

DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

ONLINE CHAT IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL CLASS

**The effects and implications of including pair/peer chat tasks in
the English class**

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2006

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem

Bölcsészettudományi Kar

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Budapest, 2006

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

List of Tables

List of Figures

1 Introduction	1
1.1 The research problem	1
1.2 The significance of the study	2
1.3 Summary of the main findings	3
1.4 The organisation of the thesis	4
2 Background to the study	6
2.1 Models of second language acquisition	6
2.1.1 The importance of output	8
2.1.2 Non-native dyads and opportunities for acquisition	9
2.2 The effect of task type in second language acquisition	10
2.2.1 Studies on the relationship of task types and negotiation of meaning	10
2.3 Producing language in online chat	12
2.3.1 Comparing online chatting with face-to-face interaction	12
2.3.2 The effect of online chatting on accuracy: enhancing or detrimental?	14
2.4 Empirical studies on chat in language learning	15
2.4.1 Meaningful use of the target language	15
2.4.2 Increased participation and more complex language in chat	16
2.4.3 Improving grammatical competence with goal-oriented tasks	17
2.4.4 Autonomy and motivation in classroom chat	18
2.4.5 Intercultural encounters and learning from peers in chat	18
2.5 Rationale for studying chat in the Hungarian context	19
3 Approaches to research methods in second language acquisition	23
3.1 Assumptions of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies	23
3.1.1 Research focus and the objectives	24
3.1.2 Research procedures	25
3.1.3 The researcher's role and the language used in reporting	26
3.2 Combining qualitative and quantitative methods	27
3.3 Concern for the trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the study	30
3.3.1 Credibility	31
3.3.2 Transferability	31
3.3.3 Dependability	32
3.3.4 Confirmability	34
3.4 Summary	34
4 Research method	35
4.1 The research problem	36
4.2 Pilot studies preceding the BHS chat project	36

4.2.1 The first pilot study	36
4.2.1.1 Setup	36
4.2.1.2 Findings	37
4.2.1.3 Preparing the second pilot study	37
4.2.2 The second pilot study	38
4.2.2.1 Setup	38
4.2.2.2 Findings	39
4.2.2.3 Implications for the BHS chat project	40
4.3 The BHS chat project	42
4.3.1 The research questions	42
4.3.2 The setting of the chat project	44
4.3.3 Participants	44
4.3.4 The treatment: the tasks used in the chat project	48
4.3.5 The software used for chat: Internet Relay Chat	49
4.3.6 Data collection procedures	49
4.3.6.1 Questionnaire on Backgrou51nd (QB)	50
4.3.6.2 Questionnaire on Attitudes an52d Motivation (QAM)	51
4.3.6.3 End-Project Interview (EPI)	52
4.3.6.4 Task Evaluation Questionnaire (TEQ)	53
4.3.6.5 General Proficiency Test (GPT)	54
4.3.6.6 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)	55
4.3.6.7 Chat logs in the chat group	
4.3.6.8 Chat logs in the control group	
4.3.6.9 Language Teacher's Journal (LTJ)	56
4.3.6.10 Member checks	56
4.3.7 Summary	58
5 The effect of the inclusion of chat tasks on the participants' EFL learning process	
	59
5.1 The inclusion of chat in the EFL classes	59
5.1.1 The seven steps of the inclusion cycle	59
5.1.2 The chat group's background	61
5.1.3 The setting of the chat sessions	62
5.1.4 An overview of the chat tasks	62
5.2 The description of the 23 chat sessions of the BHS chat project Sessions 1-23	63
5.3 Lessons from the inclusion cycles	88
6 The effect of the inclusion of chat on EFL proficiency and language learning strategies	91
6.1 Results on the general proficiency test	92
6.1.1 Language elements	93
6.1.2 Total test score	94
6.1.3 Writing skills in the chat group	94
6.1.4 Speaking skills in the control group	95
6.1.5 Skills unchanged: reading and listening	97
6.2 The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning	97
6.2.1 Using mental strategies	100
6.2.2 Managing emotions	102
6.2.3 Strategies unchanged: remembering, compensating, organizing and learning with others	104
6.3 Conclusions	106

7 The effect of the inclusion chat in the EFL classes on motivation to learn English and attitudes toward the inclusion of chat	107
7.1 Dörnyei and Ottó's model of motivation	108
7.1.1 The pre-actional state of motivation	109
7.1.2 The actional state of motivation	109
7.1.3 The postactional state of motivation	110
7.1.4 Applying the model to the BHS chat project	110
7.2 The three states of motivation in the BHS chat project	111
7.2.1 The pre-actional state	111
7.2.1.1 Qualities of language learning	111
7.2.1.2 Language learning objectives	111
7.2.1.3 Group history	112
7.2.1.4 Synthesis of the pre-actional state	114
7.2.2 The actional state	115
7.2.2.1 The actional state in school learning environment	115
7.2.2.2 Chat cycles in the actional state	116
7.2.2.3 The first phase of the chat project	118
7.2.2.4 The second phase of the chat project	122
7.2.2.5 Synthesis of the actional phase	125
7.2.3 The postactional state	126
7.2.3.1 Eliciting the participants' evaluation: the End-project Interview	126
7.2.4 Synthesis of the three states	142
7.3 Attitudes towards chat tasks	143
7.3.1 Statements on attitudes towards the inclusion of chat	144
7.3.2 Development in different skill148	
7.3.3 The assessment of the whole chat project	149
7.3.4 Summary of findings on attitudes towards chat tasks	149
8 Longitudinal changes in grounding strategies in the roleplay chat texts	151
8.1 The theoretical background of the investigation	152
8.1.1 Grounding theory	153
8.1.2 Grounding techniques in conversation	155
8.1.3 Grounding in chat communication	157
8.1.4 Negotiating common ground in chat	159
8.2 The research questions and hypotheses	160
8.3 Analysis	160
8.4 Results and discussion	164
8.4.1 Grounding techniques used in the chats	164
8.4.2 Longitudinal changes	165
8.5 Summary of the findings and implications	169
9 Conclusions and implications	171
9.1 Summary of the findings of the study and their implications	171
9.1.1 How to include chat tasks in foreign language teaching	171
9.1.2 Development in proficiency and language learning strategies	173
9.1.3 On motivation and attitudes in the chat class	175
9.1.4 On the role of common ground in chat	176
9.2 The implications of the findings	178
9.3 Suggestions for further research	180
9.4 Significance of the study: a summing up	181

References
184

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Sample chat log from Pilot 1
- Appendix 2 Sample chat log from Pilot 2
- Appendix 3 Language Teacher's Journal
- Appendix 4 Questionnaire Pilot 1
- Appendix 5 Questionnaire Pilot 2
- Appendix 6 Questionnaire on Background
- Appendix 7 Questionnaire on Attitudes
- Appendix 8 End-project Interview
- Appendix 9 Sample chat logs from the BHS chat project
- Appendix 10 Strategy Inventory in Hungarian
- Appendix 11 Items of general proficiency tests
- Appendix 12 Member Check Interview Protocol
- Appendix 13 Overview of chat tasks in the BHS Chat Project
- Appendix 14 Chat tasks in the BHS Chat Project

List of Abbreviations

- BHS – Buda High School
C1 – control group 1
C2 – control group 2
CALL – compute-assisted language leaning
ChG – chat group
CMC – computer-mediated communication
EFL – English as a foreign language
EPI – End-project Interview
ESL – English as a second language
GPT – general proficiency test
IRC – Internet Relay Chat
IT – Information Technology
JP – joint project
LAN – local area network
LTJ – Language Teacher’s Journal
NC – network-based communication
NNS – non-native speaker
NS – native-speaker
QA – Questionnaire on Attitudes
QB– Questionnaire on Background
SILL – Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SLA – second language acquisition
T1 – track 1
T2 – track 2
TELC – Trinity English Language Certificate
TEQ – Task Evaluation Questionnaire
TL – target language

List of Tables

Table 3.1 *The main characteristics of the two research approaches*

Table 3.2 *The components of the concept 'trustworthiness'*

Table 4.1 *Research questions, data types, and analysis*

Table 4.2 *Background information about the members of the chat group*

Table 4.3 *Data collection in control group 1*

Table 4.4 *Data collection in control group 2*

Table 5.1 *Frequency of the task types in the BHS chat project*

Table 6.1 *Pre- and post-test scores on the proficiency test*

Table 6.2 *Pre- and post-test mean group scores on the SILL*

Table 7.1 *Results of the independent-samples t-tests*

Table 7.2 *Attitudes to chat tasks: mean scores per statement*

Table 7.3 *Skills improved by classroom chat*

Table 8.1 *The description of the chat text groups investigated*

Table 8.2 *Grounding techniques found in the chats of the EFL learners*

Table 8.3 *Mean frequencies of the grounding techniques*

Table 8.4 *The mean frequency of the individual grounding techniques*

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 *The aspects of online chat investigated in the BHS chat project*

Figure 3.1 *Data collection in the BHS chat project*

Figure 4.1 *The three stages of the chat study*

Figure 4.2 *The chat inclusion cycle*

Figure 4.3 *The data collected during the BHS chat project*

Figure 4.4 *The protocol of the end-project interview*

Figure 5.1 *The chat inclusion cycle*

Figure 7.1 *Group history in the chat group*

Figure 7.2 *The motivational states observed in the BHS chat project*

Figure 7.3 *Factors in the postactional state of motivation*

Figure 9.1 *Factors influencing classroom chat*

Figure 9.2 *The added value of chat in the language class*

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank Nanda Poulisse and Theo Bongaerts for helping me find such an intriguing research topic, and assisting me in drawing up a research plan during my stay in Nijmegen in 2002.

My thanks also go out to Dorka Holló, for supervising my dissertation, devoting all that time to my project, and showing enthusiasm about my study and encouraging me all the way.

I would like to thank Per van der Wijst from the University of Tilburg for helping me find a way to analyse the chat logs, giving me Clark's *Using language* to read, and being a source of strength and support throughout my project. I am also very grateful for the peaceful weeks I could spend in Tilburg on studying and writing.

This work would not have been possible without the cooperation of the members of the chat group and the control groups at Buda High School, and the help of the English teachers at the school. I am also grateful to my friend Dóczy Brigi for helping me administer the tests and analyse my data, I hope to return this favour soon!

And last, but not least, my deepest thanks go out to my family, especially my parents for showing such an interest in my work, supporting and encouraging me, and giving me wise advice in difficult times, and Tomi for being so patient. You've only known me as a PhD student so far, I hope you'll like the new me as well :-)

Abstract

The present dissertation describes how the inclusion of online chat tasks influenced the language learning process of a group of secondary school learners of English as a foreign language. The group had eight 17-year-old members, who were in the fifth class in a secondary school in Budapest. The learners performed online chat tasks in pairs or small groups with their peers in their English classes on 23 occasions. The investigation was carried out in the framework of a case study, which involved the study of the various aspects of classroom chat for the period of one school year. The aspects investigated were the effect of the inclusion of chat on the English classes, the participants' proficiency in English, the strategies they used in language learning, their motivation for learning English, and attitudes towards the inclusion of chat, and the language the learners used in chat. A mixed methodology approach was employed in the study, involving both qualitative and quantitative research methods. I had two roles in the study, those of the researcher and the language teacher.

The effect of the inclusion of chat in the English classes was approached qualitatively and a detailed, thick description is given of the 23 chat classes of the project. The description of the classes shows how the inclusion of chat tasks was fine-tuned in the course of the project, focusing on the tasks, the composition of the chat pairs, the medium of communication and the classroom environment.

The participants' proficiency in English and use of language learning strategies were investigated quantitatively, in a pre- and post-test design. The results of the group were compared to a control group. The results show that the effect of chat tasks is comparable to the effect of the oral communicative tasks the control group was engaged in. Both groups made significant progress in proficiency. The difference between the two groups was that the chat group made more progress in writing skills, while the control group improved more in speaking. In language learning strategies, the use of mental strategies in language learning also increased in both groups. The frequency of strategies aimed at reducing the learner's anxiety decreased in the chat group, suggesting that one of the merits of the chat medium is that it provides a stress-free medium of practicing and learning the target language.

Motivation for learning English in the chat group was investigated qualitatively, by describing the group members' state of motivation before, during and after the chat project. The changes in the learners' motivation for learning English were positive in five of the cases, while in the case of three learners, the chat project had no effect on the language learning process of the participants. The attitudes towards chat tasks in the chat group were compared to the attitudes of a control group who performed chat tasks in the English class on two occasions. The results show that both groups find chat tasks an autonomous, relaxed and enjoyable way to learn, but the chat group found chat tasks significantly more useful than the control group.

The analysis of the language use in chat logs was based on Clark's grounding theory (1996). The longitudinal analysis of the frequency of grounding strategies revealed that the learners used less techniques aimed at grounding the linguistic form of their messages, and at managing the task and expressing emotions. The frequency of techniques aimed at grounding the content of the messages and acknowledging understanding each other remained constant, suggesting that these areas of language use are not affected by the learners' increased experience with the chat medium or the task.

1 Introduction

1.1 The research problem

Computer-mediated communication and computer-assisted language learning have become widespread in the course of the past decade. *Computer-mediated communication* (CMC) is a form of communication between two or more people using computers which are connected through the Internet or with a network connection. The most widespread forms of CMC are *e-mail*, which entails electronic correspondence, *online forums*, where participants can post messages to an electronic bulletin board for others to read on certain topics, and *online chat*, which is a written form of interactive ‘dialogue that takes place between spatially distant interlocutors’ (Werry, 1996, p. 47).

Teachers and researchers have sought ways to complement the array of ‘traditional’ language learning tools with tasks that can be performed using computers. *Computer-assisted language learning* (CALL) is defined as ‘the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning’ (Levy, 1997, p. 1, cited in Chapelle, 2000). The project described in the present dissertation is an example of *network-based language teaching*, ‘a new and different side of CALL, where human-to-human interaction is the focus’ (Warschauer & Kern, 2000, p. 2), and where CMC takes place. The present study will focus on the use of online chat within the field of network-based language learning and teaching.

