

Appendix 1: Exchanges on Moodle on Modality

Note: All the names have been replaced by an 'X' to establish anonymity in these exchanges.

Use this thread to discuss any thoughts you have on the above prompts. You might prefer to discuss something else. Why not open another thread if you wish to do that. You might name your thread according to the topic you wish to discuss.

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Hello 😊

just a quick note about proxemics .. I remember reading a research article on proxemics in SL where they noticed that women's avatars tend to get closer to other women's avatars than men's avatars to other men's avatars (as in many western countries in RL) and they also studied how often and for how long the different gender avatars were gazing at each other.

I'll try to find the title and post it 😊

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Fluency & Accuracy: Do you think you give equal emphasis to fluency and accuracy in your context? Do you think that one is more important than the other? Why? Do you agree with the comment that: *SL perhaps has potential for blending fluency practice (SL) with accuracy practice based on activity in SL.* Why/why not?

Well, it clearly depends on the teaching/learning context. In my situation, - preparing ss for the Cambridge main suite of exams, I have to concentrate on accuracy, unfortunately. I say 'unfortunately' because I think communication largely depends on fluency 😊.

I was thinking about the two principal modes of communication between students and teachers in SL, voice and text, and that using voice allows ss to practise fluency, whereas writing lends itself to accuracy, - I don't know if you would agree 😊. Also, the fact that chat, whether written or spoken, can be recorded by copying and pasting the local chat or using Audacity or similar, means that teachers/students also get opportunities to reflect on accuracy after the event.

Having said that, I did notice that the activity we did in our first session

practised fluency and accuracy using both modes of communication indifferently:

- we got precise instructions (accuracy)
- we went off with our partners and had some opportunities to reformulate the instructions and have a casual chat (fluency)
- we had to report back with precise information (accuracy)

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I think that X published a few good points/thoughts which I agree with.

Fluency and accuracy play an important role in communication in SL. I am sure the one cannot be more important than the other. A good mixture of both helps learners to improve their language skills in speaking.

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It would be very interesting to read the results of the research X mentions. I now have my opinion but it is only based on my personal experience - in RL and in SL.

I think that, like in many other aspects of our SL that resemble our RL life and behaviour, we decide on how close to get to other avatars in the same way we do it in RL, and it is only partly culturally related.

If I think of people around me, I must say I know all kinds and my least favourite is those who come too close and even touch me while talking to me. Fortunately for me, I haven't seen any animations that do that yet.

This discussion is important. I don't think any set of rules is necessary or would change anything but paying attention to research results and being aware of the importance of this issue for people whose job is teaching or similar shouldn't be neglected or considered not important enough.

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I am very much looking forward to your research article on proxemics in SL.

I participated in some trainings/seminars that dealt with this topic, but I have only got experience in Real life. SL is something very new, haven't thought about that Proxemics could be of importance in SL.

In the beginning I had to concentrate on my avatar and tried not to bump into others. So this might have upset someone.

Once I am completely fit with my avatar, and my PC is hopefully running

faster, I can imagine that being too close to others could cause uncomfortable feelings and make me step backwards in order to gain room for myself!!!!

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I agree completely with X that giving more emphasis on accuracy depends on the teaching/learning context. We can believe in the importance of fluency as much as we want but if the purpose of the course is to prepare students for exams, accuracy plays a bigger role. However, In any course, in RL or SL, there should be a balance.

SL offers a lot of opportunities to make improving accuracy not so dull. X already mentioned the recordings, but there are also a lot of possibilities in the simultaneous use of chat, IM, notecards and voice, there are clickable objects that give information, etc.

The teacher has to learn how to use SL teaching tools and not rely only on RL tools if we want to make difference. Oh, it's almost time for our SL meeting. We'll continue this discussion in SL anyway.

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"... being too close to others could cause uncomfortable feelings and make me step backwards in order to gain room for myself!!!!"

That is something I do in SL just as in RL. I'm also trying to remember a research where I read that apparently same social "rules" apply in both worlds. Makes sense to me as it is humans behind the avatars and not a different species 😊

You might also have noticed that we automatically apologize when we bump into others' avatars. This is such an ingrained behaviour that even those who are new to SL do it.

On the other hand, those who see SL as a game, tend to not abide by RL social norms and rules of etiquette. They don't mean to be disrespectful but just don't see avatars as a person but as a play figure.

