al'universita questo anno. Perche', anche <u>miei figli studiamo</u> al'universita di ANU, <u>mia</u> famiglia e' molto <u>occupato</u>. Ma penso <u>avere</u> molto <u>occupato</u> e' meglio.</p> <p>Mi <u>piace incontrare</u> venerdi', <u>ventisei</u> maggio (questa settimana, <u>alle</u> mezzogiorno). Telefono questa settimana, forse mercoledi' o giovedi'. A presto A</p> <p>Ciao A <i>Si</i>, ho <i>recevuto</i> il suo ultimo <i>messaggio</i> due volte - spero che questo <u>significa</u> che il suo email a casa <i>funciona</i> meglio!</p> <p><u>La sua</u> fine settimana <u>mi sembra era</u> molto <u>bella</u>. <u>Tanto</u> bella musica!</p> <p>Io ho passato <u>una</u> fine settimana molto <u>tranquilla</u> perche' mio marito e' andato via (a Coffs Harbour) per una settimana. <u>La</u> fine settimana prima <u>dell'ultima</u> era anche molto <u>tranquilla</u> <u>perche</u> ho assistato ad un corso di meditazione <u>in la</u> tradizione del buddismo di Tibet. Ho imparato "Transcendental Meditation" <u>in</u> Buenos Aires <u>in</u> 1974 (questa forma <u>della</u> meditazione era molto <u>popolare in</u> questo tempo). Da <u>quando</u>, continuavo <u>meditando</u> con molte pause. La filosofia del buddismo - specialmente il buddismo di Tibet - e' come una scienza <u>del</u> mente. A volte, quando ci</p>	<p>brilliant. I think we are really fortunate to have this orchestra visit Canberra often.</p> <p>And then, Saturday night I cooked dinner for ten friends! (Today I'm very tired, because I didn't go to be until Sunday at two in the morning). Tonight we are going to another concert of the chamber music festival at "Old Parliament House". But going to concerts is good fun and I like going when it's possible.</p> <p>Have you seen "A Midsummer night's dream"? I hope to go this week, maybe Wednesday night, after work. But, If I don't go, maybe I'll go to the movies to see the film "Mifune". It's on at Electric Shadows for two weeks only. I think we have good, top quality entertainment in Canberra, don't you agree?</p> <p>But, today I have to study Italian; it's lucky that I only study one subject at University this year. Because my children study at ANU as well, my family is very busy. But I think being very busy is best.</p> <p>I'd like to meet Friday 26May (this week, at midday). I'll ring this week, maybe Wednesday or Thursday. Talk soon A</p> <p>Hi A, Yes, I received your last message twice – I hope that this means that your home email is working better!</p> <p>Your weekend sounds like it was really lovely. So much beautiful music!</p> <p>I had a very quiet weekend because my husband went away (to Coffs Harbour) for a week. The weekend before last was also very quiet because I attended a course in meditation in the Buddhist tradition of Tibet. I learnt "Transcendental Meditation" in Buenos Aires in 1974 (this form of meditation was very popular at that time). Since then, I've continued meditating with lots of breaks. Buddhist philosophy - especially from Tibet - is like a science of the mind. Sometimes, when a</p>
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<p><u>sono</u> un monaco buddista <u>vistando</u> Canberra vado a ascoltarlo. E lei? <u>Ho praticata</u> mai una forma <u>della</u> meditazione?</p> <p><u>In</u> suo corso d'italiano ha un esame <u>al</u> fine <u>della</u> questa semestre? Noi non abbiamo un esame, grazie a Dio! <u>Nell'ultimo anno</u> (primo anno), abbiamo avuto un <u>esame</u> molto facile dopo la prima semestre e un esame molto difficile <u>al</u> fine del secondo semestre. Non e' <u>dire</u> che sara' lo stesso quest'anno.</p> <p>Posso <u>incontrare</u> <u>venerdi</u> <u>a</u> 12.30 pm. Va bene? <u>Le telefonaro'</u> mercoledi'. (E' meglio se io <u>teleofonaro'</u> perche' <u>a</u> molte volte non sono a casa.) Possiamo andare <u>in</u> qualche parte <u>circa</u> al tuo lavoro. A presto K</p> <p>Buon giorno K <i>Si</i>, <u>mio</u> scorsa fine settimana era <u>bella</u>! Non penso <u>e'</u> possibile avere troppa bella musica, <u>e'</u> vero? Pero', <u>perche'</u> sono molto <u>impegnato</u> al lavoro (ho lavorato <u>troppi</u> <u>ori</u> per <u>molti</u> <u>settimani</u>) ed a casa, <u>io</u> <u>stanca</u>. Adesso, oggi sto male (ma, non <u>troppe</u> male). Mi dispiace, ma, non e' possibile incontrare domani (<u>ie</u> <u>venerdi</u> <u>alle</u> mezzogiorno, <u>ventisei</u> maggio). <i>Forse'</i>, incontriamo prossima settimana? Oggi io <u>non a lavoro</u>, sono a casa.</p> <p>Coffs Harbour e' lontana da qui, ma non e' lontana dal <u>luogo ho abitato</u> molto tempo fa. <u>Ho abitato Nambucca Heads</u>, e' <u>bello</u> luogo, <u>quando ero giovane</u>. Non <u>lo so</u> di meditazione, ma penso e' molto buono per <u>rilassamento</u>. Qualche tempo fa, ho imparato "Tai Chi", perche' <u>ho avuto una ferita</u>. Ha aiutato e ho imparato per due anni, ma adesso nuoto invece di "Tai Chi". <u>Ho</u> <u>piaciuto</u> l'attivit� di "Tai Chi", ma <u>io non avere molti pazienza</u>. (Imparare l'italiano e' <u>buona attivita</u> per me, perche' e' difficile se e' <u>non pazienza</u>!) Ma, mio marito practica "Tai Chi" <u>per</u> molti anni. Non sono una buona studentessa di meditazione; <u>non avere mente tranquille o buone</u> concentrazione.</p> <p><u>Ammiro gente chi capiscono meditazione</u> perche' e' importante avere una forma di rilassamento. <u>Tutto di religioni e filosofia del mondo, penso buddismo e' maggior etico</u>. Qualche tempo fa, ho visto</p>	<p>Buddhist monk visits Canberra I go to hear him. What about you? Have you ever practised a form of meditation?</p> <p>Does your Italian course have an exam at the end of this semester? We don't have an exam, thank God! Last year (first year), we had a really easy exam after the first semester and a really difficult exam at the end of the second semester. That's not to say that it will be the same this year.</p> <p>I can meet you on Friday at 12.30pm. Is that ok? I'll phone you on Wednesday. (It's better if I phone because I'm not home a lot of the time). We can go somewhere close to your work. See you soon K</p> <p>Good day K Yes, my weekend was lovely! I don't think it's possible to have too much beautiful music, do you? Anyway, since I'm so busy at work (I have worked too many hours for many weeks) and at home, I'm tired. Now, I'm sick today (but not too sick). I'm sorry, but, it's not possible to meet tomorrow (ie Friday at midday, 26 May). Maybe we can meet next week? Today I'm not at work, I'm at home.</p> <p>Coffs Harbour is far from here, but it's not far from the place I lived a long time ago. I lived in Nambucca Heads, it's a beautiful place, when I was young. I don't know about meditation, but I think it's very good for relaxation. A while ago I learnt "Tai Chi", because I injured myself. It helped and I learned for two years, but now I swim instead of "Tai Chi". I liked doing "Tai Chi", but I don't have much patience. (Learning Italian is a good activity for me, because it's difficult if you're not patient!) But, my husband has practised "Tai Chi" for many years. I'm not a good student of meditation; I don't have a peaceful mind or good concentration.</p> <p>I admire people who know meditation because it's important to have a form of relaxation. Of all the religions and philosophies in the world, I think Buddhism is the most ethical. A while ago, I saw</p>