Online chat programs make synchronous communication between two or more computer users possible if their computers are connected to a central computer or to the Internet. In online chat, the message is typed on a computer keyboard and it appears immediately on the screen. In some chat programs, the chatting partner can see the message appearing at once, while in others, the sender of the message just has to click on the ‘send’ button, and the message will appear soon on his or her chat partner’s screen.

Even though communicating in online chat requires some technical knowledge, it is especially popular with the younger generation: primary as well as secondary school pupils. They can easily learn how to do it and enjoy online chatting not only with their friends but also with people they do not know and are not likely to meet.

Online chatting as a mode of communication is somewhere between speaking and producing a written text; it does not require the linguistic depth of a written text, yet one has more time to formulate the message than in the case of speaking. If the chatting partners are of a similar age, at a similar level of proficiency and share some interests, regular online chatting in a foreign language can not only be useful but enjoyable as well, and lead to an increase in motivation to learn the foreign language and an actual improvement in language proficiency.

Can these characteristics be exploited in foreign language teaching? Can online chatting become a regular activity in classrooms of English as a foreign language (EFL)? What kind of theoretical considerations justify the use of online chat in language teaching? These are the questions the present study focuses on in the Hungarian context and investigates how

secondary school learners react to the inclusion of regular online chat activities into their language classes.

1.2 The significance of the study

When the present study started, in the year 2003, numerous empirical studies devoted to online chat tasks in language learning could be found. The studies by Beauvois (1992, 1995), Blake (2000), Kelm (1992), Kern (1995), Lee (2002), Nilakanta (2002), Pellettieri (2000), Toorenaar (2002), and Warschauer (1996) all aimed to describe how online chat tasks could be used in the second and foreign language classroom.

Out of these studies, only Beauvois' case study from 1992 was conducted in a secondary school setting; the rest of the investigations involved participants from university or language school courses.

The topic of CALL had scarcely been researched in the Hungarian context. My quest for such investigations yielded only two studies: Blasszauer (2000) on computer-supported collaborative learning in secondary schools, and Bujdosó (2001) on the use of chat rooms in learning Esperanto.

The present study builds on the foundations of previous studies on the topic of CALL. The main issues explored in the literature on chat were the following:

- opportunities for improving one's proficiency in chat,
- the motivating potential of chat activities in language learning,
- chat as a stress free medium of language learning,
- the utility of different task types in chat, and
- the characteristics of language use in chat.

The present study explored these areas of research in a secondary school EFL class in the Hungarian context with a longitudinal perspective. In the paragraphs to follow, the main findings of the study will be summarized.

1.3 Summary of the main findings

In the framework of the study, the steps the language teacher should take to integrate the chat activities were worked out. The inclusion of chat entailed that learners performed communicative tasks in pairs or small groups with their classmates in their EFL classes at school on a weekly basis for the period of one school year.

Beside letting the learners carry out the chat task, involving the learners in planning the task, and evaluating chat logs with the learners are also steps that language teachers are strongly advised to take if they want to make classroom chat activities a meaningful part of the learners' language learning process.

The study also showed that the usefulness of chat activities for the learners' language proficiency and language learning strategies is comparable to that of regular activities learners do in an EFL class. As chat is a written medium, the inclusion of regular chat tasks in the English class had an impact on the learners' writing skills and knowledge of language elements in the first place.

As far as the motivating potential of chat is concerned, factors such as the type of chat task and the chat partner considerably affected the participants' level of involvement in chat tasks.

The learners' understanding of the goals of the chat task deepened as they became more experienced chatters, and this also brought about increased motivation.

In the participants' view, the relaxed atmosphere of chat classes, the autonomous work they could do in chat, and the fact they are doing 'something different' than regular classroom tasks were the merits of including chat tasks in the EFL classes.

The learners performed chat tasks over an extended period of time, so the longitudinal changes in language use in chat could be investigated. The changes suggest that communication in the new classroom medium became less problematic on the level of form as the learners became more experienced chatters. The amount of attention they had to devote to understanding the content of their partners' messages remained constant over time.

All in all, the study revealed that including chat in secondary school language learning provides the learners with a useful and motivating way to learn. The usefulness of language learning tasks performed in the chat medium is comparable to classroom speaking or writing tasks. The added values of a chat task are its novelty, authenticity and the autonomous nature of the language activity the chatters are involved in, and last but not least, the visual record of the conversation the chat medium provides.

1.4 The organisation of the thesis

The chapters and appendices in this dissertation are organized in the following way. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on models of second language acquisition, task types used in language teaching and empirical research in the area of CALL. Chapter 3 gives an overview of approaches to research methodology in this field. Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology used in the present study.

Chapters 5 to 8 contain the results of the study. Chapter 5 focuses on the effect of the inclusion of chat on the chat group's language learning process. Chapter 6 examines the effect of the inclusion of chat on the language proficiency and the language learning strategy repertoire of the participants. Chapter 7 discusses how the participants' motivation for learning English and attitudes toward chat tasks changed as a result of and in the course of the project. Chapter 8 examines the participants' language use in the chat logs and discusses the longitudinal changes that characterize the participants' language use in chat. The changes are also placed into the context of the findings of the previous chapters.

In chapter 9, the conclusions and implications of the study are discussed and suggestions are given for future research. The Appendices include sample chat logs from the three stages of the study, the questionnaires used in the study, the narrative account of the third stage of the study in the Language Teacher's Journal, the full text of the End-project Interview and the protocol of the Member Check Interview.

2 Background to the study

In the present chapter, the literature that served as a background to the study will be reviewed. Section 2.1 describes the models of second language acquisition (SLA) which influenced a considerable part of the research in the field of online chat in language learning. In section 2.2, the task types employed in the study will be defined and the various task types will be compared from the viewpoint of SLA. Section 2.3 examines what role CMC has played in language learning and teaching to date. In section 2.4, the issues empirical studies on online chat have investigated are reviewed and evaluated. In the last section, I will address the rationale for conducting a chat study in the Hungarian context.

2.1 Models of second language acquisition

In SLA theory, the notions of input, output and interaction have an essential function. Input refers to the language the learner is exposed to in reading and listening, output refers to the utterances produced by the language learner, either in written or in spoken form. Interaction refers to the way in which participants use language to keep up communication. When communication problems arise in interactional situations, negotiation of meaning takes place: the participants work together to resolve non-understanding. This is particularly important in oral interaction, where response is immediate and trouble has to be spotted and clarified in order for the conversation to proceed.

Krashen (1981) claimed that comprehensible input has a key role in SLA. The learner can understand the meaning of this input, although it might contain some new elements and thus be somewhat beyond the learner's linguistic competence. Comprehensible input should be at the $i+1$ level, just one step beyond the learner's level of competence. He or she can work the meaning out with the help of 'linguistic, paralinguistic, or situational clues, or world knowledge backup' (Swain, 1985: 245).

Problems in communication may lead to *negotiation of meaning* between the speakers, which can have a beneficial effect on language acquisition. Long (1983) and Varonis & Gass (1985) argue that it is 'the input that occurs in interaction where meaning is negotiated' (cited in Swain, 1985:246) which plays a crucial role in SLA. In conversations, the speaker might receive feedback from his or her partner which signals that some part of the message has not been understood. Negotiation is

the modification and restructuring of interaction that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility. As they negotiate, they work linguistically to achieve the needed comprehensibility, whether repeating a message verbatim, adjusting its syntax, changing its words, or modifying its form and meaning in a host of other ways. (Pica, 1994, p. 494)

Varonis and Gass' (1985) model of negotiation of meaning consists of a *trigger*, which is an utterance or a part of it, which has not been understood by the hearer. The hearer can then indicate non-understanding; so the trigger is followed by an *indicator*. The speaker might respond to the indicator (*response*) and try to clarify the non-understanding. The response can optionally be followed by a *reaction to response* from the hearer's side. A sequence of negotiation is a shift away from the main line of the conversation but it might help the interlocutors to (more precisely) understand each other's message and then continue the conversation. Many researchers (among others, Gass, 1997, Long, 1996, Pica, 1994, and Varonis & Gass, 1985) claim that negotiated interaction is beneficial for SLA because it helps the learner notice gaps in his or her knowledge. In the course of negotiated interaction, the learner has the opportunity to fill these gaps by self-correction or asking for clarification and help from the interlocutor.

2.1.1 The importance of output

Swain (1985) claims that although input and interaction are necessary conditions for acquisition, they are not sufficient. The key facilitator of acquisition is output, which gives the learner an opportunity to use his or her knowledge in a meaningful way, and to test out hypotheses about the target language (TL). The learner can analyse the input semantically, and generally understand the message, without paying attention to its form. In order to produce output, however, 'some sort of (at least) rudimentary knowledge of syntax is necessary' (Gass, 1997, p. 7). Output moves the learner from mere semantic analysis to syntactic analysis of the language as well. Interactions in which communication breakdown occurs can be particularly useful for learners, as this situation can bring about *pushed output*, when they are forced to deliver the message in a formally more precise, coherent and appropriate way (Swain, 1985).

In Gass' (1997) model of SLA the input an L2 learner receives is converted into output in five stages. The first stage is *apperceived input*, or noticing 'that there is something to be learned, that is, there is a gap between what the learner already knows and what is there to know (p. 4).' This stage can be followed by *comprehended input*. Comprehension has different levels from understanding the meaning of the message (semantic analysis) to understanding its component parts (structural analysis). Comprehension makes the third stage, *intake*, possible, during which the comprehended material is assimilated.

In the *integration stage*, intake can either result in the development of the learner's second language grammar, or storage. In the case of development, a hypothesis created earlier by the learner is either confirmed or rejected on the basis of the intake received. In the case of confirmation, integration occurs, in the case of rejection, the modified hypothesis 'awaits further confirmation from the input (p.6).' Development may also take place if the input contains information that is already included in the learner's knowledge base. This information can still have a role in rule strengthening or hypothesis reconfirmation. These processes can make the information more easily available to the language learner and thus increase his fluency. A third way to integrate input is storage. If some level of understanding of the input has taken place, but it is not clear how it can be integrated into the learner's grammar, integration can happen with delay, after a period of storage.

The last stage is *output*. Producing output is a form of hypothesis testing for the learner. 'Once learners have created a particular hypothesis about a second language form and use that form in production (orally or in written format), they may receive feedback and as a result modify the original hypothesis (p. 7)'. This leads to input again, with the possibility of apperception by the learner, and so forth. Output is also a form of practising language use and therefore fosters the development of automaticity in interlanguage production.

Both Swain (1985) and Gass (1997) emphasize the importance of producing the TL, and receiving feedback on one's output. The oral practice language learners get is thus essential for their language development because of the opportunities it gives for receiving input, producing output and engaging in negotiation of meaning. In face-to-face conversations, learners can test their hypotheses about the TL and get immediate feedback on it. If the learner's message proves to be unsuccessful in the conversation, he or she is pushed to modify the message and try to produce comprehensible output. However, the time devoted to oral practice in classrooms is fairly limited and many learners do not have the opportunity to practise outside the classroom. Language teachers frequently include pair or group work activities in the language class to maximise student speaking time.

2.1.2 Non-native dyads and opportunities for acquisition

A considerable part of oral communication takes place between dyads. This is also true for a good part of language classrooms. Conversations between instructor and learner or two learners are frequently used forms to practise the TL. The learners of a foreign language in (secondary) schools usually have more opportunities to practise their knowledge with other non-native speakers (NNS) than with native speakers (NS) of the language. One might argue that the potential for learning is greater when one of the parties in a conversation is fully competent in the language used. What kind of advantages do NNS-NNS dyads have over NNS-NS dyads from the point of view of SLA?

Varonis & Gass (1985) compared the amount of negotiation in NS-NNS and NNS-NNS dyads, and found that negotiation of meaning is more frequent in the discourse of two non-native speakers. Their results show that the inequality of status between a native and a non-native speaker discourages negotiation, while non-native speakers, being not yet competent in the domain of the TL, would thus also be more likely to respond to other-repair without embarrassment. Because the 'fault' of non-understanding may reside with either the speaker or the hearer or both, the interlocutors have 'shared incompetence' (p. 71).

In the case of NNS-NNS dyads, they have an opportunity to practice their language knowledge in a non-threatening environment, receive input and produce output, which has been made comprehensible through negotiation.

2.2 The effect of task type on SLA

In addition to the number of participants and their language proficiency level, the type of task performed also influences the amount of negotiation of meaning in interaction. Pica et al. (1993) taxonomize communication task types along the following dimensions: *Interactant relationship* between the participants, which identifies the holder, requester and the supplier of the information in the activity, and the information requester-supplier relationship. The second dimension is *interaction requirement*, in which interaction between the participants can either be required or not required. *Goal orientation* means that tasks can be convergent, requiring the reaching of a common goal from the participants, or not convergent. *Outcome options*, the last dimension, shows how many possible outcomes the task type can have, ranging from none to one or more than one. The task types differentiated along these

dimensions are *jigsaw*, *information gap*, *problem-solving*, *decision-making* and *opinion exchange* tasks. In the case of the first three types of tasks, there is only one possible outcome and the interactants have convergent goals. These properties 'generate opportunities for interactants to work toward comprehension, feedback, and interlanguage modification processes related to successful SLA' (Pica et al, 1993, p. 22). In other words, when performing these types of tasks, learners have more opportunities to negotiate meaning than in the case of decision-making and information exchange tasks.

2.2.1 Studies on the relationship of task types and negotiation of meaning

Deen (1995) compares the amount of negotiation of meaning in NS-NNS face-to-face interaction in a formal and an informal setting. In the formal setting the NS, a housing officer, interviews the NNS in order to get certain information and fills in a form about the NNS, so the conversation has an obvious aim. In the informal setting, the participants of the conversation speak about certain topics. The outcome of the conversation is not fixed. Deen concludes that the informal conversation results in more negotiation of meaning, and in more opportunities for the NNS to acquire language. There are three reasons for this difference. One reason is that in the formal setting, the script of the conversation, and part of the vocabulary to be used is given to the participants in advance, which makes the topics more predictable. Another reason is that the asymmetry in the status of the participants inhibits negotiation. The NNS might be too inhibited by the superior linguistic status of the NS to ask for help. The parties often decide to act politely and avoid signalling misunderstandings. A third reason is that in the formal setting, a certain goal has to be reached at the end of the conversation and this imposes time pressure on the participants; there is hardly any room for learning and creative language use.