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"... I haven't seen any animations that do that yet."

There are animations for all kinds of imaginable or unimaginable gestures. But it seems to be rare that avatars/people touch each other in the way you mention, at least not without your permission.

One thing that makes life much easier for me in SL compared to RL is not to have to shake hands. Again, I am sure there are gestures for it but I have never come across someone who wanted to shake hands. In RL, I don't shake hands with men. However, it has become normal that men offer a handshake first and then they get embarrassed when I don't

shake their hand even though I try to be as friendly as I can in order not to make them feel awkward.

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Dear all,

Like X I hadn't thought about the role proxemics could have in SL before, but yesterday evening during the session I started observing how we moved while we were interacting.

At the beginning, when our tutors had not yet arrived and we were welcoming each other and talking freely, we ended up standing in a circle so that we could see each other and not turn our backs to anyone. When our tutors arrived we started following their instructions, so our attention was focused more on what we were requested to do than on avoiding to bump into each other. Interesting.

Anyway, proxemics deals with both body spacing and posture. In SL I see the former more meaningful than the latter. The former is easier to control.

Last week, during one of first sessions, I noticed someone who was talking turning her back to the whole group. Obviously it wasn't a matter of politeness, she was probably using camera view and was so concentrated on speaking that she didn't even realize her position. I have also noticed some experienced SL users that never change their avatar position when a discussion takes place. They are obviously concentrated on what is being said and don't mind what their avatars are doing.

I still move my avatar a lot when interacting with others but I am also realizing that moving your avatar so that s/he can look the speakers in their "eyes" is a bit silly in SL... Maybe polite, but certainly silly 😊😊.

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Regarding X'scomment:

I think that, like in many other aspects of our SL that resemble our RL life and behaviour, we decide on how close to get to other avatars in the same way we do it in RL, and it is only partly culturally related.

Certain cultures have clear guidelines about what is acceptable or not, but others are more open to influence. Take Britain, where 25 years ago we never kissed each other as a greeting, whereas now, we seem to kiss total strangers, which I find strange. In Italy, we use body contact freely, walking along with friends arm in arm and personally, I feel comfortable with that when I'm here. Second Life is a bit of a No Man's Land or better Everybody's Land so we should be more sensitive to these issues. That's why I'm not into Pub-type haunts in SL as I think they might exclude residents who wouldn't consume alcohol in RL either for religious reasons or because they are not into that sort of 'culture' in general.

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Like X, I have observed how we move in SL. It's true that we often tend to form a circle so that we don't turn our back to other avatars. Another reason for this phenomenon is, I think, the fact that we want to know to whom we are speaking and who is there with us. In the beginning of our meetings I often see myself turning around in order to see who has already arrived. 😊 Perhaps this could also be done by using camera view...

As X already mentioned, sometimes some people are turning their back when speaking to other avatars. I always feel a need to look to a person who I'm speaking to but sometimes it's not easy in SL. If I turn my head towards somebody, my avatar automatically returns to its original position after some seconds. Is there a way to look to a certain direction for a longer time? Or do we then need to turn all our body instead of our head?

About the distance between avatars, I would say that at least for me it's still difficult to determine the distance between myself and other avatars. Not for cultural or personal reasons (because in RL I feel quite comfortable getting close to my students for example) but for technical ones. I feel it's difficult to move my Avatar just a little bit and often one click on an arrow button takes me closer or farther than I have intended to go. Moving is not very smooth in SL, or at least for me it's not (yet). 😊

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The four skills: Which of the four skills do your learners practise? Why? Do you feel that your learners get enough practice in all skills? If not, in which skills do you feel your learners get the least practice?

At the moment I am teaching at secondary school level (Italy). In most of my classes I have 26 to 30 students. Reading, writing and listening are quite feasible but practising speaking is extremely difficult. Asking my students to do pair or group work is useless: they speak Italian and possibly about something different from the topic assigned. Asking direct questions to one or more of them is more effective - usually they answer, or at least try to - but this way I can involve only few students at a time. The "old" linguistic lab (recorders and tapes) isn't working anymore. The "new" computer lab has neither headsets nor recording software.

... Do you think that SL might play a role in addressing that? How?

I am trying to convince some of my students to join me on the British Council Isle (main grid) to solve the Merlin Quest. Only English spoken. I am extremely curious to see how they will react. The problem is that the students interested are only 4-5. What to do with the other ones?