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<p>un monaco buddista a Lyneham, <u>vedere</u> una manifestazione di Tai Chi. (Non mi piace "<u>Western</u>" <u>religione</u>, <i>forse</i> sono agnostica)</p> <p>Invece di meditazione, <u>ogni giorni secondi</u>, vado alla piscina e nuoto. Esco <u>a</u> casa alle <u>sette e mezzo</u> nella mattina (d'inverno <u>e</u>; molto difficile perche' <u>e</u> molto freddo). Mi piace molto nuotare, ogni mese d'anno. E' buona forma della rilassamento per me, perche' mi piace pensare mentre nuoto. Nuotare <u>ed</u> anche una buona <u>attivit�</u> per <u>mia</u> forma, <u>ed</u> posso andare <u>solo</u>. <u>Anche</u>, mentre nuoto e' possibile imparare i verbi italiani e i numeri italiani ... uno, due, tre ..ecc. <u>Pero</u>', il nuoto e' buono per gli studenti d'italiano, particolarmente <u>nuota</u> trenta o trenta cinque <u>giri</u> della piscina!</p> <p>Non nuoto oggi perche' sto male. <u>Adesso</u>, <u>oggi</u> ascolto la musica di Tallis, "Mass for four voices". E' <u>bellissima</u> musica <u>e</u> tranquilla.</p> <p><u>Anche</u>, <u>queste</u> semestre non abbiamo un esame, d'accordo- grazie a Dio! Non mi piace avere <u>esame</u>; sono <u>troppa</u> nervosa e dimentico i verbi, i numeri, I nomi .<u>tutti</u>! Telefono al piu' presto. Possiamo andare <u>prossima</u> settimana, e decidiamo <u>incontrare in</u> qualche parte. A presto A</p> <p>Ciao A Non sono s orpresa che sta un po' male' - non e' buono lavorare tanto per <u>molti</u> <u>settimani</u>. Si', possiamo incontrare la prossima venerdi' (2 <u>junio</u>) <u>alla</u> Street Theatre Cafe. E' meglio <u>anche</u> per me.</p> <p><u>Dovrei trattare</u> una forma di meditazione <u>altra volte</u>. Tai Chi e' una forma. <u>Sono</u> molto. Non e' necessario avere <u>un</u> mente <u>tranquillo</u> o la buona concentrazione. Certamente io non ho queste qualita' - al contrario! Ho <u>cominciato e</u> <u>fermato</u> <u>meditare molti tempi</u>. Ma quando ho cominciato di nuovo ho sempre trovato che mi ha portato una mente molto piu' calma <u>dentro di pochi</u> giorni. Anch'io credo che la filosofia buddista <u>e</u> molto buona. Non sono una buddista ma mi <u>piace</u> molto molti <u>degli</u> principi di <u>questo</u> religione.</p> <p>Non mi piace nuotare - specialmente <i>perche</i> non mi piace <i>l'acqua</i> <u>freddo</u> - specialmente al <u>vierno</u>! Come <u>tu</u>, <u>mio marito piace</u> molto</p>	<p>a Buddhist monk at Lyneham, I saw a Tai Chi demonstration. (I don't like Western religion, perhaps I'm agnostic)</p> <p>Instead of meditation, every second day I go to the pool and swim. I leave home at 7.30 in the morning (in Winter it's very hard because it's very cold). I like swimming a lot, every month of the year. It's a good form of relaxation for me, because I like thinking while I swim. Swimming is also a good activity for my physique, and I can go alone. Also, when I swim it's possible to learn Italian verbs and numbers...uno, due, tre ..ecc. So, swimming is good for Italian students, particularly swimming 30 or 35 laps of the pool!</p> <p>I'm not swimming today because I'm sick. Now, I'm listening to the musics of Tallis today, "Mass for four voices". It's beautiful, peaceful music.</p> <p>We don't have an exam this semester either, I agree – thank God! I don't like having exams; I'm too nervous and forget verbs, numbers, nouns..everything! I'll ring soon. We can go next week, and decide to meet somewhere. Talk soon A</p> <p>Hi A I'm not surprised that you are a bit sick - it's not good to work so much for many weeks. Yes, we can meet next Friday (June 2) at the Street Theatre Caf�. It's better for me as well.</p> <p>You should try a different form of meditation sometime. Tai Chi is one form. There are many. You don't need to have a peaceful mind or good concentration I certainly don't have these qualities – au contraire! I've started and stopped meditating many times. But when I have started again I've always found that it gives me a much calmer mind within a few days. I also believe that the Buddhist philosophy is very good. I'm not a Buddhist but I like many of the principles of this religion.</p> <p>I don't like swimming – especially because I don't like cold water – especially in Winter! Like you, my husband likes to swim</p>
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<p>nuotare e mi ha spesso detto che e' una buona forma di rilassamento (come una forma di meditazione me lo dice!). Che buono che possa praticare i verbi italiani nella piscina!</p> <p>Alloro, e' interessante che anche lei non <u>ha</u> un esame quest'anno. Anch'io sono sempre molto nervosa negli esami. Non mi piace molto <u>anche</u> l'orale - specialmente <u>i domandi</u> dopo la presentazione. Non ho ancora scelto un <u>soggetto</u> per la mia seconda presentazione..</p> <p>Spero che senti meglio fra poco. <u>Vediamo</u> la prossima venerdi'!</p> <p>A presto</p> <p>K</p>	<p>a lot and he's always said that it's a good form of relaxation (like a form of meditation he tells me!). How good to be able to practise Italian verbs in the pool!</p> <p>So, it's interesting that you don't have an exam this year. I'm also always very nervous in exams. I don't like the oral either – especially the questions after the presentation. I haven't chosen a topic for my second presentation yet..</p> <p>I hope you feel better soon. See you next Friday!</p> <p>Talk soon</p> <p>K</p>
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Exchange 4