However, other research has shown evidence of the beneficial effect of goal-oriented tasks on SLA. Several studies investigating the role of task type in SLA (Pica et al., 1993, Doughty & Pica, 1986) claim that goal-oriented tasks, especially jigsaw and two-way information gap tasks bring about more negotiation of meaning and thus also more opportunities for language acquisition than open-ended chat activities, in which learners 'can choose the degree to which they would like to interact. In such instances, there is not much opportunity for interaction, leading to a decrease in language production' (Nilakanta, 2002, p.5).

Cloutier (2000) compared information-gap, jigsaw, decision-making, problem solving and opinion-exchange tasks, and found that although the opportunities to negotiate meaning are higher in the first two types of tasks, more open-ended task types like opinion exchange result in a higher number of words per turns, and are more related to ways in which learners use language outside the classroom. (These types of tasks are also advocated by Nunan, 1993). Cloutier concludes that both goal-oriented and open-ended tasks are conducive to SLA; they complement each other and help learners in achieving different types of conversational proficiency.

2.3 Producing language in online chat

The issues of the importance of output, learning by interaction, the opportunities for learning in non-native dyads and the choice of task have relevance to speaking skills in the first place. A number of studies on online chat in language learning have also concentrated on these issues, although the medium of communication is different. In the following sections, the qualities of online chat as a channel of communication will be described and related to SLA.

If we describe online chat from the viewpoint of a speech production model, in this case, Levelt's model (1989, cited in Poulisse, 2002), production takes place in the following steps:

the chatter plans the content of their message (conceptualization). Then they plan the form of the message (formulation), finding the grammatical structures, vocabulary and phonetic information that fit the message. The phonetic information is transformed into graphemes, since online chat is a written form of communication. The third phase of the production is typing: the muscles in the chatter's hand are commanded to hit the right letters on the keyboard of the computer. In the case of speech production, the third phase is speaking, uttering the message.

Both in speaking and in chat, the speaking or chat partner receives the message immediately or within a few seconds. After understanding and processing it, the process of answering, producing speech or a chat utterance can begin. The partner will conceptualise and formulate the new message. Since the two forms of communication, speaking and online chat, share these features, models of SLA devised to explain the role of speech in second language learning can also be relevant to the study of online chat as a communication tool in language classes.

2.3.1 Comparing online chatting with face-to-face interaction

Several factors of face-to-face conversations can also be found in online chatting: turn taking is relatively fast, which results in short utterances with simpler syntax, and less time is given to formulation and correction than in the case of writing. The incomprehensibility of a message can be signalled almost immediately and the sender has the opportunity to try to improve it on the spot.

Poulisse (2002) notes that there are two salient differences between face-to-face conversations and online chatting: the first difference is that in chat, phonetic information about words is transformed into graphemes, thus spelling plays an important role. The second is that the chatter can monitor his or her message before sending it, so there is more time for reflection and correction than in the case of speaking. A third difference between the two modes of communication is mentioned by Toorenaar (2002): when two learners are involved in online chatting, they have to be more explicit in their language use than in the case of a face-to-face conversation, since there is no visual context to complement the verbal part of communication. If the learner's chat partner indicates that the message has not been understood, he or she has to revise it, and is forced to negotiate meaning and produce more comprehensible output in order to communicate successfully.

Owing to these three differences: spelling, monitoring and explicitness, in the case of online chatting learners can gain more insight into their own language use and learning process than when speaking, but can still utilise what they have learnt in a lifelike way, Poulisse concludes (2002). Poulisse's claims are corroborated by Pellettieri's (2000) findings which imply that negotiation of meaning in online chatting leads to improved language proficiency:

In NC [network-based communication] chats, the learners have the added advantage of the visual saliency of the model form, whether delivered explicitly or implicitly, which can allow for greater opportunities for a cognitive comparison of the new form against the speaker's original utterance, which is also visible on the screen. It is therefore possible that extra processing time and resources allow learners to better discriminate between target and non-target-like forms. (p.31)

In online chatting, all utterances are recorded on the screen, which makes monitoring easier for the learner. Revision too is facilitated, not only during the chat session, but afterwards when learners can read their texts. Also, their instructors can help with correction. Because

these conversations can easily be recorded, employing chat tasks also holds an extra appeal for SLA research.

2.3.2 The effect of online chatting on accuracy: enhancing or detrimental?

Lee (2002) believes that online chatting is beneficial for SLA for the following three reasons: Firstly, it ‘provides for more equal participation than face-to-face interaction. ... [Chatting] is special, for example, in that it allows shy and less-well motivated learners to interact with others’ (p. 17). At this point, it should be noted that many learners are reluctant to talk in the TL because they are insecure about pronunciation. Chatting gives them an opportunity to practise without having to worry about pronunciation (also mentioned by Poulisse, 2002). Secondly, when chatting, the learner has the opportunity to define the pace at which he or she can, and wants, to process input, as well as monitor and edit output. In most of the conversations learners of a foreign language get involved in this is not at all the case. Thirdly, Lee states that online chatting increases language production and complexity. Learners get more turns than in the traditional classroom setting and ‘engage more frequently, with greater confidence, and with greater enthusiasm than in the communicative process than is characteristic for similar students in oral classrooms’ (Swaffar, 1998, cited in Lee, 2002). Besides being beneficial for SLA, chatting can also have a positive effect on motivation for and attitudes toward learning the TL (reported by Beauvois, 1992, Lee, 2002, and Toorenaar, 2002). Some researchers, however, find that the language production in online chatting is of a low formal quality and is potentially detrimental for the grammatical accuracy of learners.

Chat texts produced by native speakers of a language are characterized by ellipsis, abbreviations, which make ‘the conversation in writing’ faster, and emoticons, which express feelings and attitudes, substituting gesture and mimicry in face-to-face conversations (on the linguistic features of online chat see Werry, 1996). While these linguistic features are natural and practical in online chatting, the aim of most learners is to improve their speaking and writing skills and become more fluent and accurate in the language they are learning. Using the TL in online chat may not be conducive to all of these goals. Furthermore, O’Connor and Ross (2004) in their study on the effect of CMC on learning environment found that students retain and are able to apply knowledge better in a face-to-face than in a computer-mediated setting.

Kern (1995) draws the following conclusions in his study on classroom interaction (whole-class discussion) with networked computers: ‘Formal accuracy, stylistic improvement, global coherence, consensus, and reinforcement of canonical discourse are goals not well served by *InterChange* (p. 470)¹.’ He also notes that while participation in network-based discussions is more democratic than in face-to-face ones, it can ‘verge on the anarchistic (p. 470)’. Beauvois (1992) mentions that when using online chat for communication, students can become ‘indifferent to the appropriate usage of the target language (p. 460)’ in the context of chatting. In the concrete case she describes in her study the teacher remedied the problem of carelessness by printing out and reviewing the students’ chat texts. I share Beauvois’ opinion, and also believe that using well-planned pedagogical tasks in online chat can direct learners’ attention to the importance of accurate language use. By giving the chat tasks to dyads instead of groups, virtual anarchy can be avoided as well.

2.4 Empirical studies on chat in language learning

¹ *InterChange* is a kind of software which allows students to take part in collaborative, synchronous written discussion on a topic. It is comparable to Internet Relay Chat in its possibilities, but it operates in a Local Area Network (LAN), not on the Internet.

In the paragraphs above, the focus was on the qualities of online chat that make it a potentially useful medium of communication in language learning, and the specifications of how chat can be included in language learning. In the paragraphs to follow, the key issues of using chat tasks in the language class will be dealt with on the basis of the most influential empirical studies on online chat in language learning.

2.4.1 Meaningful use of the target language (Beauvois, 1992)

In Beauvois' case study (1992), the case of a Texan high school student, Alex is described. Alex was going to fail French in Beauvois' class. 'He had had many extra help sessions with a private tutor and with his classroom teacher, all to no avail. He did not seem to be able to retain the grammar or vocabulary presented' (p. 461). Beauvois organized four chat sessions with Alex and one of his classmates at the end of the term. Although four sessions are comparatively few, the researcher-teacher claims that they had a decisive effect on Alex's attitude towards French and he passed in summer school. During the first chat session, Alex produced 21 messages (28 sentences) in French, answered 23 questions, and asked 4 questions himself, which was much more than he had ever produced in several traditional French classes. Beauvois attributed the success of the chat sessions (the amount of language produced by Alex and the fact that he finally passed) to the novelty of the medium and the fact that it gives the language learner a high degree of autonomy; he has more time to formulate his message than in an oral task. Chatting in French also made Alex realize that the foreign language can be used for lifelike purposes. Beauvois interprets Alex's change of attitude this way: 'I think that to some extent, in writing messages to his classmate, Alex experienced the use of French as a 'natural' occurrence, perhaps for the first time' (p. 462).

Beauvois' study was one of the first investigations into using chat in language learning and described the case of just one learner, relying on participant observation in the chat sessions with the learner and the chat logs produced in these sessions. The studies in the field of online chat in language learning in the following years broadened in scope and used a variety of research methods to reveal more about the nature of the new medium.

2.4.2 Increased participation and more complex language in chat (Warschauer, 1996)

Warschauer compared the language of face-to-face and electronic discussions. Four groups of four adult learners of English of Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese nationalities participated in the experiment. The face-to-face discussions performed by two of the groups were tape-recorded and transcribed, the electronic discussions of the other two groups were saved², so the two types of texts could be compared. Warschauer claims that the language used in the electronic discussions was lexically and syntactically more formal and complex, and that the 'findings showed a tendency toward more equal participation in computer mode and revealed some factors which correlated with increased student participation in that mode (p. 7)'. His findings imply that electronic discussions provide a good practice opportunity for learners who are too anxious to speak in class or group discussions.

The features of language use investigated in Warschauer's study provide a static view of learning through communication and do not consider the interaction that is a key element in the process of language learning. The following three studies investigate what opportunities chat provides for learners to expand their language proficiency through interaction. The studies also shed light on how chat should be included in language learning programs in order to maximize the beneficial effect of the medium on language learning.

2.4.3 Improving grammatical competence with goal-oriented tasks (Pellettieri, 2000)

² Warschauer used the software Daedalus InterChange, which makes synchronous electronic communication possible.

The participants in Pellettieri's experiment were university students of Spanish in the United States. The experiment lasted for five weeks, and the participants carried out five chat tasks in pairs. The tasks varied in type: in two of them only one outcome was possible, while three of them were open-ended and allowed for multiple outcomes. Pellettieri investigated the chat logs from the point of view of possibilities for the development of grammatical competence. There are instances in the text where the chatters have difficulty understanding each other, and are forced to modify or correct their original message in order for the conversation to proceed. Pellettieri claims that these modifications, or in other words, instances of negotiation of meaning, give the chatters opportunity to improve their grammatical competence. The type of tasks which have only one possible outcome (the so-called goal-oriented tasks) compel the chatters to clarify the messages which are not clear for their chat partner more often than open-ended tasks.

Pellettieri concludes that when performing a chat task, the learners 'have more time to process and monitor their interlanguage' (2000, p.33), so 'chatting can play a significant role in the development of grammatical competence among classroom language learners' (p. 34). The frequency of opportunities for meaning negotiation can thus be intensified by choosing goal-oriented tasks. However, beside the potential of a task to elicit negotiation of meaning, the language teacher should also consider factors such as social and cultural relevance and the appropriacy of the electronic medium for the task (mentioned by Warschauer, 2000). These factors might have influenced teacher-researchers to use open-ended discussion tasks in online chat, like in the following two studies.

2.4.4 Autonomy and motivation in classroom chat (Lee, 2002)

Lee involved third year college students of Spanish from Texas in her experiment. The participants chatted in small groups about topics from their language classes. The teacher-researcher prepared open-ended questions about each topic to help the group discussions. The main aim of the chat-sessions was to practise and revise what the students had learnt in class. The researcher saved the chat logs, commented and wrote feedback on them, and gave them back to the groups. The chat logs suggest that student-student interaction creates more opportunities for negotiation than interactions where the instructor is also present. The members of the groups were encouraged to discuss corrections with each other. The texts were collected in the students' portfolios for the final evaluation. Lee finds that the revision of chat logs is necessary in order for the chat tasks to have a beneficial effect on the chatters' language proficiency. Lee does not give an in-depth analysis of negotiation patterns in the chat logs like Pellettieri. Nevertheless, her study gives language pedagogical insight into the classroom application of chat by showing how chat can be integrated into a language course, and advocating the revision of chat logs with the learners.

The four studies introduced above all have in common that they involved participants from the same institution, so the situation of 'meeting online' in chat was simulated, and in three of the four studies, the first language of the chat partners was identical. A truly authentic situation for chat between language learners is when they are far from each other geographically, and their only lingua franca is the target language, as was the case in the following study.

2.4.5 Intercultural encounters and learning from peers in chat (Toorenaar, 2002)

Two groups of students of Dutch as a second language, enrolled on courses in two Dutch cities, Purmerend and Zaandam, participated in Toorenaar's experiment. The participants had different language backgrounds. They took part in chat-sessions every Friday for one term.

They chatted in pairs, each learner from Purmerend had a partner from Zaandam. The pairs did not know each other. The topics of the chat were based on the textbook both groups were using. Toorenaar's main research question was: What is the added value of online chatting for language learners? Having investigated the chat logs of the tasks, she mentions the following points:

- 1) Since the chatters do not see each other, they have to be more precise in their language use to make sure their partner understands them.
- 2) While performing a chat task, the chatters are often forced to modify their own or their partner's utterances, and this is potentially beneficial for their language development.
- 3) In chatting, one has more time to modify one's message than in face-to-face conversations.
- 4) The chatters produce the chat log collaboratively, and the text appearing on the monitor helps them do this.
- 5) When two learners chat with each other, they have the opportunity to get to know each other and become friends. They can learn about each other's culture.

These phenomena can have a motivating effect on the language learners. Toorenaar, like Lee (2002), also advocates the revision of chat-texts with the learners. The merit of Toorenaar's study is that the linguistic factors of explicitness and modifications in chat appear, and the medium's potential to lower learner anxiety and increase motivation to produce the target language in an authentic situation are shown.