Do you agree that being able to communicate multimodally is important, particularly given the evolving nature of internet technologies?

Yes, I do. The concept of "literacy" is more complex and involves more abilities now than it was only ten years ago.

Do you think that this should have a bearing on the approach you take to teaching the four skills?

Yes I do. I am trying to use as many digital tools as possible. For a class I have set up a Google group to write about the topics they have to discuss in the end-of-school exam (in four months). As resources I have added videos, sound recordings, multimedia websites. Unfortunately, the number of students who have replied to my stimuli is very low. With another class I have created a wiki site where they can work on a research project about American music (their choice). They are working in groups at a distance. I ask them to add pictures, videos, sound. At the end of the project I would like them to make an oral multimedia presentation. The project has just started so we'll see.

At the beginning of the school year I tried to convince my colleagues and headmistress to adopt Moodle. They are still discussing. In the meantime I have adopted some open-source or free resources. The school where I teach lacks of everything, like most schools and universities in Italy. This morning I wanted to show a class the end of "Apocalypse Now". We have done Conrad and are about to study Eliot, so AN would have been a perfect companion. I brought my own copy of the film but the DVD player wasn't working. I had to change lesson plan.

This is just to say that teaching approaches often rely on something different than the teacher's willingness or ability to propose new methods and tools. BTW, I am working in a very rich area and school (Forte dei Marmi's Liceo Scientifico for those who know Italy). End of rant.

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On bumping. You are right, many seem to shift some proxemics habits from RL to SL.

However, my observation on bumping when I was new to SL was quite different. I remember people bumping on me and apologizing. I then thought to myself: "Why is he/she apologizing?" What sense does it make here?" The funny thing is that sometimes I was apologized to but never felt or saw it because i was concentrated on setting my audio, e.g.



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Hello again

sorry for the late post, I'm very busy these days ...

I'm going to give you the title of the article before reading the other posts 😊

This is the article I was talking about

Yee, N., Bailenson, J., Urbanek, M. Chang, F. and Merget, D., 2007. The

Unbearable Likeness of Being Digital: The Persistence on Nonverbal Social Norms in Online Virtual Environments, CyberPsychology and Behavior, 10 (1), 115-121.

I think I have an electronic copy of it. Can I post it anywhere on this moodle? Would that be a breach of copyright?

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I think I read all your posts and I do agree with what you are all saying. I was also thinking about the way I move in SL and realised that I tend to behave in the same way as Anna: if I see X is looking down or up, I'll correct her position so that she'll look at the speaker 😊

and ... what about always running towards the person who's speaking? I know I can hear them all the same, still ...

It is exactly like what most of you wrote, we tend to behave the same way we would in RL.

I have been reading a few research articles on the use of SL in psychology and psychiatric. SL is considered a valuable tool, as the sense of presence in virtual worlds is very strong. It is used, for example, for treating agoraphobia. This, I believe, can give us the scale of how REAL these virtual worlds can be ...

(I am sure many of you have read the famous over-cited article by Julian Dibbel, published first in 1993 in The Village Voice, which describes a cyber-rape in a MUD. Very interesting, indeed)

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Proxemics:

I do stand quite close to others both in real life and in SL. I guess there is something cultural in this (I am Spanish myself and we are known by our high sensory involvement to put it nicely). This is part of the netiquette associated with language teaching/learning and as such it should be properly introduced to students from the very beginning as a cultural note.

Four skills:

In my view SL provides excellent opportunities mainly for oral comprehension and production and secondly for grammar/vocabulary and written communication practice (note cards, profile creation, local chat, etc.).

Fluency and accuracy:

To me both are important to master a language. However, if our main

aim is communication (as an overall personal objective or as a means to complete a certain task) then fluency should be prioritised. In a controlled teaching environment I have always thought it makes more sense to devote some language tasks to practise accuracy and others to build up confidence and fluency. This applies to any language class in RL or in SL I reckon. I do agree with your input statement; there is a natural flow of oral communication going on in SL that provides many opportunities for interaction which is directly linked to fluency and at the same time you can stop, take personal notes, images and sounds and save them and this is crucial to retain chunks of language that we may want to memorise and reuse later in an appropriate context.