<p>Ciao a tutti!</p> <p><u>Vorrei mi presentare a tutti studenti</u> d'italiano d'ANU. Mi chiamo WH, e ho ventitré anni; sono studente universitario. <i>Habito</i> a Canberra in una grande casa con la mia famiglia - la madre (che si chiama J), il padre (R), la sorella (W) e il fratello (P). Questo è il mio primo anno d'italiano, ma non è il primo anno di studio universitario. Ho già finito i miei studi di matematica, e questo anno insegno un po' <u>alla</u> questa università. Questo anno studio tre lingue straniere – il greco antico, l'italiano e il persiano. L'italiano non è molto difficile, ma il persiano è <u>vero</u> difficile perché non si scrive con l'alfabeto romano.</p> <p>L'anno scorso, insegnavo la matematica e le scienze naturali <u>a</u> una scuola media in Namibia (<u>c'è una</u> paese <u>vicina al</u> Sud Africa - se vuoi guardare alcune foto fatte <u>a</u> Namibia, visita, per esempio, il sito http://culturefocus.com/namibia.htm).</p> <p><u>Era</u> un anno molto interessante e anche molto difficile, perché la scuola e gli studenti sono poveri: <u>la studia</u> è un po' difficile quando hai fame. Dunque, vorrei parlare <u>delle</u> queste cose se vuoi rispondere! A più tardi!</p> <p>WH</p> <p>Ciao W</p> <p>Hai trovato ancora un <i>correspondente</i>? Voglio parlare con te delle lingue, soprattutto del persiano. Studi la lingua farsi o persiano antico? Sono andata in Iran negli anni sessanta, prima delle "difficoltà". Ho visitato Tehran, poi sono andata ad Isfahan in macchina, attraverso il deserto. Ero giovane e pronta a tutto!</p> <p>Adesso studio archeologia da tre anni a</p>	<p>Hi all!</p> <p>I would like to introduce myself to all the students of Italian at ANU. My name is WH, and I am 23 years old, I'm a university student. I live in Canberra in a big house with my family – my mother (whose name is J), my dad (R), my sister (W) and my brother (P). This is my first year of Italian, but it's not the first year of university study. I've already finished my studies in maths and this year I'm teaching a bit at this university. This year I'm studying three foreign languages – Ancient Greek, Italian and Persian. Italian isn't very difficult, but Persian is truly hard because you don't write it with the Roman alphabet</p> <p>Last year, I was teaching maths and natural science at a high school in Namibia (it's a country close to South Africa – if you want to see some photos taken in Namibia, visit, for example, the site http://culturefocus.com/namibia.htm).</p> <p>It was a very interesting year and also very difficult, because the school and the students are poor: studying's hard when you're hungry. So, I'd like to talk about these things if you want to reply! See you later!</p> <p>WH</p> <p>Hi W,</p> <p>Have you found a correspondent? I want to talk with you about languages, above all about Persian. Are you studying Farsi or Ancient Persian? I went to Iran in the 1960s, before the "difficulties". I visited Tehran, then I went to Isfahan by car, across the desert. I was young and ready for anything!</p> <p>Now I've been studying archeology for three years</p>
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<p>ANU, questo e' il mio secondo anno d'italiano. Quanto all'italiano, <u>temo che io sia</u> dilettante! Ho anche il lavoro a <u>pieno tempo</u>. Molti anni fa, <u>studio</u> le civilta' asiatiche, anche a ANU. W, se ti piacerebbe, rispondimi. Dimmi tutto! EC</p> <p>Ciao E, Grazie per la tua risposta! Non ho trovato ancora un <i>correspondente</i> ma va bene, perché mi piace parlare con te. Studio farsi, non persiano antico (che peccato!), ma ad ANU si chiama 'Persian' - perché, non conosco precisamente. Posso parlare un po' di farsi: lo studio da quattro settimane sole. Mi piacerebbe che parlassi un po' della tua visita in Iran. Perché sei andata? Che hai <u>veduto</u>? Era bello? Puoi parlare farsi, o hai <i>diminticato</i>? Che cos'è il tuo lavoro? Aspetto già la tua <u>risposta prossima</u>. A presto! W</p> <p><u>Buona