In the five studies described above all had in common that they found evidence for chat being a beneficial medium in second and foreign language learning. This implies that chat can also be employed successfully in the Hungarian context.

2.5 Rationale for studying chat in the Hungarian context

The use of computers and the Internet has become widespread in Hungarian schools in the past decade. Although a great number of schools have computers and the Internet at their disposal, the use of computers in teaching subjects other than Information Technology (IT) cannot be called self-evident. The reasons for this situation are probably the following: Firstly, teachers of foreign languages, History or Physics, just to mention some of the subjects taught in Hungarian schools, are neither trained nor encouraged in the course of their education to include computer-assisted activities in their teaching. Secondly, the number and quality of computers, and the Internet connection at most schools would make computer- and internet-based projects cumbersome to carry out. Thirdly, most computer-based activities require the learners to work alone or relying on their peers, which makes it difficult for the teacher to control what is happening during the activity and what the outcome will be.

However, communicating with and through computers have become everyday activities for people of all ages, especially the generation growing up at the beginning of the 21st century. The traditional notion of literacy is now complemented by the concept of electronic literacy, which stands for the ability to communicate with and through computers (Warschauer, 2000). By developing the learners' electronic literacy, and giving them tasks to perform on the computer, the learners are practising in an authentic medium that is likely to be a part of their life in the world of work as well. If we consider the growing importance of computers in everyday life, at work and in people's homes, the increased inclusion of computers in teaching at school should also be beneficial for the learners. This claim is especially valid for the case of foreign language teaching, as the Internet opens a gate for its users to an excess of materials, speakers and native speakers of various languages.

In order to make computer tasks meaningful, classroom research on the inclusion of such tasks and the development of materials are essential. An interesting example of textbooks for using the Internet in English language teaching is Varga's *Virtual Visits* (2004). As

mentioned above, people can communicate with, and through the computer. The latter form of communication is often referred to as computer-mediated communication, or CMC in short, as it was introduced in chapter 1. CMC includes e-mail, forums and chat. In all three cases, humans communicate with humans. Poór (2001) in his book on technology in language pedagogy describes these three forms of communication as tools for fostering learner autonomy in language learning.

There is a sharp contrast between the ubiquity of computers and the scarcity of empirical studies on how language learners can benefit from these new forms of communication in the Hungarian context. One of the few examples is Blasszauer's study (2000), which investigated how secondary school EFL learners participated in collaborative e-mail projects by using participant observation and an attitude survey. He claims that his project had positive results, as the participants 'reported high levels of satisfaction over developing technical, language and collaborative skills' (p. 1). Concerning research methodology, Blasszauer followed an ethnographic and process approach. His description of the project serves as a useful source of ideas. However, in Blasszauer's study, no measurement of the language skills of the participants is included, and no linguistic analysis is given of the learners' e-mails.

Bujdosó (2001) explored how secondary school learners of Esperanto profit from practising the target language at an Internet Relay Chat channel created for learners of Esperanto. He mentions that in chat, learners

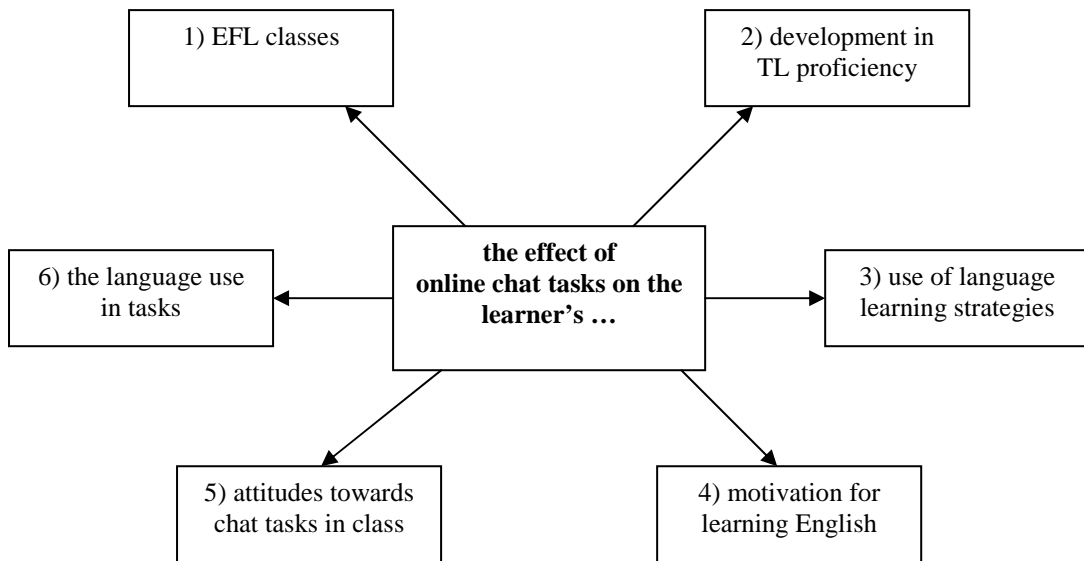
- could start writing even at very low levels
- were willing to learn hundreds of words in order to be able to chat in the target language
- could later meet their chat-pals at a youth camp
- were able to pass an advanced level exam just after one semester of learning

These results could probably not fully be applied in foreign language classes in other Hungarian secondary schools. However, Bujdosó's findings, just like Blasszauer's (2000), indicate that CMC in language learning yielded promising results in the Hungarian context as well.

More research is needed that explores the various aspects of integrating CMC in language learning (also advocated by Ortega, 1997, in the international context), with a focus on secondary schools, including how to set up a CMC project, the learners' attitudes and motivation, and the investigation of language use in CMC.

The present dissertation describes a year-long chat project conducted at a secondary school in Budapest. The study will be referred to as the Buda High School (BHS) chat project. The aim of the study was to explore *the effects of including chat tasks in an EFL group*. As was shown in the previous sections, language learning in online chat has multiple aspects. The BHS chat project intended to investigate the aspects shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 *The aspects of online chat investigated in the BHS chat project*



The divergent aspects of the research topic called for a research design that is suitable for encompassing a topic of such a broad scope. In the following chapter, a brief review of research methods will be given, with the intention of giving the rationale for the combined methodology approach employed in the study.

3 An overview of the research approaches used in the Buda High School Chat Project

The aim of the present chapter is to review the literature on research methodologies used in SLA and to provide an overview of the assumptions underlying the research methodology employed in the present study, the Buda High School (BHS) chat project (see 4.3), and the pilot studies preceding it (see 4.2).

In section 3.1, the assumptions underlying the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms will be discussed. By reviewing both the qualitative and the quantitative paradigm, I intend to justify the employment of the *mixed methodology* approach in the study. The merits of combining the two approaches are discussed in section 3.2. In section 3.3, the issues of trustworthiness, validity and reliability are investigated, and the steps taken in the present study to ensure that these are fully addressed are described. Section 3.4 will summarize the issues discussed in this chapter.

3.1 Assumptions of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies

The differences between the two research paradigms will be illustrated along the following dimensions: the *focus* of the investigation, the research *objectives*, the *procedures* of research, the *researcher's role* in the study and the *style of writing* used in reporting the study. The comparison of the two research methodologies is based on three seminal works on research methodology, Seliger & Shohamy (1989), Creswell (1994), and Holliday (2002). Table 3.1 summarizes the key characteristics of the qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Table 3.1 *The main characteristics of the two research approaches*

<i>type of approach</i>	<i>qualitative approach</i>	<i>quantitative approach</i>
<i>focus of investigation</i>	process	product
<i>research objectives</i>	hypothesis-generating	hypothesis-testing
<i>research activities</i>	fieldwork	measurement
<i>researcher's role</i>	'filter' interpreting reality	no impact on results
<i>style of reporting</i>	narrative, subjective tone	objective account

3.1.1 The research focus and objectives

The qualitative approach to research is primarily concerned with *interpreting* social reality and describing the *processes* behind it. Another term used in place of qualitative is *interpretative*, which also emphasizes that *meaning* is the primary point of interest for the researcher in this paradigm. In the course of qualitative research, *hypotheses* about the research problem can be *generated*.

In quantitative research, the underlying assumption is that the behaviour of a chosen *population* can be understood by investigating a *sample* from that population (Ferguson, 1981). In order to ensure that the results of the investigation are generalizable, which means they hold true for the population, the sample should be representative of the population.

In quantitative studies, the researcher has concrete ideas about what is salient to look for when commencing the research. The 'segment' of reality investigated is defined in terms of *variables* in quantitative research. The changes in the variables are measured by research *instruments*. The researcher makes predictions, *hypotheses* about how the variables will

change as a result of the *treatment*, the intervention planned by the researcher. In the course of the quantitative investigation, the hypotheses are *tested* by the means of statistical procedures. The changes (or lack of changes) in the variables reveal something about the research problem.

3.1.2 Research procedures

In the present section, the research activities, the size of the population investigated, and the interpretation of research rigour in the two paradigms are addressed.

The following steps are taken in quantitative research: the researcher defines the research focus, then they devise the research instrument, and after these two steps, the *subject* of research is approached. The focus of the research, the variables to be studied, and the instruments, e.g. questionnaires and tests, are chosen in advance. The researcher also predicts what kind of answers might be found to the research questions in the form of hypotheses, which can be supported or contradicted by the research results. This approach to research, in which the researcher begins the investigation with preconceived notions and expectations about the outcome of the investigation, is called *deductive* or *hypothesis testing* research.

In qualitative research, the first step is to define a research topic or subject, and then the researcher takes the initial steps towards exploring the topic. Research activities are *emergent*: no a priori decisions are taken on themes, focuses in the research, or the research instruments to be used, as the researcher shall intend to allow these to emerge during the course of their investigation.

Qualitative research entails *fieldwork*, which means that the researcher is present at the site of research for an extended period. During fieldwork, the researcher observes the participants and setting, conducts interviews and collects documents and other data which might help them to better understand the specific features of the setting.

Data collection in a qualitative project begins at the moment of entering the setting, and it is further shaped by the themes and focuses the researcher judges to be relevant, based on experience accumulated prior to, and during the study. This experience, together with other factors that might influence the researcher, are stated explicitly in the research report.

The emergent nature of qualitative research means that the researcher believes that the themes and focuses important to the research topic chosen will emerge during the data collection. The researcher also believes they have the ability 'to devise research procedures to fit the situation and the nature of the people in it, as they are revealed' (Holliday, 2002, p. 6), and she is able to interpret results arising from them.

If we compare the *size of the population investigated* in qualitative and quantitative studies, we can conclude the following: as qualitative studies aim to probe deeply into the chosen topic and setting, they normally do not span a large population, in contrast to quantitative studies, which generally do. Qualitative studies, especially case studies, focus on smaller groups of people, or in many cases, individuals. The reason for this is that the in-depth investigation of a given phenomenon, and the intention to provide a holistic picture of that phenomenon, compel the researcher to limit the scope of the investigation.

Rigour in quantitative research entails that the researcher applies established rules to statistics, experiment and survey design. Quantitative research is characterised by a high degree of control. Being fully informed of the conventions of quantitative methodology, and following them, is a prerequisite for carrying out quality research.

The emergent nature of qualitative research, and the fact that the researcher's subjective view of the problem play a significant role in qualitative studies, do not mean that qualitative studies are conducted in an ad hoc manner. Rigour in qualitative studies means finding research strategies that fit the setting and participants being studied, and also that the researcher continuously endeavours to keep track of events, find the best way to record them and instigate the next step in the inquiry. The qualitative researcher leaves an *audit trail* in their study, which outlines the decisions they have taken in the course of the study.

3.1.3 The researcher's role and the language used in reporting

As far as the style of writing is concerned, the quantitative research report is characterized by an objective, impersonal style. The researcher stays in the background, and the use of the passive, the word 'researcher' and the third person singular are encouraged. The researcher should not have an effect on the data collected or the results of the research, as objectivity is a key prerequisite for quality quantitative research. The people participating in the research are usually referred to as *subjects* or *participants*.

The role qualitative researchers play in their studies is quite the opposite of the role of the quantitative researcher. In the qualitative paradigm, the researcher is the main instrument of research, and all of the data and the results are filtered through her interpretation. Subjectivity is thus present in the investigation, and the researcher's experience, biases and opinions are explicitly stated. For an example of a description of the researcher's personal role see Cherney (1999).

The qualitative study is characterised by a narrative style. The text describes the participants, the setting and the events taking place in the presence of the researcher. As the researcher is present at the site of research the description is given from her point of view. It is customary to use the first person singular in these descriptions. The people participating in the research are usually referred to as *informants* or *participants*.

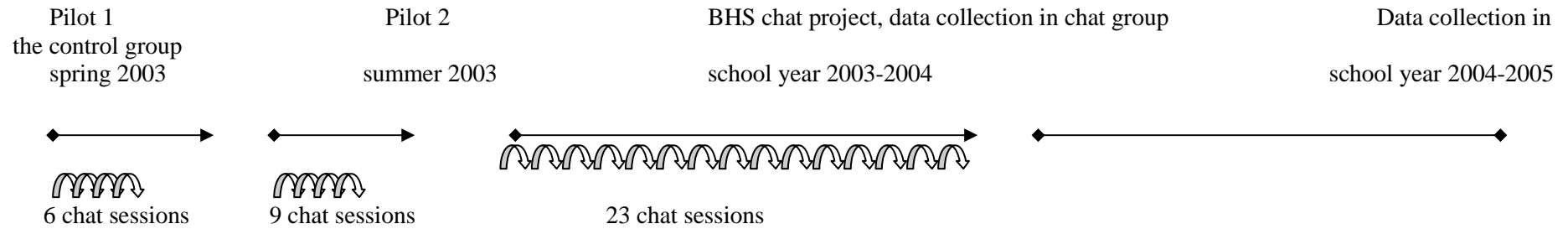
3.2 Combining qualitative and quantitative methods

As shown in the paragraphs above, quantitative and qualitative research methodologies have opposing assumptions and objectives. The results obtained by the two types of investigation are also of an entirely different nature. In spite of the sharp distinctions between the two research traditions, it is possible to combine the two methodologies in one study. Numerical results and descriptions concerning the same research problem can shed light on different facets of the same topic, and provide a more refined answer to the research question. Using combined methods also increases the validity of a study (Jick, 1979, Creswell, 1996). By using two different methodologies and collecting and analysing two or more data sources to answer the same research question, the researcher *triangulates* their findings, and the results drawn from one source may be confirmed by the results from a second one. For example, the researcher's observations at the site of research can be confirmed (or contradicted) by the results of a questionnaire given to the informants at the site. (The concept of *triangulation* will be dealt with in detail in 3.3.1.)