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X, when I first joined SL, I once left my avatar in a public sim to answer a telephone call, etc. and when I came back, I found myself in a totally different place, and the text chat showed that a couple of people had thought it very funny to move me around against my will - there were all sorts of comments - but mainly referring to me as a 'noob' (i.e. newbie or new user of SL). When I got back to the keyboard and found out what they had done, I actually felt upset and angry that they had been able to push me around like this - ever since then, I am sensitive to bumping into people in SL and am one of those people who always apologise when I do so 😊

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Dear all,

I have noticed I get closer to other avatars now, which tells me proxemics are very much like in the real world where we distinguish between social and personal space depending on cultural and personal factors. I find that pair work and warm-up activities certainly have an effect on our non-verbal language. However, the 'cognitive overload' that I am experiencing in the first stages of my SL is preventing me from noticing a lot of these issues.

On a similar note, I do not feel at ease with the unintentional non-verbal language that certain situations involve (i.e. sitting around a table) although I find some poses funny.

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Wow! Lots of points being made, most of which make a lot of sense to me! Here's my two cents:

[On Proxemics:](#) I guess it's a fine line between RL and SL when it comes to feeling comfortable with the amount of "personal space" you get. I myself have noticed that

a) I'm as clumsy in SL as in RL (that explains the occasional bumping into people -sorry!)

b) I follow more or less the same pattern: I don't come very close to people and I feel uncomfortable when they come too close to me (usually, a couple of meters is fine!)

I certainly agree that one has to raise students' awareness of acceptable proximity and general behavior in different cultures from the very start.

Fluency and accuracy: I'll agree with X and X: if you teach an exam class, accuracy seems to take precedence over fluency in most cases. I also think that X has put it very clearly: ideally, there should be a balance between fluency and accuracy activities, unless specific course aims dictate otherwise. And I do believe that SL can be used to practice both, perhaps in a slightly different way from RL.

In a face-to-face class, you'd probably go for something like a presentation- practice - production kind of lesson, in which the practice stage would be traditionally associated with accuracy and the production stage mainly with fluency. I'd say that SL -apart from bolstering fluency in both stages- offers excellent feedback capabilities: the accuracy focus may be shifted much more easily from *during* the lesson to *after* it. Students may be given a voice or chat recording of what was said and asked to reflect on the language used - perhaps self-correct or peer-correct even.

Four skills: I think X has a point and that SL seems to offer more opportunities for practicing listening and speaking, rather than reading and writing – at least up to now: word is the new viewer makes it easier to upload whole web pages or longer tasksheets or texts from your computer, so that may change soon.

What I'd like to underline is the unique environment that SL offers in practicing all four skills at once, in a natural, meaningful way. You can listen to someone voicing an opinion while typing your own in local chat (to avoid all speaking at once, or interrupting, or just having too many microphones on at the same time and produce echo). The very next minute you may find yourself answering a question in voice while reading what's being typed in local chat as you speak. I can think of more combinations or contexts in which this occurs in SL, but I cannot say I remember anything similar taking place in a RL class. Obviously, there was no need to and/or such a task would seem meaningless or silly in most cases.

I honestly do not know what the practical implications of that may be for our teaching the four skills. But it's a new element that has to be taken into account. Perhaps there's a negative side to that as

well, since it favours multitasking, therefore fragmentation of our concentration and energy. On the other hand, this kind of activity is becoming an increasingly large part of our everyday life -I rarely seem to find myself doing only one thing at a time these days- and that of our students', who seem to be surfing the Internet as they're listening to their favourite music on their iPod and keeping an eye on their cell phones for any new messages from their friends.

Maybe practicing all four skills at once would make sense in today's world. I do not know how sound that would be pedagogically though. Any thoughts?

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I didn't even know that I could correct my avatars position before the last meeting in SL. I really played around with this on Thursday and tried to adjust my avatar's head so that it looked like as if she was listening to the conversation. It was very easy with the help of the mouse and now I don't have to worry about my students feeling that I am not really listening when my avatar is looking down or somewhere else away from the student.

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On the four skills and on fluency & accuracy:

My students do Spanish as their main degree and, at departmental level, we find they still do not know the implications of this i.e. a more comprehensive and accurate knowledge of grammar and high expectations when it comes to producing academic pieces of writing. In fact, many choose Spanish for the wrong reasons and think, allow me to put it this way, that it is all about ordering beer or tapas in a bar... Additionally, we fight against the fact that they come to us with no knowledge of grammar whatsoever as they do not do grammar at school level here in England 😊 (I reckon this is now changing).