giornata</u>, W! No, non ti ho risposto prima, questa e' la mia seconda risposta. Calmati, non da' torto al computer, questa volta! Sono io in ritardo! Il <i>mercoledì</i> sera bisogna finire i miei compiti italiani (<u>alla</u> mezzanotte), perche' c'e' la classe alle nove il <i>giovedì</i> - alle nove - madonna! Ho passato solo una settimana in Iran, tornavo dall'Europa in Australia. La moschea ad Isfahan era favolosa - che belle tegole blu - pero', purtroppo, non avevo la possibilita' di visitare Persepolis al sud. A casa, <u>in</u> qualche parte, c'e' il vocabolario <u>da</u> farsi, ma non lo parlo. Il mio lavoro e' la nostra impresa "Mr Spokes' Bike Hire", lungo Largo Burley Griffin, <u>c'e' anche li</u> un piccolo caffè'. Dimmi del tuo anno in Namibia, W. Che anni hanno gli studenti? <u>Si parla li' quali lingue</u>? Il tuo soggiorno <u>e'</u> <i>organizzato</i> da un gruppo internazionale? (come Community Aid Abroad, Peace Corps - esiste ancora..?) Questo e' un esercizio stupendo, no? (stupendo, non stupido....!) Con amichevoli saluti E</p> <p>Ciao, E! Grazie per la tua risposta <u>scorsa</u>. Sono <u>difficile</u>, i <i>tui</i> compiti italiani? Sono io che rispondo <u>adesso</u> in ritardo, perché avevo molti compiti difficili di persiano. Questa lingua è sempre difficile perché ci sono nel nostro</p>	<p>at ANU, this is my second year of Italian. As for Italian, I fear I am an amateur! I'm also working full-time. Many years ago, I was studying Asian civilisations, here at ANU as well. W, if you'd like, reply to me. Tell me everything! EC</p> <p>Hi E, Thanks for your reply! I haven't found a correspondent yet but that's okay, because I like talking to you. I'm studying Farsi, not Ancient Persian (what a shame!), but at ANU it's called 'Persian' – why, I'm not precisely sure. I can speak a bit of Farsi, I've only been studying it for four weeks. I'd like you to talk a bit about your visit to Iran. Why did you go? What did you see? Was it good? Can you speak Farsi, or have you forgotten? What's your job? I'm already waiting for your next reply. See you soon! W</p> <p>Good day, W! No, I didn't reply to you before, this is my second response. Settle down, don't blame the computer, this time! I'm the one who's late! Wednesday nights I have to do my Italian homework (at midnight), because there's the class at nine on Thursdays – at nine – Mother of God! I only spent a week in Iran, I was on my way back from Europe to Australia. The mosque at Isfahan was fabulous – what beautiful blue tiles – however, unfortunately, I didn't have the chance to visit Persepolis in the South. At home somewhere I have a little Farsi dictionary, but I don't speak it. My job is our enterprise "Mr Spokes' Bike Hire", along Lake Burley Griffin, there's also a little caffè there. Tell me about your year in Namibia, W. How old are the students? Which languages do they speak there? Was your trip organised by an international group (like Community Aid Abroad, Peace Corps – does it still exist?). This is a stupendous exercise, isn't it? (stupendous, not stupid....!) With warm wishes E</p> <p>Hi, E! Thanks for your last reply. Is your Italian homework difficult? I'm the one who's replying late now because I've had lots of difficult Persian homework. This language is always hard because in our group there</p>
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gruppo alcuni parlanti dell'araba che possono parlare molto velocemente, mentre io tento leggere una parola sola! Si dice, sbagliando s'impara, e spero che questo proverbio è vero! In Namibia, abitavo a un paese (quasi 2000 abitanti) che si chiama Tses. È nel sud di Namibia nel deserto - potevo guardare le sabbie dalla mia finestra. Gli studenti hanno da 13 a 19 anni, e parlano il nama (una lingua molto difficile – la *pronuncia*! I 'clicks'! (non conosco la parola italiana)) e anche l'afrikaans (di solito parlano l'inglese solo alla scuola). WorldTeach (un gruppo internazionale ma fondato a Boston) *a organizzato* tutto.