The main study, the BHS chat project, was preceded by two pilot studies. In these studies, the problem of inclusion was approached *heuristically*. The use of this approach meant that my aim was to find the dominant themes, and the patterns of student behaviour in an EFL class where chat tasks are included in the syllabus.

In the present dissertation, which describes the BHS chat project, a combined qualitative and quantitative research approach was employed. The reason for this combined approach is that the phenomenon investigated, that is the effect of the inclusion of chat tasks on a group of secondary school EFL learners, had not been the topic of empirical research in Hungary at the time of this project's commencement. Due to the novelty of the subject of the study, I considered it important to present a detailed picture and description of the chat project, and to describe the English classes and chat sessions that took place within the framework of the project. At the same time, previous studies on chat in the language classroom suggested some themes worth investigating. Consequently, I was able to define a number of steps to be taken before beginning the research. The variables *proficiency in English*, and *the frequency of language learning strategies* were investigated using quantitative methods. In figure 3.1 the different stages of the study are shown. The third and most important stage of the study, the BHS chat project, can be seen in the middle. Under the time line of the project, the quantitative and qualitative elements of the project are shown. The qualitative element is the case study of a group that had regular chat sessions in its EFL classes for one school year. The quantitative element included in the study is the chat experiment.

Figure 3.1 Data collection in the BHS chat project



Case study of the *chat group*

- participant observation: Language Teacher's Journal
 - interviews with participants
- classroom documents: chat logs
- task evaluation questionnaires

- 2 chat sessions with another group

Chat experiment

- treatment: the inclusion of chat in the EFL classes
 - pre- & post-test of language proficiency and strategy repertoire
- questionnaire on attitudes

- no treatment
 - pre- & post-test of language proficiency and strategy repertoire

Since the qualitative and quantitative methods played an equally important part in the study, the methodological approach of the BHS chat project constitutes an example of ‘mixed methodology’. Green et al. (1989) claim that by relying on both paradigms in a study, different facets of a phenomenon may emerge. The possibility for exploring different facets of the inclusion of chat in the EFL classes was the asset of mixed methodology that I wished to exploit in the BHS chat project.

From the qualitative angle, the pilot projects and the BHS chat project are examples of case studies (Stake, 2000, Yin, 2003). Within the framework of the case study, I intended to explore the themes relevant to the group’s language learning process. From the quantitative angle, the effect of chat was investigated using a quasi-experimental design, which involved three intact school groups. The inclusion of chat in the language classes was the treatment, the effect of which was measured by the use of various instruments. The changes in the variables are compared with the results in the control groups.

The aim of the present study therefore, is to test and generate hypotheses concurrently, and to show how the various components of a chat project function, and what added value a chat project can bring to language learning.

3.3 Concern for the trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the study

In quantitative research, the concepts of validity and reliability play crucial roles in defining how useful the findings of a study are for its readers and ‘consumers’, the people and institutions who may apply the findings. Similarly, a key concept in qualitative research is *trustworthiness*, which shows how far the readers of a study can trust the findings described in a qualitative report. Guba (1981) lists four components of trustworthiness in a qualitative study: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. In the following paragraphs, these concepts will be explained. It will also be shown how the four concepts relate to notions used in respect of similar concerns in quantitative studies: internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. Table 3.2 summarizes the four qualitative concepts and their equivalents in the quantitative paradigm.

Table 3.2 *The components of the concept ‘trustworthiness’*

<i>Component</i>	<i>corresponding concept in the quantitative paradigm</i>
Credibility	internal validity
Transferability	external validity/generalizability
Dependability	reliability
Confirmability	objectivity

3.3.1 Credibility

The *credibility* of research refers to how far the findings can be confirmed by the sources of the data. In qualitative research, the researcher can check the credibility of their findings by doing *member checks*, which means asking the participants of the research what they think of the findings and conclusions. Another method of checking credibility is the analysis of several sources of data, for example checking if the observation notes, and the interview conducted with the participants both lead to the same conclusions. The technique of using two or more data sources to show that the findings of research converge is called *triangulation* (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, Creswell, 1994, Holliday, 2002). Triangulation is a basic technique used to ensure confirmability. Both member checks and triangulation were used in the present study to ensure the credibility of the findings. Member checking was done by conducting post-project interviews with two of the participants and the English teacher of the control group about the findings of the study. Triangulation was achieved by collecting and analysing data from different sources for each research question.

The concept of credibility in qualitative research is comparable to that of internal validity in quantitative research, which is the measure of how far the results of research were affected by the manner in which the research was conceived (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).

3.3.2 Transferability

The second component of trustworthiness is *transferability*. The concept of transferability concerns the degree to which the findings of research can be transferred to a context similar to that of the research. The detailed, *thick description* of the context of the research can assist readers in estimating how other contexts compare to that described in the research. Thick description in qualitative research is the technique of reporting an event or describing a phenomenon by presenting its different facets and showing its complexity. In the case of a classroom project, its different facets can be shown by; presenting the participants' opinions, the investigation of the written product of the class, the teacher's experience, and the observation of the participants' behaviour. The transferability of research should also be ensured in qualitative studies by leaving an *audit trail*, a record of the steps and decisions taken in the course of research. This record enables the reader to transfer the results to another setting. In the present study, transferability was ensured by presenting thick descriptions, and giving an account of the important decisions taken in the course of the research, as outlined in Chapters 5 and 7, which approached the topic of chat in the EFL class qualitatively.

In quantitative studies, generalizability is a key concept. Generalizability means that the findings of research are applicable to the whole population the sample was part of. The findings of qualitative studies cannot be generalized to larger populations. However, by choosing the setting in which an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon researched is possible, the qualitative researcher can provide a description that helps their readers 'vicariously experience these happenings and draw conclusions' (Stake, 2000, p. 439). Consequently, the investigation will be transferable, and the reader can compare the motives and patterns described to other cases and settings.

3.3.3 Dependability

The third concept of trustworthiness is *dependability*. The quantitative counterpart of dependability is reliability, which refers to how accurate and consistent the data collection was. Dependability also concerns the stability of the research instruments. However, as humans are used as instruments in qualitative research (Guba, 1981), shifts in the instruments are not interpreted as errors, as they are in quantitative research. Changes in the 'instruments' are attributed to the emergent nature of qualitative inquiry. As the researcher progresses in their inquiries, they have 'evolving insights and sensitivities' (Guba, 1981, p. 81). In this process, *trackability* takes on the main role, instead of consistency. Trackability means that the decisions the researcher makes in the course of research are precisely documented in the research report. Dependability in qualitative research thus consists of both consistency and trackability. In the present study the two chapters concerning qualitative research, chapter 5 about the evolution of the inclusion of chat tasks in the EFL classes, and chapter 7 about changes in motivation and attitudes towards chat, provide an account of the decisions I made in the course of the project.

3.3.4 Confirmability

The fourth and last concept included in trustworthiness is *confirmability*. Confirmability concerns the neutrality of the data produced. While conducting the study, the qualitative researcher collects data from different sources so that the findings can be triangulated. The qualitative researcher should also record the events in the study, reflect upon them, and keep track of the decisions they made during the study. After the study has been conducted, and the researcher reports on the research, it should be extensively documented, so that the data is available to the readers. The presentation of all the products of research, including the data, is called *confirmability audit* (Guba, 1981). The word 'audit' here refers to the fact that the researcher makes it possible for her readers to examine all the documents of her research. In order to achieve confirmability, the qualitative data were included in the appendix of the study (see Chapter 4).

The quantitative counterpart of confirmability is objectivity. Objectivity is achieved by removing the investigator from the inquiry. While in qualitative research, the main instrument is the researcher themselves, in quantitative research, the researcher employs objective research instruments to make sure that their personal bias and subjectivity do not interfere with the findings of research. In qualitative research, the researcher explicitly states the personal biases that influence data collection and interpretation. In the present study, the personal factors that influenced the course of research were recorded in the Language Teacher's Journal (see description in 4.3.7.8 and the document in Appendix 3). As a result, the reader is aware of the factors that had an impact on the course of the research.

3.4 Summary

In the preceding paragraphs, the assumptions underlying the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms were discussed. The comparison of the two research approaches, the rationale for using combined methodology in a study, and the description of how the two differing approaches ensure the credibility of the findings of research were provided as a theoretical background to the complex and unusual methodology used in the present study.

In the following chapter, the methodology employed in the BHS chat study, and the two pilot studies preceding the chat project, are elaborated on.

4.1 The research problem

The main question the present study focuses on is *what influence the inclusion of chat tasks has on the language learning process of Hungarian EFL learners*. Language learning process encompassed issues related both to the language learners and the language classes. The inclusion of chat tasks in the English classes was investigated in three stages. Each stage comprised a chat project. The first two of the three

successive chat projects were pilot studies. The findings of the pilot studies helped me to narrow the focus of research and determine the design of the BHS project.

4.2 Pilot studies preceding the BHS chat project

In the following sections, the two pilot studies preceding the BHS chat project are described, and the rationale for the main study is outlined. The first project (Pilot 1) took place at a Hungarian secondary school near Budapest, in the spring semester of 2003. I held a number of chat sessions with an English teacher colleague's group at the school. The second project (Pilot 2) was carried out at an English language camp for secondary school learners in the summer of 2003, where I was working as an English teacher and had daily chat sessions with the learners in my group. The final, and largest in scale of the three projects, the main study, was conducted at Buda High School, a secondary school in Budapest, from September 2003 to June 2004. Figure 4.1 shows the three consecutive chat projects.

Figure 4.1 *The three stages of the chat study*



4.2.1 The first pilot study

In the spring of 2003, I organized chat sessions for secondary school learners of English in order to explore *how chat tasks worked in a language classroom*, and *what attitudes the learners had towards online chat*.

4.2.1.1 Setup

I was not teaching at a secondary school at that time. An English teacher acquaintance at a secondary school near Budapest offered me one 45-minute lesson a week with a lower-intermediate group she was teaching. The group consisted of twelve 16-year old students.

There were six chat sessions altogether. The site www.trefort.net was used for chatting, because it could be used without altering anything in the computers of the school, it was possible to save the chat log there and several of the participants were already familiar with it. The first session was spent learning to log in and use the chat site. In the following sessions, the participants performed various chat tasks in pairs. The tasks were selected from a collection of communicative activities for pre-intermediate learners of English (Kay, 1999). At the end of the chat-project, I asked the participants' opinion about online chatting in the language classroom in a questionnaire (see Appendix 4).

4.2.1.2 Findings

The project described in the preceding section resulted in the following findings. The first finding concerned the composition of chat pairs. Although the participants were enthusiastic about chatting, they were not all present on every occasion, so there were no set pairs. This had a negative effect on the participants' performance: some pairs did not like working together at all.

The second finding was related to how a chat task can fit into a secondary school English class: a 45-minute-lesson was not enough for logging in to www.trefort.net, which sometimes took 5-10 minutes, and completing the task. The chat sessions were immediately followed by another class in the computer room, so most of the time the chatters could not finish the task and left the chat session disappointed.

The third lesson learnt in the project was about choosing tasks for the chat class: I did not know the participants very well, and had no opportunity to observe their English classes regularly, so I could not

really tailor the chat tasks to their proficiency level and needs. This became apparent from the chat texts the learners produced. If a task was too difficult for the learners, they could not complete it successfully. (For a sample chat log saved from one of the sessions see Appendix 1.)

4.2.1.3 Preparing the second pilot study

Using the findings of the first investigation, I decided to carry out a second, improved project. Three important factors needed to be modified in the new project. Firstly, I concluded that the chat tasks should be designed for a group I myself teach and know. Secondly, double (i.e. 90-minute) lessons were needed in the computer room. Thirdly, the chat site used for chatting was not ideal for learning purposes: sometimes it took very long to log in and students kept forgetting their passwords. I had to find a chat site or software that was easier to work with.

4.2.2 The second pilot study

This investigation was intended to find answers to the following questions:

- 1) What steps should the English teacher take to include and integrate chat tasks into her lessons?
- 2) How useful is the inclusion of chat for the learners' proficiency in English?
- 3) What is the learners' attitude to the inclusion of chat in EFL classes?

4.2.2.1 Set-up

The second, improved chat project took place in a summer camp in Hungary in July 2003, where I was teaching a group of 10 intermediate students for 9 days. The age of the participants ranged between 15 and 18 years.

Every day there were six 45-minute English lessons. A double lesson was spent in the computer room. The participants carried out nine different types of chat tasks, and I chose them so that they were connected to the topics of the other lessons. The tasks were taken from Kay (1996) and Greenall (1996). The site www.chat.hu was used for performing the chat tasks, because it was easy to reach and work with, and one did not have to register and use a password to log in. Most of the time the participants chatted in pairs. There was one whole-group online chat discussion in the programme. The chat texts produced by the participants were saved.

Six of the nine tasks were goal-oriented, as illustrated by the three examples below:

- 1) Jigsaw reading: student A and B read different texts on the same topic, and they asked questions to find out what the other text was about.
- 2) Taboo: student A got a list of words. Student B had to find out these words with the help of A's definitions. Under each word, there were four words closely associated with the words to be guessed, for example if the word 'bank' was to be guessed, the associated words could be 'building, money, save, account'. Student A was not allowed to use these words in the definition. This made defining and guessing much more difficult.
- 3) Picture dictation: Student A and B got different pictures with a lot of small details. Student A 'dictated' her picture to student B, who tried to draw the picture. Then they exchanged roles. The student who was drawing could ask questions about the picture to make the drawing as precise as possible. Three of the tasks were open-ended tasks, such as the following activities:
- 4) Discussing musical tastes in pairs.
- 5) Group discussion about a film watched in the previous lesson.