Having said that about the importance of grammar and writing skills, we give students lots of opportunities to practise their ORAL skills not only by sending them abroad for a year or six months but also in class (I keep telling them they are in a privileged position when it comes to speaking as our groups have a maximum of 18 students -when I studied English at the University of Valladolid (Spain) we were 150 students in a class and we could just do listening comprehension exercises in what was meant to be our oral class). However, like X says, asking my students to do group work is pretty useless as they tend to speak Spanish the moment I turn back. This worries me in the SL context... 😊

Finally, multimodality is extremely important to allow the adaptation to different learning styles and provide for those students with disabilities like dyslexia, dyspraxia, etc. With multimodality students may opt which

channel of communication to choose and differentiation is thus possible.

Fluency & accuracy demands will depend on the objective of the task in question, how it is organised and, like I mentioned above, on the context of study and the reasons for studying the language in the first place. My impression is that SL reinforces fluency more than accuracy but I am newly born in SL and I need to explore far more...😄

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looks like we have the same sort of students. Mine avoid any chance to speak Italian in class as well and come to us with no knowledge of the structures of their language, let alone a foreign language. Again, this poses a problem when we want to make the autonomous learners ... how much autonomy can you give them, if you are afraid they will abuse/misuse it? Shouldn't we all learn to be autonomous learners already in school? How do you change certain approaches to study when your students are already 18-19?

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Do you think you could use SL to motivate your students to speak Spanish? How could you do that? Can you think of activities or maybe even projects that could help?

Do you think SL could be used to prepare your students for their trip abroad? How?

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Very true, X! In fact, I believe we should not be dealing with the concept of autonomy to the point we've reached these days and even less at university level (to me this is a sign of the system having gone wrong somewhere, at least in the context I teach). Responsible students don't need to be reminded about autonomy at all times the way they are nowadays. Perhaps they need some directions but that's all.

The moment we make this concept of autonomy explicit and try to reinforce it by several controlling means (i.e. portfolio, etc.) we actually change its very nature and stops being what is meant to be, don't you think?

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Nergiz, thanks for your last suggestion. I think SL could prove very useful to prepare our students for the year abroad but provided it is used appropriately and with the right cohort of students. Certainly a possible project to think about... Gracias

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Dear X

I agree with you about autonomy. I must say that, since I started working here, I developed a sort of 'shame'/'reluctancy' to talk about my students and my classes to people who do not teach in Ireland/GB in a similar kind of environment. I feel that I often sound patronising, frustrated (well, I must admit I AM, frustrated) and exaggerating. My colleagues in Italy CANNOT believe the total lack of motivation and interest in my students, and take for granted many of the predicaments of autonomy, as there is no need to advocate autonomy when students are autonomous from elementary school ...

I am recently tutoring a trainee Italian teacher who is sitting in my classes and is taking her first steps in teaching Italian as a foreign language. I see in her the same reactions I had when I first came here ... and that comforts me a little (I am not the too demanding, never happy teacher I thought I had become, I am just a normal teacher, with normal expectations 😊)

After this rant (sometimes I do need to let off steam ;)) I'll come to the next bit: can SL motivate our students? I was and I am still convinced it can!!! However, this is my experience up until now .. I have been talking to them about it for a few months .. I told them how many things they could do in it, I asked them to download it and meet me there a few months ago as we would use it in one of our courses ... They met me there, we met some Italians ... then I started organising a few sessions. The sessions cannot be compulsory (long story) and I asked who would be interested in taking place in them. Well, the initial group of 6 is now reduced to 4 (with no reason whatsoever for people deciding to drop out), and I hope these 4 will stay. We are going to start on Friday .. I'll tell you how it shapes up 😊

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I'm very curious to hear about how it will go. It would be great if you had the time to keep a diary or blog (private if you want) and to write your reflections down. That helped me a lot.

Good luck with it!

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Hi again

we started last Friday and it was a technical nightmare (everything that could go wrong did)

anyway, I enjoyed it ..

I am keeping a blog, which is now still closed to me and my supervisors

... I haven't had the time to update it yet, as I have worked no stop since Friday .. but I hope I will during Easter .. and eventually I'll open it as well 😊

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Hi X,

I was really curious to know how things had gone. At least, your students came...

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I'm glad you still enjoyed it. At least, it can only get better now when all the "disasters" happened in the first session 😊

Looking forward to reading your blog.

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