Dimmi, se ti piace, di tu! Dove abiti? Quanti anni hai (quasi!)? Che studi all'università?

A presto!

W

Buona sera, W

Scrivo questo alle ore piccole, sono veramente grata alla posta elettronica! Il nostro lavoro e' molto occupato la settimana scorsa, certo siamo contenti (i soldi sono sempre benvenuti), ma - che stanchezza! Anche troppi verbi italiani irregolari! No, non trovo difficile la lingua italiana, pero' e' una sfida certa! Fortunatamente studiavo latino e francese a scuola e perfino all'universita' (cento anni fa). Il studio della lingua, come l'archeologia, e' un gran bel mistero, un indovinello. Qualche volta, per me resta un enigma, ma sempre, sempre m'interessa.

Ho cinquantasei anni, esattamente, non quasi! Studio archeologia da tre anni. Ad

ANU abbiamo la fortuna di avere i professori famosi e bravi – sei d'accordo? Quest'anno studio l'archeologia delle Ande Centrale, e mi sembra che la costa di Namibia sia dello stesso tipo della costa di Peru', cioe', si trova il mare molto freddo vicino al deserto. Come vedi, quale che m'interessa e' l'influenza sulla storia del clima. Il mare li' e' ricco di pesce? Mi ricordo di aver studiato i San e i Khoisan l'anno scorso.

Che cattiva, scrivo troppo! W, non credo che quest'anno sia il tuo primo d'italiano - scrivi facilmente (potrei dirlo), usi perfino il congiuntivo imperfetto, che bravo! Modestia a parte, dammi il segreto, sei uno studente brillante, davvero?!

A domani

E

Ciao, E!

Sono anche un po' stanco perché studio molto - ho due esami di greco antico questa settimana, e ho

are some speaker of Arabic who can talk really quickly, while I'm trying to read just one word! They say, you learn from your mistakes, and I hope this proverb is true! In Namibia, I was living in a town (about 2000 inhabitants) called Tses. It's in the South of Namibia in the desert – I could see the sand from my window. The students are between 13 and 19 years old, and they speak Nama (a very difficult language – the pronunciation! The 'clicks'! (I don't know the Italian word)) and also Afrikaans (they usually only speak English at school). WorldTeach (an international group but founded in Boston) organised everything.

Tell me about yourself, if you like! Where do you live? How old are you (almost!)? What are you studying at uni? See you soon!

W

Good evening, W

I'm writing this in the wee hours, I'm really grateful to electronic mail! Our work was really busy last week, of course we're happy (money is always welcome), but – how tiring! Also, too many irregular verbs.

No, I don't find the Italian language difficult, but it's certainly a challenge! Fortunately I studied Latin and French at school and even at university (100 years ago). The study of a language, like archaeology, is a big, lovely mystery, a riddle. Sometimes, for me it remains an enigma, but it always, always interests me.

I'm fifty-six years old, exactly, not almost!

I've been studying archaeology for three years. At ANU we have the fortune to have famous expert lecturers – do you agree? This year I'm studying the archaeology of the Central Andes, and I think that the coast of Namibia is the same type as Perú's coast, that is, you find very cold sea near the desert. As you can see, something that interests me is the influence of history on climate. Is the sea there full of fish? I remember studying the San and the Khoisan last year.

What a bad girl, I write too much. W, I can't believe that this is your first year of Italian – you write easily (I could say so), you even use the imperfect subjunctive, well done! Modesty apart, tell me your secret, you're a brilliant student, aren't you?!

'Til tomorrow

E

Hi, E!

I'm a bit tired too because I study a lot – I've got two tests for Ancient Greek this week, and I'm

paura che siano difficile. Devo anche imparare molti verbi irregolari – 'leipo, leipso, elipon, leloipa, leleimmai, eleiphthen'; la verba greca ha tante forme ... e anche ho bisogno di studiare venti pagine del testo per tradurre. Ma non è troppo difficile perché, come hai detta, ci sono alcuni professori bravi ad ANU!

Non *cognosco* la costa di Peru (eccetto dalle fotografie), ma la costa di Namibia è veramente meravigliosa. A Swakopmund, per esempio, la pioggia è circa 20mm per anno, e puoi vedere gli alberi e l'erba verde nella città, ma fuori, le sabbie del deserto.

Ci sono le piccole piante, 'welwitschie', che somigliano a niente di speciale, ma possono vivere 500 anni o più nel questo deserto, perché hanno una *radica* di quasi cinquanta metri che beve dall'acqua *sotteranea*. E parli accuratamente dell'influenza del clima sulla storia - la parola nama '!'namib' significa davvero 'scudo' in italiano; il deserto si chiama 'Namib' perché proteggeva il paese degli europei fino a 1886.

Grazie per le tue frasi *simpatiche della* mia scrittura italiana, e la parola falsa 'brillante', ma è davvero il mio primo anno d'italiano! Congetturo la grammatica - studio il latino da dieci anni e *cognosco* anche un po' di francese - ma ho paura che in italiano faccia molti sbagli! Non c'è un segreto!

Hai parlato dei professori bravi ad ANU - chi sono? E perché diresti che sono tanti bravi? E (più importante, magari?) che hai fatto questa fine-settimana? Era buona? Buona sera! mihi est dormiendum, come i romani antichi dicevano!

W

Buon pomeriggio, W!