At the end of the project the participants were asked about the whole chat-project in the form of a questionnaire (see Appendix 5). The participants were asked to rate the chat tasks according to how

interesting and useful they found them. The members of the group also wrote an essay in English on what they thought about chat tasks in language learning.

4.2.2.2 Findings

During the second chat project, I was able to determine the composition of chat pairs, the material used in the non-chat English classes, and observe the students' behaviour in the classes. I could also review the chat texts produced after each chat class. As I had more control over the teaching process, and could integrate the chat tasks better in it, the findings of the study provided a more accurate picture of the influence of chat tasks on EFL learning than the first pilot study. Three factors emerged as decisive from the viewpoint of the success of the chat session: the choice of chat task, the quality of language the participants produced in chat and the stability of the site used for chatting.

As far as the *choice of tasks* is concerned, the comments the students made in the chat classes, the analysis of the chat texts, and the student questionnaires revealed that the participants enjoyed play-oriented tasks the most, where creativity was required. The most useful and enjoyable task turned out to be Taboo.

When investigating *language use* in the chat texts, I found that the learners did not necessarily make an attempt to write correct English in online chat. They had to be encouraged to do so. Revising and correcting the texts (by teacher and chatter) are indeed important steps if chat tasks are to be used for language learning purposes.

The participants found performing chat tasks very useful for improving their English. However, since they were all Hungarians, they had the same L1 and cultural background, and communication was easier for them than it would have been with a partner with whom the only shared language would have been English. The problem of using L1 in the chat sessions could be controlled by revising and checking the texts.

The results of the project evaluation questionnaire, and the essays the participants wrote about chat in language learning revealed that the group found the chat tasks to be an interesting and useful part of the English course.

The *site used for chatting*, www.chat.hu was technically very good, but still not perfect for the purposes of a chat project. Since the site is public, the chatters were sometimes disturbed by 'strangers' looking for chat partners on the site. The ideal chat room in a project should be protected from strangers.

4.2.2.3 Implications for the Buda High School chat project

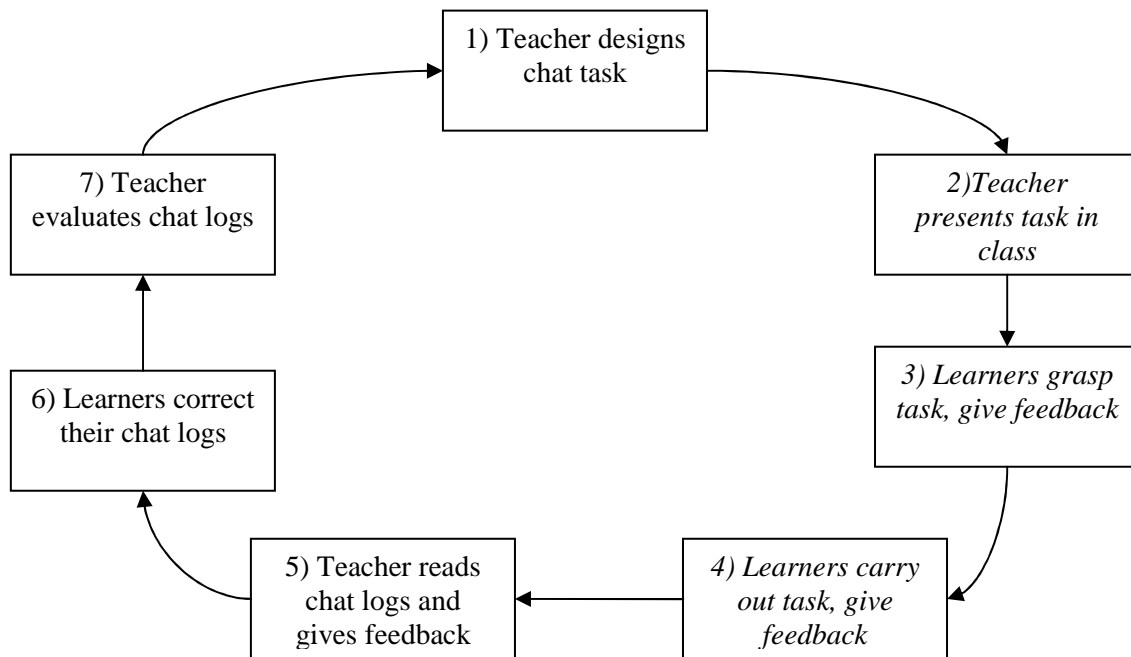
After having conducted two chat projects, and having reviewed the literature on using chat tasks in language learning, the assumption that online chatting can be a useful tool in language learning for secondary school students seemed well-founded. I intended to learn more about how it can be included within the framework of a secondary school English syllabus, and what effects its inclusion would have on the language learning process of the participants. The following paragraphs will list the lessons learnt from the pilot studies that assisted me in designing a larger-scale study, the BHS chat project.

The students' reactions to the questionnaires showed that chat tasks can offer an enjoyable means of learning, and the inclusion of chat in the language class can be a source of motivation and generate positive learner attitudes towards learning English. The motivating nature of chat tasks in language learning, and the usefulness of revising the chat logs afterwards are also mentioned by Beauvois (1992, 1995), Lee (2002), Toorenaar (2002) and Warschauer (1996).

As far as the *method of including chat* is concerned, I regularly read the participants' chat texts, and realized it should be made clear to the participants at the beginning of the chat-project that, besides performing the task, correct spelling and grammar are very important.

During the course, the learners often made evaluative comments and came up with ideas about what they would like to do in a task. This behaviour was a sign of the learners' involvement, and made me realize that the chatters' involvement can be increased by building their feedback into the chat tasks to follow. I devised a model of the steps that should be taken to incorporate chat into the EFL classes. Figure 4.2 shows the seven steps of the *chat inclusion cycle*, which consists of the preparation of the session, designing the task, the chat session, and its aftermath. Then the cycle begins again with the design of the task.

Figure 4.2 *The chat inclusion cycle*



To remedy the problem of chat instability on the internet, IRC (Internet Relay Chat) software can be used. When using IRC, the participants are protected from strangers, and no Internet is needed for classroom chat. This is a great advantage considering how slow Internet connection is in most secondary schools in Hungary.

Using the experience gained from the pilot studies, I set out to conduct a year-long experiment at a Hungarian secondary school, in order to explore how the inclusion of chat influences the EFL classes. Section 4.3 is devoted to the description of the methods used in the BHS chat project.

4.3 The Buda High School chat project

In the following sections, the research methods used in the chat project are described. Section 4.3.1 outlines the research questions guiding the investigation. Section 4.3.2 gives a description of the setting. Section 4.3.3 is about the participants involved in the project, the chat group and the control groups. In Section 4.3.4, the chat tasks used in the study are dealt with. In Section 4.3.5, the software used for chat is introduced. In Section 4.3.6, the types of data collected are listed. Section 4.3.7 briefly summarizes what has been said in chapter 4 about the methodology of the BHS chat project, and provides a preview of the chapters on data analysis.

4.3.1 Research questions

The aim of the present study is to *describe the effect of the inclusion of chat tasks in secondary school EFL classes on the participants' language learning process*. The effect of the inclusion was investigated, focussing on the following research questions:

- 1 How can the chat tasks be *integrated into the EFL classes* at school?
- 2 How does the inclusion of chat influence the participants' *EFL proficiency and language learning strategies*?
- 3 How does the chat inclusion cycle influence the participants' *attitudes to chat tasks and motivation for learning English*?
- 4 What impact does the inclusion of chat have on the participants' *language use*?

Table 4.1 outlines the research questions and the corresponding types of data collected in the chat group. For each data type, the type of analysis conducted is given. All of the data listed below was collected in the school year 2003-2004.

Table 4.1 *Research questions, data types, and analysis*

Research question	Data type	Analysis
1 How can the chat tasks be integrated into the EFL classes at school? (Chapter 5)	questionnaire on background	<i>qualitative analysis</i>
	chat logs	<i>qualitative analysis</i>
	journal	<i>qualitative analysis</i>
	interview	<i>qualitative analysis</i>
2 How does the inclusion of chat influence the participants' EFL proficiency and language learning strategies? (Chapter 6)	pre- & post-test papers of proficiency in English	quantitative analysis
	pre- & post-test strategy inventory questionnaire	quantitative analysis
3 How does the chat inclusion cycle influence the participants' attitudes to chat tasks and motivation for learning English? (Chapter 7)	journal	<i>qualitative analysis</i>
	background questionnaire	
	chat logs	
	questionnaire on attitudes	quantitative analysis
4 What impact does the inclusion of chat have on the participants' language use? (Chapter 8)	chat logs	quantitative analysis

4.3.2 Setting

The chat project took place at a secondary school in Budapest in the school year 2003-2004. Whilst looking for a secondary school where I could conduct the study, I was offered a group at Buda High School, with the assistance of a colleague at university. In June 2003, I visited the school to discuss the practicalities of the project with the headmaster, the head English teacher and the I.T. teacher at the school. The group and the setting seemed optimal for conducting the study I had planned. For details on the first visit, see the first entry in the *Language Teacher's Journal* in Appendix 3.

4.3.3 Participants

In the BHS chat project, three groups were involved in different stages of the data collection. The investigation focussed on the case of the chat group (ChG) and further involved two control groups, control group 1 (C1) and control group 2 (C2).

The chat group

The chat group consisted of eight 17-year-old students, six males and two females. The group was taking five English lessons a week. English was the students' second foreign language. The English proficiency of the learners was approximately at level B1. The general proficiency test (GPT) results of the participants at the beginning of the project are shown in table 4.2. The learners in the chat group came from two different classes and did not form a group in any other classes. When they started their first year at BHS, they all knew some English already. According to the students' own, and their class teacher's judgement, they stood between levels B1 and B2 (Common European Framework, 2001) in German, which was their first foreign language. They were fairly experienced language learners. In September 2003, when the project started, they were in the third year of secondary school. I was their third English teacher at BHS. Both of their previous teachers told me the group was difficult to handle.

In table 4.2, the background of the members of the chat group is given. The information was gathered by means of a background questionnaire (see 4.3.7.1) at the beginning of the project, in September 2003. For the sake of confidentiality, the names of the students have been changed. I gave them new, English names which resemble their Hungarian names. The following names are used in the study thus: Mitch, Ben, Footie, Piper, Dot, Tom, Seth, and Martin. Piper and Dot are girls, the rest of the students in the group are boys. On a number of occasions, an American exchange student also participated in the classes. She will be referred to as Lara.

The second column in Table 4.2 shows the participants' results on the pre-test General Proficiency Test (see section 4.3.7.5). The names of the participants are aligned according to how high their total score was on the test. Only one of the group members, Ben, had a score above 80%, the level above which candidates at The European Language Certificate language exam (see www.telc.hu) can receive an intermediate-level exam certificate. (This type of exam was used to measure English proficiency at BHS.) Six participants were between 60% and 80%, which is at B1 level. Only one participant, Mitch, was lower than 60%, thus not yet at level B1.

The third column in Table 4.2 shows the score each participant gave themselves on a self-assessment scale about proficiency in English. The fourth column shows how often they used the computer. There was a computer in all of the participants' homes, and they all had access to the internet. They had all tried chat before.

The fifth column of the table shows how each student felt about language learning at the beginning of the project, in September 2003. The sixth column shows how they felt about speaking English. Mitch and Dot, who were the least proficient in English as the test scores

showed, were not positive about learning English, though Dot thought that language learning was interesting sometimes, so she had a partly positive attitude towards learning English. Three members of the group only marked negative adjectives about how they felt when speaking English. Footie and Piper had mixed feelings about speaking English: they felt it was exciting and they felt embarrassed at the same time.

Table 4.2 Background information about the members of the chat group

name	gender	GPT max: 100%	max: 35	frequency of computer use	language learning is ...	when I speak English, I feel ...
Ben	male	83	28	1-2 hours a day	interesting	it is an exciting challenge
Footie	male	73	28	every day	interesting, easy	it is an exciting challenge, embarrassed
Mart	male	71	21	not very often	-	it is an exciting challenge
Tom	male	70	23	several times a week	interesting, entertaining, easy	confident
Piper	female	69	31	2-3 times a week	interesting, easy	it is an exciting challenge embarrassed
Seth	male	66	25	every day	interesting, entertaining	anxious
Dot	female	64	20	every second day	interesting (sometimes), difficult	anxious, silly
Mitch	male	43	23	every day	boring, nerve-racking	embarrassed

Control group 1

In order to answer research question 2, the proficiency skills and the language learning strategies of the chat group were compared to those of control group 1 in a quasi-experiment. The types of data collected in this group and the time of collection are shown in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Data collection in control group 1

Research question	Data collected in C2	Time of data collection
Influence of chat on proficiency and learning strategies	Pre- & post-testing of proficiency Pre- & post-testing of learning strategies	October - April 2004

The members of control group 1 were in the third year of secondary school in 2004-2005, just like the chat group a year earlier. The language groups in the third year at BHS were formed on the basis of which foreign language the learners had been taking at school, from either German or English. In each year there was one group which took English as the first, and one group which took English as a second foreign language. This meant that it was not possible to compare the

chat group's performance to that of another group in the same year. Hence, the control group was observed in the school year 2004-2005.

The group had 17 members, and they all came from the same class, unlike the members of the chat group. Another difference between the two groups was that the control group was made up of real beginners at the start of the first year at secondary school. This meant that the members of the group learnt the items they knew together, in a group. They also had two years of continuous instruction suited to their own level. The control group had the same teacher for the first two years. From their third year at secondary school, their form teacher took over as their English teacher. The control group's first teacher, and their form teacher also, stated that it was a good group, and the students were fairly easy to work with.

As the description above reveals, there were a number of basic differences between the chat group and the control group. Firstly, the control group was more than twice the size of the chat group. Secondly, the level of their English differed when they started learning English at BHS. Thirdly, the control group was a community in which the group dynamics worked quite well, and the group members had positive experiences of learning English together. According to their previous teachers, this was not the case in the chat group.

In spite of these differences, which are obvious threats to the validity of the results of the study, the similarities between the groups, the fact that they had been learning at the same school and were both in their third year, and that both groups received instruction suited to their level for the school year studied, made the comparison worthwhile.

Control Group 2

During the BHS chat project, in the school year 2003-2004, a fourth-year English group was asked to participate in two chat sessions. This group had 14 members. The purpose of the chat sessions in control group 2 was to collect chat data in an English group at BHS where there was no *regular* inclusion of chat tasks and no reviewing and correction of the chat texts. Table 4.4 below shows the type of data collected in this group and the time of collection.

Table 4.4 Data collection in control group 2

Research question	Data collected in C2	Time of data collection
1 The effect of inclusion cycles	Two chat sessions	March, May 2004
3 Attitudes to chat tasks	Questionnaire on attitudes and motivation	May 2004

It was considered advisable to collect chat data from a group in the same year as the chat sessions in the chat group were taking place, because at that time it was possible to use the computer room for chat, and I had daily contact with the English teachers at BHS, so the sessions were relatively easy to organise in another class. The members of the group were also asked to fill in a questionnaire about attitudes towards chat tasks in the class.

4.3.4 The treatment: the tasks used in the chat project

The BHS chat project included 23 chat sessions within the framework of the English lessons of the chat group. Appendix 14 contains the complete list of tasks used in the project, and the type and source of the tasks. There were seven task types introduced in the chat sessions:

- 1) jigsaw
- 2) information gap
- 3) opinion exchange
- 4) story-telling

- 5) interview
- 6) role-play
- 7) vocabulary and grammar practice

These types of tasks are frequently used in the free production phase of language classes (Scrivener, 1996), in which learners are supposed to produce target language freely and creatively. The choice of the tasks was motivated by three sources: the task types suggested in the literature on chat in language learning (see Chapter 2), the lessons learnt from the two pilot studies (see section 4.2) and my experience gained in the course of the BHS chat project. (For a thick description of the latter, see Chapter 5.)

4.3.5 The software used for chat: Internet Relay Chat

The software the participants used when carrying out the chat tasks was Internet Relay Chat (IRC). IRC is a synchronous form of computer-mediated communication. This means that two or more people, who are sitting in front of their computer at the same time, can communicate with each other with the help of their computers. The computers communicating with each other must be connected by the Internet or an intranet.

The software used in the project was text-only, so the parties engaged in chat only had to express what they wanted to say to their partners by using the characters on their keyboard. There was no sound or picture in the software.

When using IRC, the chatters see two windows on their computer screen. In the lower window, the message can be typed and edited. By clicking on the 'send' button, the chatter can send their message to the other party or parties, who can in turn send a reply to the message in a similar fashion. There is also a larger window on the computer screen, where messages sent by participants in the chat conversation appear. This window thus shows the dialogue to which all parties can contribute. The text of the chat dialogue, which is called a chat log, can be saved on the computer.

Chatting in IRC takes place in chat rooms or channels that can be created by the chatters, or the chatters can log on to existing channels. A room or a channel is a virtual space where the chatters can meet and 'talk' to each other.

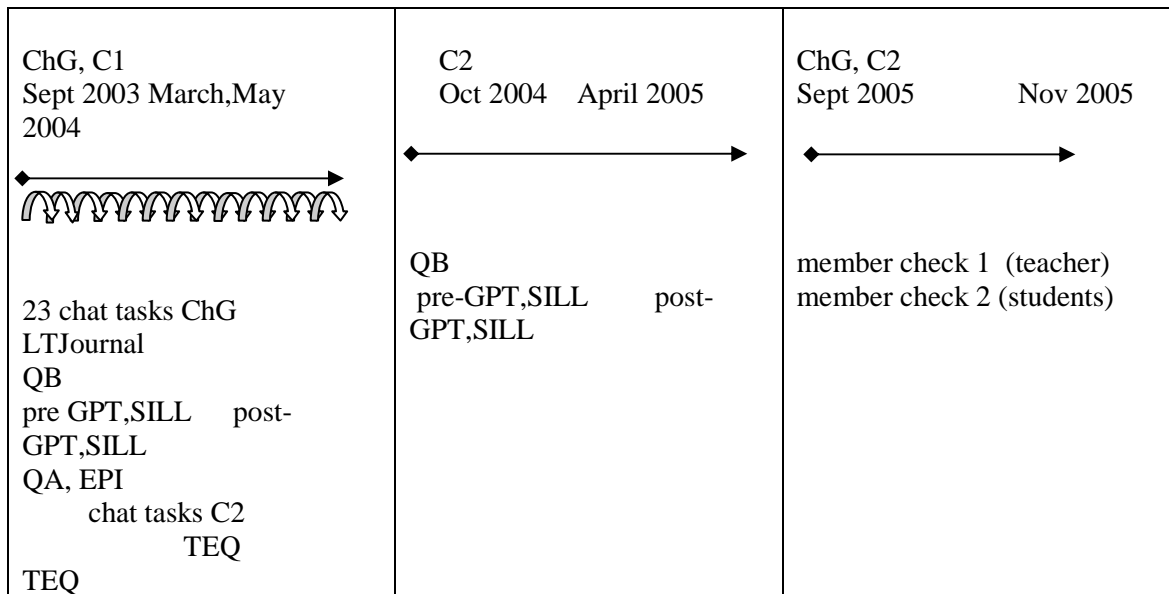
4.3.6 Data collection procedures

Within the framework of the study, the following types of data were collected:

- 1) Questionnaire on Background (QB)
- 2) Questionnaire on Attitudes (QA)
- 3) End-Project Interview (EPI)
- 4) Task Evaluation Questionnaire (TEQ)
- 5) General Proficiency Test (GPT)
- 6) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)
- 7) Chat logs from the chat group and control group
- 8) Language Teacher's Journal (LTJ)
- 9) Member checks (interviews)

Figure 4.3 below shows when the different data in the chat group were collected in the course of the school year, between September 2003 (beginning of the project) and November 2005.

Figure 4.3 *The data collected during the BHS chat project*



In the following paragraphs, the data collection procedures are described.

4.3.7.1 Questionnaire on Background

A questionnaire on the background of the participants in the chat group and control group 2 was administered at the beginning of the 2003 school year. The questionnaire was administered to control group 1 a year later, at the beginning of the 2004 school year.

The questionnaire was compiled based on the model questionnaire provided in Gedeon et al. (1993). Questions about the participants' language learning experience and computer skills were added. The questionnaire included questions about the following topics:

- 1) reasons for learning English,
- 2) self-assessment of different areas of language proficiency,
- 3) computer access at home,
- 4) internet access at home,
- 5) frequency of computer use,
- 6) type of activity conducted on the computer,
- 7) self-assessment of typing skills,
- 8) attitude to learning English,
- 9) feelings about speaking English.

The chat group's answers helped me to form the dyads the students worked in when performing the chat tasks. At the beginning of the chat project, I put students with similar computer literacy levels, proficiency levels and interests into the same pair or small group. (See the complete questionnaire in Appendix 6.)

4.3.7.2 Questionnaire on Attitudes

The questionnaire on attitudes was based on the sample questionnaire in Gedeon et al. (1993), Beauvois' questionnaire on attitudes towards CMC (1995) and my observations about the chat

inclusions. The language of the questionnaire was Hungarian. (See the complete questionnaire in Appendix 7.)

The participants in the chat group and the control groups were asked to fill in the questionnaire at the end of the school year. The questionnaire contained 7 questions, covering the following points:

- 1) reasons for learning English,
- 2) attitudes towards learning English,
- 3) classroom activity preferences,
- 4) emotions related to speaking English in class,
- 5) attitudes towards chat in the EFL classroom, including questions addressing the following sub-topics:
 - a) The inclusion of chat tasks makes language learning more interesting.
 - b) Chatting is a useful tool for language learning.
 - c) When doing a chat task with a fellow group member, I can work autonomously, without the teacher's control.
 - d) When doing a chat task, I can learn English in a stress-free environment.
- 6) self-assessment of language skills developed by chat,
- 7) overall evaluation of the inclusion of chat in the EFL classes.

The questionnaire consisted of open-ended items, items where students were asked to mark on a Likert-scale, between 1 and 5, how true an item was for them, and items where students could choose one or more from a number of answers.

The questionnaire was validated by two types of methods. The first method was expert-rating, in which two experts in the field of applied linguistics were asked to give their opinion, both about the questionnaire as a whole and its items. The method of expert-rating is advocated in Brown (2001). Using the feedback given by the two experts, the questionnaire was modified, and the corrected version was given to two students, a girl and a boy, who were not participants in the chat project. They were asked to fill in the questionnaire and vocalise their thoughts while filling it in. This method is called the *think aloud procedure*, and it is used to explore the mental processes taking place in the head of informants while filling in a questionnaire, taking a test, or doing some other activity involving important cognitive processes. I took notes of the students' questions and ideas, and modified the questionnaire to make sure the questions posed in it were clear and suitable for the purpose intended.

4.3.7.3 End-project Interview

At the end of the BHS chat project, I interviewed each participant in the chat group to learn about how they evaluated the project and the group's progress. The interviews were conducted in the last week of May 2004, one week before the project and instruction finished. I conducted the interviews myself. I had asked a colleague to assist me in the interviews and take notes of what the students said. The language of the interviews was Hungarian. Six of the eight participants let me record the interview with a Dictaphone. Two students did not want to be recorded, so both of us took notes of what they said. The questions and the full text of the interviews are included in Appendix 8.

At the beginning of the interview the interviewees were told that we were planning to launch a new chat project at another school, and this is why we wanted to know how the interviewee evaluated the project. The interviews took between 10 and 15 minutes.

The interview was standardized and open-ended. During the interview, the same eleven questions were put to all of the participants. The questions were open-ended. This type of interview ensures consistency across the interviews, makes comparison of answers possible, and minimises the

variation among the interviewees (Patton, 2002). The format of the interview was focussed on the issues raised by the questions, so time was used efficiently, which was very important considering the school setting. However, I remained open to other issues related to the evaluation of the chat project, and a number of times asked some follow-up questions to the participants and encouraged them to elaborate on the topics the participants brought up in their answers. When compiling the questions for the interview, my aim was to gain as much information as possible about the participants' experience of the inclusion of chat tasks in the EFL class. I expected that the participants would touch upon the positive and the problematic aspects of the chat project as well, and talk about how they thought the medium, the tasks, the correction of the texts, the chat partner, and the group influenced their learning in the chat project.

4.3.7.4 Task Evaluation Questionnaire

At the end of the first semester, in February 2004, and at the end of the second semester, in June 2004, the members of the chat group were asked to evaluate the chat tasks they had completed according to how useful and interesting they had found them. The participants were asked to give grades to these tasks, between 1 (useless/boring) and 5 (useful/interesting). In the first semester, the participants were also asked to write down the names of the three group members they enjoyed working with the most, and to explain this choice. In the second semester, the participants were asked to write down who they had worked with, and to evaluate their common work. The question about partners was Question 2 in both questionnaires. In both questionnaires, in Question 3, there was room for the participants' further comments or requests.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain information about each participants' evaluation of the chat tasks, and to find out how they felt about their chat partners and what made them feel their partners were good or unpleasant to work with.

4.3.7.5 General Proficiency Tests

To answer research question 2, pre- and a post-test proficiency tests (that show fine changes in the learners' proficiency level,) were administered to the members of the chat group and control group 1. The pre-test was administered to the chat group in September 2003. The post-test was administered in March 2004. Control group 1 took the pre-test in October 2004, the post-test in April 2005. Consequently, there was a time interval of five months between the pre- and the post-test in both groups.

Both of the tests were standardised general proficiency tests of English. The pre-test was the International Certificate Conference Examination in English. The post-test was the Mock Examination for level B1 of The European Language Certificates. The reason for choosing these tests was that the school administers them every year to the third-year students who have English as their first foreign language, so I could obtain two compete sets of proficiency tests. Both tests were for intermediate-level learners of English. Achieving 60% on the test was the threshold for reaching level B1. Achieving 80% or more in these tests meant that the candidate had reached level B2, and could obtain an intermediate-level English Language Certificate from the Hungarian Institute of Foreign Language Studies (ITK).

The proficiency test had five sub-sections:

- Reading Comprehension,
- Listening Comprehension,
- Language Elements,
- Letter Writing, and

- Oral Examination.

An overview of the items in the five parts is given in Appendix 11. The first three sections of the test were corrected using the answer keys for the tests. The writing and oral parts of the test were assessed by myself and another examiner, an English teacher colleague from BHS. Each score was calculated by taking both of the individual scores we had given into consideration, and an agreement was reached.

4.3.7.6 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

The language learning strategy repertoire of the participants in the chat group and control group 2 was investigated with the help of Oxford's SILL, Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) (1990, pp. 293-300). The SILL is a self-report survey of language learning strategies. Oxford claims that the SILL was 'extensively field-tested, demonstrated to be highly valid and reliable, and used for both research and classroom practice' (p. 199). Janssen-van Dieten (1992) also claims that self-report can serve as a valid and reliable tool in assessing the learners' skills.

The pre-test questionnaire was administered to the chat group in September 2003. The post-test questionnaire was administered in March 2004. Control group 2 took the pre-test questionnaire in October 2004, and the post-test in April 2005. Consequently, there was a time interval of five months between the pre- and the post-test in both groups.

The inventory is a list of 50 statements divided into 6 sections. The sections contain statements about the following strategy types:

- A. Remembering more effectively
- B. Using all your mental processes
- C. Compensating for missing knowledge
- D. Organizing and evaluating your learning
- E. Managing your emotions
- F. Learning with others

When filling in the inventory, the students were supposed to mark the statements according to how true they were for them, on a scale between 1 and 5. A profile of the student's language learning strategy repertoire could be compiled with the help of the inventory, which included the average of scores given for the different sections, and an overall average of how often they employ language learning strategies.

I assumed that the results of the self-report would provide a realistic picture of the learners' activities. To ensure that learners would not worry about giving low grades to the statements, I reminded them before filling in the questionnaire that there were no right and wrong answers.

The SILL was translated into Hungarian. Two third-year students, a boy and a girl, who were not members of the chat group, were asked to fill in the questionnaire using the think-aloud method (Cohen, 1987, Elekes, 2000). While filling in the questionnaire, they were vocalising their thoughts. I made notes of the students' ideas and questions, and modified the translation of the questionnaire accordingly. This enabled me to ensure that the ideas expressed in the original version of the SILL were translated accurately into Hungarian (see translation in Appendix 10).