Parli dei verbi greci - beato te!

"Eleipthen??" - mi sembra che si abbia bisogno di un "lisp" per parlare greco antico (come con lo spagnolo). Ho cercato la parola giusta di "lisp": il dizionario da "lisca", ma quando faccio il rimando, come sempre, "lisca" significa "fishbone"! (Matteo, aiutami!)

Lunedì scorso ci siamo fermati a dormire dai parenti, vicino al Lago Illawarra alla costa. Ci sono piaciute due belle giornate limpide con viste stupende - una pausa piccola ma piacevole. Fai riferimento alla pianta "welwitschie" che vive nel deserto. Credo che ci siano le rane australiane che *iberano* da molti anni, fino alla pioggia (beh, cinque anni, non 500!). Hai studiato botanica?

Quanto a me, non ho studiato mai le scienze (*ecetto* un po' di zoologia a scuola). Mi vergogno - non ne

scared they'll be difficult. I also have to learn lots of irregular verbs – 'leipo, leipso, elipon, leloipa, leleimmai, eleiphthen', the Greek verb has many forms...and I also need to study twenty pages of text for translation. But it's not too difficult because, as you said, there are some good lecturers at ANU!

I don't know the coast of Peru (except from photographs), but the Namibian coast is really marvellous. In Swakopmund, for instance, the rain is around 20mm per year, and you can see trees and grass in the city, but outside, the sands of the desert.

There are little plants, 'welwitschie', that don't look like anything special, but can live for 500 years or more in this desert, because they have a root of almost 50 metres that drinks from subterranean water. And you talk accurately about the influences of climate on history – the word nama '!'namib' really means 'shield' in Italian, the desert is called 'Namib' because it protected the country from the Europeans until 1886.

Thanks for your nice sentences about my Italian writing, and the false word 'brilliant', but it really is my first year of Italian! I guess the grammar – I've been studying Latin for ten years and I also know a bit of French – but I fear that in Italian I make lots of mistakes. There is no secret!

You talk about the good lecturers at ANU – who are they? And why would you say that they are so good? And (more important, perhaps?) what did you do this weekend? Was it good?

Good evening! mihi est dormiendum, as the Ancient Romans would say!

W

Good afternoon, W!

You talk about Greek verbs – lucky you!

"Eleipthen??" – it seems to me that you need a "lisp" to speak Ancient Greek (like with Spanish). I looked up the word for "lisp": the dictionary gives "lisca", but when I check the Italian side, as I usually do, "lisca" means "fishbone"! (Matthew, help me!)

Last Monday we stayed at our relatives, near Lake Illawarra on the coast. We enjoyed two clear days with stupendous views – a short but sweet break. You refer to the "welwitschie" plant that lives in the desert. I think there are Australian frogs which hibernate for many years, until the rain (well, five years, not 500!) Have you studied botany?

As for me, I've never studied science (except a bit of zoology at school). I'm ashamed – I know

<p>so un bel niente! Pero', forse potrei dire che "nescire quaedam magna pars sapientiae est". Di recente ho letto la biografia del fisico Richard Feynman, "Genius" da James Gleick. I miei gusti sono vari!</p> <p>Perche' direi che i professori sono bravi? Beh, loro ed io pensiamo allo stesso modo! Sto scherzando, un po', ma e' una domanda spinosa.....</p> <p>Le vacanze arrivano presto. Per te c'e' una pausa? Devo andare al lavoro tutti i giorni (sempre il mio lavoro include <i>la</i> fine-settimana).</p> <p>A presto, W</p> <p>E</p> <p>Ciao, E!</p> <p>È spesso difficile conoscere la <i>pronuncia</i> del greco dall'ortografia. Davvero il 'th' e il 'ph' greci sono come il 't' e il 'p' inglesi ma non come il 't' o il 'p' italiani, perché sono <i>pronunciati</i> con l'aspirazione; dunque <u>si non ha</u> bisogno di balbettare per <u>li pronunciare</u>!</p> <p>La tua pausa al Lago Illawarra mi sembra molto buona e tranquilla. Vorrei che <u>la</u> mia fine-settimana fosse <u>stata</u> tanto <u>tranquilla</u>, ma <u>era</u> due giorni pieni di lavori – che peccato! Spero che le vacanze siano davvero tranquille, ma ho paura che la mia speranza non sia <u>vero</u> perché <u>vado lavorare</u> a Sydney per quasi dieci giorni. <u>Vado insegnare</u> la matematica <u>a</u> una scuola <u>delle</u> vacanze per alcuni studenti intelligenti. Ti piace la matematica?</p> <p>Non ho studiato la biologia o la zoologia, ma mi <i>piacono</i> i piantie gli animali. A Namibia non è difficile <u>si interessare</u> di biologia perché tutti gli animali e tutti i <u>pianti</u> sono tanto belli e tanto meravigliosi – davvero possono abitare <u>in</u> deserto!</p> <p>Allora, questo esercizio è molto divertente - ho imparato della biologia, di Peru, d'Iran, <u>delle</u> tante cose! Grazie per i <i>tui</i> email interessanti – spero che potremmo <u>ci parlare</u> più nel futuro!</p> <p>A presto,</p> <p>W</p>	<p>absolutely nothing! Anyway, maybe I could say that "nescire quaedam magna pars sapientiae est". Recently I read the biography of the physicist Richard Feynman "Genius" by James Gleick. My tastes are varied!</p> <p>Why would I say the lecturers are good? Well, they and I think in the same way! I'm joking, a bit, but it's a thorny issue.....</p> <p>The holidays will arrive soon. Have you got a break? I have to work every day (my work always includes the weekends).</p> <p>See you soon, W</p> <p>E</p> <p>Hi E!</p> <p>It's often difficult to know the pronunciation of Greek from the spelling. The Greek 'th' and 'ph' are like English 't' and 'p' but not like Italian 't' or 'p', because they are pronounced with aspiration; so you don't have to stutter to pronounce them!</p> <p>Your break at Lake Illawarra sounds very good and peaceful to me. I'd like my weekend to have been so peaceful, but it was two days full of work – what a shame! I hope the holidays are really peaceful, but I fear that my hope won't come true because I'm going to work in Sydney for almost ten days. I'm going to teach maths in a vacation school for some intelligent students. Do you like maths?</p> <p>I haven't studied biology or zoology, but I like plants and animals. In Namibia it's not difficult to get interested in biology because all the animals and plants are so beautiful and so wonderful – they really can live in the desert!</p> <p>So, this exercise really is enjoyable – I've learnt about biology, about Peru, about Iran, about many things. Thanks for your interesting emails – I hope we can talk more in the future!</p> <p>See you soon,</p> <p>W</p>
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Both elaborate exchanges are between dyads consisting of an introductory level (A and W) and a continuing level student (K and E). These exchanges are clearly qualitatively and quantitatively different to the pro forma exchanges. By contrast with exchanges 1 and 2, these exchanges display the following traits:

- a broad range of topics – these are not limited to the immediate situation of the students (university studies, age, family, etc.) but significantly cover the students' interests and experiences
- evidence of linguistic risk-taking in the sense that students are experimenting with grammatical and lexical features which are outside their experience of formal instruction. Notably, in exchange 4, the more advanced student, in fact, highlights this in her metalinguistic comments on W's use of the imperfect

subjunctive. There are a number of examples of successful use of the present subjunctive and conditional

- a richer and broader lexicon than is found in the earlier pro forma exchange.

Also of note, in exchange 4 both participants comment positively on the email exchange exercise which we take as clear evidence of a heightened engagement with the exercise. Given the breadth of topic and range of grammatical features in the elaborate exchange, we can confidently assert that these students did indeed take advantage of the asynchronous environment to produce messages of considerable quality. These exchanges are also much more dialogic in nature than the earlier pro forma examples. These examples demonstrate that a relationship does indeed exist between the linguistic form and content of the communicative act.

It can also be claimed that the linguistic and content-related aspects of the emails examined reflect the individual characteristics of each student: their level of motivation, their personal approach to the task of communicating via email in Italian and their experiences as language learners.

We would claim that the more successful interaction found in the elaborate exchanges is a result of the electronic environment which provides students with a supported context for language use that favours risk-taking. Exchange 4, in our view, illustrates that when students are exposed to such an environment their natural disposition as autonomous learners is allowed to come to the fore (Trevitt, p.c).

15. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study suggests not only that email communication provides students with the chance to communicate in the target language in a communicatively authentic context, but also that the electronic environment itself influences the way in which the language is presented and the shape the language takes. In summary, we have noted that using electronic mail in a language course encourages the most reticent students to participate and, due to the freedom from constraints of space and time, allows learners to construct messages which communicate ideas with success. It is particularly valuable to reflect on whether these characteristics might have a positive flow-on effect to oral production.

Baron (1984) holds that electronic communication does influence spoken language and that it is reasonable to expect an improvement in the levels of logical and grammatical cohesion of spoken discourse. Roed suggests that the “virtual environment can work as scaffolding: gradually giving anxious students more confidence to embark on conversation in the target language” (Roed, 2003, p. 170). With regard to foreign languages, it is important to recall that the written and spoken abilities of the learner do not develop in a uniform fashion and that therefore the impact of electronic communication can manifest itself differently: on the one hand, spoken language can be influenced positively by an overall increase in logical coherence and grammatical accuracy owing to the written nature of electronic communication; on the other, written language can benefit from the immediacy and spontaneity of oral modes.

Stockwell & Levy (2003) describe factors which lead to sustainability of email interaction between NS and NNS. Their study usefully identifies a taxonomy of online profiles (ie. types of learners) (Stockwell & Levy, 2003, p. 431-433) and categorises dyad dynamics (Stockwell & Levy, 2003, p. 433-435). The range of profiles includes

- the low-motivation student
- the daunted student

- the struggling student
- the technophobic student
- the inconsistent or slow responder
- the ideal high performer

The authors describe five sets of dyad dynamics:

- dyads with nothing in common
- the mismatched dyad
- 'let's stick to the topics' dyads
- dyads with lots in common
- developing friendships

Stockwell & Levy (2003, p. 436-7) conclude that two factors impact on sustainability: higher language proficiency and a willingness on the part of dyads to venture beyond assigned topics into their own areas of interest.

While our study did not focus on sustainability, we can draw parallels with Stockwell & Levy in terms of quality of exchanges. Because our study dealt with NNS-NNS exchanges the range of online profiles is reduced and we would suggest configuring the taxonomy as a continuum based on motivation with the low-motivation student at one extreme and the ideal high performer at the other. In this way, we would link the type of exchange to an online profile: low-motivation students were more likely to produce pro forma exchanges while elaborate exchanges would correlate with ideal high performers. Similarly, in relation to dyad dynamics, the 'let's stick to the topics' dyads were more likely to produce pro forma exchanges while the developing friendships dyads produced elaborate exchanges.

A factor which emerged as critical for quality exchanges was the age, or perhaps life experience, of the student. In all cases, mature aged students contributed more and of better quality than their younger counterparts. This is perhaps unique to our cohort of students and would need to be examined on a larger scale. These claims can be supported empirically. A statistical analysis of the word length of the initial introductory emails revealed that, for our cohort, increasing age correlated with increased length of the email message (see statistical analysis in appendix 1). Similarly, analysing the exchanges above using the Gulepease index of legibility (<http://www.eulogos.net/it/censor/>) reveals that the elaborate exchanges are slightly more complex. Texts are scored on a decreasing scale of complexity, ie the lower the score, the more complex the text. On the Gulepease scale, exchange 2 scores 118 which indicates that it is very easy to read. Exchange 4 scores 96. This is still in the very easy range but is more complex than the pro forma exchange 2. A second factor which is in full agreement with Stockwell & Levy's findings relates to topic. In the distinction between pro forma and elaborate exchanges which we drew above the salient difference is the range of topics. Just as venturing into wider topic areas promoted sustainability of email dialogue in Stockwell & Levy's study, so a similar situation led to exchanges of higher quality in the present study. The pedagogical implications of this situation seem fairly self-evident, namely, that the sustainability and quality in CMC depends crucially on constructing exercises which allow students to pursue their own topics of interest.

16. CONCLUSIONS

Analysing the data collected, allows us to outline a series of characteristics relating to the language students produced in the electronic context. These aspects include:

- a generally more spontaneous and natural style compared to other written texts
- an individual and expressive language both in terms of content and typographic elements
- greater expressive freedom with respect both to traditional written forms and oral discourse.

The integration of email as a support to other teaching and learning activities represents without doubt significant added value both for learners and instructors in terms of

- motivation
- participation rate
- development of linguistic abilities
- communication in an authentic context
- getting to know fellow learners
- development of skills which will be easily transferable to contexts other than university.

The aim of the present study was to offer a reflection on the specific traits of electronic communication in the context of foreign language learning in order to stimulate a discussion of its pedagogical implications and of learner behaviour online. Future studies in this area are required to fully appreciate the strategies and mechanisms which students use to effectively communicate in new electronic contexts. This in turn will lead to a greater understanding of how to best integrate the use of technology into the teaching and learning of languages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Penny Collings, Chris Trevitt and Lesley Shield for their critical insights on earlier drafts of this paper. We are indebted to Bruce Brown for his statistical expertise.

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Appendix 1: Statistical analysis of word length of introductory emails compared with age of students

This analysis was conducted by Associate Professor Bruce Brown, Statistical Consulting and Research Centre, University of South Australia.

Kendall's tau and the association between age and word count.

Kendall's t is a nonparametric measure of association which has better mathematical properties, but is more difficult to compute, than the more widely used Spearman's r . In particular, Kendall's t has an easy modification to handle ties in one variable.

Let $\{(x_i, y_i), i = 1, \dots, n\}$ be a set of independently observed pairs. In the present case x_i is the age in years and y_i is the word count of the i th subject. Kendall's t measures the extent to which x, y tend to increase or decrease together, giving it a natural, meaningful interpretation. The definition is:

concordance measure $T = \sum_{i < j} \text{sgn}\{(x_i - x_j)(y_i - y_j)\}$, and

$$t = \frac{2T}{n(n-1)}.$$

Thus $-1 \leq t \leq +1$, with $t = +1$ if x, y are in exactly the same order, and $t = -1$ if x, y are in exact reverse order.

Under the null hypothesis H_0 : the x, y variables are independent (ie have no association), the concordance measure T has an approximate normal distribution with mean zero and variance

$$s_n^2 = \frac{n(n-1)(2n+5)}{18}.$$

When there are ties in the x variable, there are unobservable contributions to T from within every tied group, and the variance of what those independent contributions would have been (if the ties were broken) has to be subtracted from s_n^2 . Then,

$$\text{var}(T) = s_n^2 - \sum_i s_{k_i}^2, \text{ where the sizes of the tied groups are } \{k_1, k_2, \dots\}.$$

In the present example of age and word count, we have $n = 66$, $T = 357$ and the sizes of the tied groups are as follows.

multiplicity	k_i	ages	$18s_{k_i}^2$
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1	17	18	10608
2	12	19, 30+	3828
2	6	20, 22	510
1	4	17	156
1	3	21	66
2	2	23, 24	18

Thus , and with $n = 66$, we have $s_n^2 = 32651.667$, giving

$$\begin{aligned}\text{var}(T) &= 32651.667 - 1085.667 \\ &= 31566 = 177.67^2.\end{aligned}$$

For a two-sided test of H_0 , the P-value is

$$\begin{aligned}P &= \Pr(|T| \geq 356.5) \text{ (using a continuity correction)} \\ &= 2\Pr(T \geq 356.5) \\ &= 2\Pr\left\{Z \geq \frac{356.5}{177.67}\right\} = 2\Pr(Z \geq 2.01) = 0.044\end{aligned}$$

from standard normal Tables.

This is significant, and the conclusion is that there is evidence suggesting that word count tends to increase with age.

ⁱ To protect the privacy of the individual students, we have reduced all names to initials only.

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Title:

Email communication and language learning at university – an Australian case study

Date:

2004

Citation:

Absalom, M., & Pais Marden, M. (2004) Email communication and language learning at university – an Australian case study. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 17(3-4), 403-440.

Publication Status:

Published

Persistent Link:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11343/34510>