The participants in the two groups were asked to fill in the SILL both at the beginning of the school year, and at the end of it as well. I intended to find out if any changes in the participants' repertoire had occurred in the space of a year, and whether the chat project had had an effect on any such changes.

4.3.7.7 Chat logs in the chat group

During the BHS chat project, the chat group took part in 23 chat sessions. In the chat sessions, 23 different chat tasks were completed. An important step in completing the chat task was saving the text onto a floppy disc. The chat logs were saved as Microsoft Word documents. The texts were printed so that I and the participants could review the texts afterwards. I wrote my comments about the chat logs on the printouts following each chat session and gave the printouts to the students in the class following the chat session. The students' task was to correct their chat texts with the help of the comments. The students wrote the corrections on the printouts. The printouts were collected in a file (for a sample of chat logs from the different task types, see Appendix 9).

4.3.7.7 Chat logs in the control group

During the BHS chat project, on two occasions the members of control group 1 were asked to participate in a chat session. The texts of the two sessions were saved. The purpose of these two chat sessions was to be able to compare the chat group's attitude towards chat tasks with that of a group which did not have chat included in their English course at school.

4.3.7.8 Language Teacher's Journal

During the whole BHS chat project, I kept a journal of the events that occurred in the classroom and at the school. On the one hand, the purpose of the journal was to record my observations about the project, and to note down the participants' comments, which I intended to use as data in the study. The journal was also meant to serve as a source of data for triangulation. The results gained from other data sources could be verified or falsified by the processes that could be traced in the journal.

On the other hand, the journal was a useful reflective tool for the teacher. Recording the main events in the journal helped me to reflect on my teaching and use my experience in planning the lessons ahead. As the chat project had a partly emerging design (the order of chat tasks was not predetermined, and the choice of tasks depended on my class experience as well), evaluation of previous classes was carried out with the help of observations noted down in the journal. The journal thus constitutes an *audit trail* of the events that took place and decisions that were taken in the course of the research. This record of events and decisions improves the trackability of the research.

When the project ended, the journal, which was hand-written in Hungarian in my notebook, was translated into English and typed into a word document. The notes in the journal were taken during and after the English classes. The present tense is often used in the journal to show that I observed the processes relevant to the workings of the project as a participant. The complete journal can be read in Appendix 3.

4.3.7.9 Member checks

In order to check the credibility of the findings of the research (see 3.5.1) I conducted member check interviews with two members of the chat group, with the assistance of a teacher from BHS. The teacher was the English teacher of control group 1, she will be referred to as H. S. henceforth. The performance of control group 1 and the chat group was compared in a quasi-experiment (see 3.4.1). In order to check if my conclusions converged with those of my colleague, I conducted an interview with H. S. The interview took place in September 2005. I listed the results of the quasi experiment to H. S. and asked her how she could explain the differences. I took notes of what H.S. said. Then I compared H. S.'s explanations to my own. The results are included in Chapter 6.

The second member check interview took place in November 2005. By that time, I had finished analysing the data collected in the BHS chat project. I prepared a brief list of the main findings (see Appendix 12), contacted two of the students who had been members of the chat group, and conducted an interview with both of them. The interviewees got the list of results on a piece of paper, were asked to read the statements one by one, and tell me what they thought of them. The interview was recorded and transcribed afterwards. The results are included in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

4.3.8 Summary

In the above sections, the research methods employed in the BHS chat project were described. After the section devoted to the research questions, the setting and the participants of the project, the chat tasks included in the English classes and the software used for chat were presented. The final section contained the details of the data collection procedures.

In the following chapters, the analysis of the data collected will be provided. Each chapter will focus on one of the five research questions. Chapter 5 explores how the inclusion of chat functioned in the chat group. In Chapter 6, the effect of this inclusion on proficiency and language learning strategy repertoire is outlined. Chapter 7 shows how the participants' motivation for learning English and attitudes towards the inclusion of chat tasks was affected by the project. Chapter 8 gives an account of how the regular inclusion of chat tasks influenced the learners' language use in chat.

5 The effect of the inclusion of chat tasks on the participants' EFL learning process

5.1 The inclusion of chat in the EFL classes

To answer Research Question 1:

How can the chat tasks be integrated into the EFL classes at school?

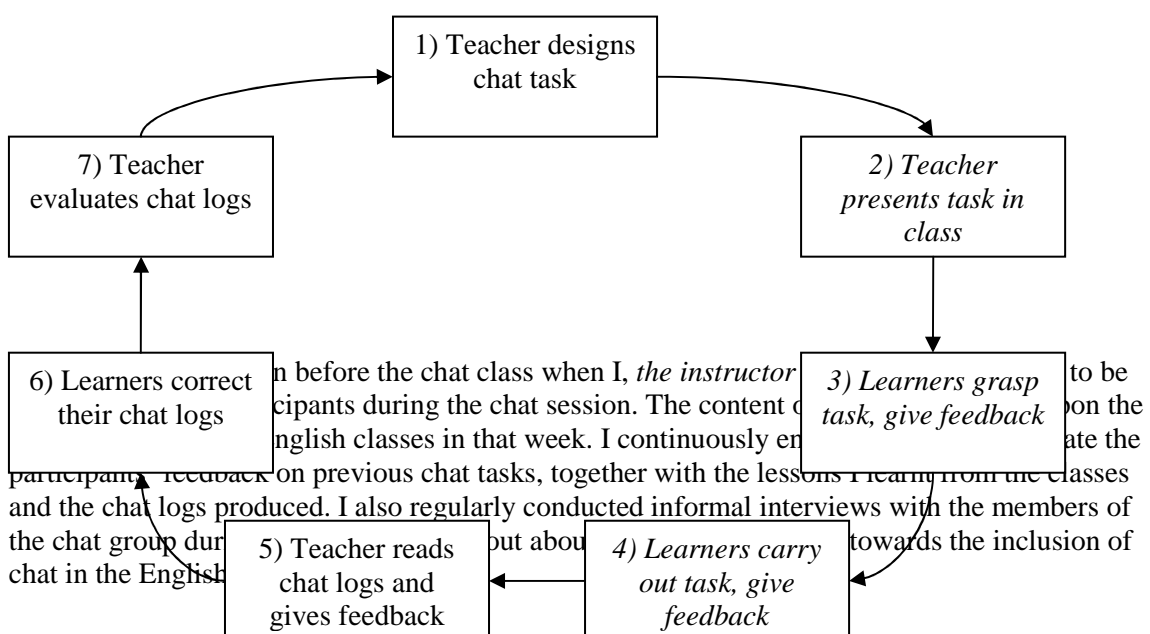
I relied on qualitative research methodology. In the present chapter, a *thick description* (see 3.3) of the Buda High School chat project is given. The description intends to show the various aspects of the chat project, and is based on the Language Teacher's Journal (Appendix 3) with a focus on the notes about the chat sessions, and the chat logs produced by the members of the chat group. The aspects relevant to the description of the inclusion of chat are the *task*, the *chat partner*, the *technical conditions* and the *classroom environment*. These four motives will form the bases of the analysis in the present chapter.

The basic units analysed in the chat project were the following: the *chat session*, which is the term used for an English class spent on a chat task, and the *chat inclusion cycle*, which is the process of planning a chat task, letting the learners perform it in class in a chat session, and evaluating it with the learners as shown in Figure 5.1 below. During the BHS chat project, the members of the chat group participated in 23 chat sessions.

5.1.1 The seven steps of the inclusion cycle

The inclusion of chat tasks in the English classes involved the seven steps depicted in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 *The chat inclusion cycle*



The second step was *the presentation of the task* in class. This step usually involved an introductory task, which was used to warm up the participants, and the instructions for the chat task proper. The participants tried to *understand the task*, responded to my instructions, and often asked questions about the task. After the presentation of the task, *the participants carried it out* in pairs, or a number of times in groups of three. There were groups of three on two occasions, when the chat task was designed for trios. Also, a number of times when there was an uneven number of participants present in class, I formed a group of three so that everyone could take part in the task. Carrying out the task also involved saving the chat log on a floppy disc at the end of the task.

After the class, I printed out the texts in the teacher's room, *read them* and *commented on the language and content* in the chat logs. This step usually took place immediately after the chat sessions. The following day, I gave the students their chat logs and asked them to correct the texts on the paper with the help of the comments written on them. I encouraged them to *correct the texts* either on their own or with the help of their peers. I found it important to let the students correct their own mistakes, because a considerable part of the correcting involved elements of grammar and vocabulary they already knew. When the students did not know what the correct form was, I also helped them find the solution, if they asked for it. Every four to six weeks, *I gave each participant a grade³ for their chat logs and corrections*. This grade contributed to the end-term evaluation I was to give them two times a year, in February and June. The last step in the inclusion of chat tasks was a return to the first one: *I designed a new task*, using the lessons I learnt from the previous series of inclusions. Including chat tasks in the EFL classes was thus a series of cyclic processes.

5.1.2 The chat group's background

Before beginning the chat sessions, in September 2003, I asked the participants to fill in a Background Questionnaire (see 4.3.7.1) in which I asked them how often they used the computer, what for, and how good their typing skills were. Based on their answers, I paired the participants who had similar computer skills. Ben and Tom, Martin and Dot, Mitch and Seth, and Footie and Piper were put in pairs. Gaining background information and pairing the learners was part of the task design phase. Chatiquette (see <http://www.englishclub.com/esl-chat/etiquette.htm>) holds that the chatters should wait for their partner's answer before posting their new message. For learners with a high level of proficiency it takes less time to produce and process messages than for their less proficient peers. It is thus better to match learners with similar skills, as they are more likely to be tolerant towards a similar partner.

5.1.3 The setting of the chat sessions

The chat sessions took place in the school's computer room. This was the room where I.T. lessons were held. Between two classes, the door of the computer room was locked. The learners in the school had no opportunity to use the computers in the breaks or after school. Neither was it possible to give the learners homework that involved searching on the Internet.

The computers were between 3 to 5 years old, insofar as I could estimate. They worked, but they were very slow. The learners could sit on two sides of the rectangular room. There were seven computers on both sides. When sitting in front of the computers, the learners were facing the wall

³ The grades were the following: 5 (excellent), 4 (good), 3 (moderate), 2 (pass), 1 (insufficient). In the majority of cases, the learners got 4s and 5s for their work in chat.

with their backs turned to each other. However, if two learners sat on the same side, they could easily speak to each other, without having to stand up.

Not all of the computers worked equally well. Some of them were difficult to start up, while on other computers the mouse did not work properly. At first, IRC was installed on six computers on the left side, and three on the right side of the room. This was good enough to carry out chat tasks in pairs. As the project progressed it became obvious that the pairs in chat should sit as far as possible from each other, otherwise it would have been difficult to ‘pretend’ that they were far from each other, and needed chat for communication. Later on, the I.T. teacher installed IRC on the rest of the operable computers as well.

The chat group had chat sessions on Tuesdays, in the double English classes, between 9.20 and 10.50 am. We usually held the class without a break.

5.1.4 An overview of the chat tasks

Appendix 14 contains a list of the chat tasks used in the project, the source of the tasks and the type of the tasks according to Pica et al. (1993, see also 2.2), in the case that the task was mentioned in their scheme. The 23 chat tasks formed the basis of the BHS chat project I conducted in the school year 2003/2004. The frequency of the task types is given in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 *Frequency of the task types in the BHS chat project*

task type	Frequency
role-play	8
Jigsaw	5
information gap	4
interview	3
opinion exchange	2
story-telling	1

Jigsaw and information gap tasks were goal-oriented and required the learners to ask for and supply the information given in the task. In these tasks, the vocabulary and set of language functions to be used was limited. The role-play and interview tasks were open-ended. The roles the learners played and the situation were given. These factors had an impact on the learners’ language use. However, they could still produce language in a creative way, unlike in the case of jigsaw and information gap tasks. The learners’ imagination had an important role in these tasks. Opinion exchange and story-telling tasks allowed the learners to use their English in a given topic in an open-ended way, without playing a role.

In the following sections, the 23 inclusions of chat in the EFL classes are described.

5.2 The description of the 23 chat sessions of the BHS chat project

Session 1, getting started

The very first chat session took place on 9 September 2003, in the second week of the school year. We used internet-based chat because IRC was not yet installed on the school’s computers. This form of chat does not require special software installed on the computers. There are free websites which have chat software. At some of the sites, such as www.epals.com, the chatters need to register first, while at other sites, such as the Hungarian www.chat.hu the chatters only need a username to enter. I used the latter site in the second pilot study (4.2.2) and found that it was easy to log in to the site and save the texts. I explained and showed the participants how they could save the chat log they produced.

Here is the journal entry from the first session, which talks about the problems I faced. The chat task I chose was a jigsaw crossword. In this task, student A gets all the horizontal, and student B all the vertical words from a crossword. They think of definitions for their words, and tell their partner the definitions. The partner tries to guess the words and complete his or her version of the crossword.

LTJ extract, 9 September Tuesday first chat class

The students are going to chat with each other in pairs. We try the chat rooms I created at www.epals.com, but some pairs do not manage to get into it at all. The site www.chat.hu does not work on the school's computers, either. 2 pairs close the chat window before we can save the text. No texts are saved this time.

The task is a jigsaw crossword, some of them do it in speaking. The task is not much of a success, just as it wasn't in Kőszeg⁴, although I thought it was a very interesting task. They are filling in the task sheets without a smile on their faces.

It became obvious during the first session that 6, or even 8 chatters, could not use the same internet chat site simultaneously on the computer network of the school. The only solution seemed to be the software, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), which the system administrator promised to install during the following week. IRC makes chat communication possible between computers even if those computers do not have high quality access to the Internet. The internet connection of the computers in the school's computer room was very slow and unreliable.

Two pairs managed to complete the task in chat, but they closed the chat window before saving the chat logs. Steps 5, 6 and 7 from the process of including the chat task in the EFL class were thus not completed. The inclusion cycle was not as useful as it could have been had the steps involving reviewing and correction taken place. I considered it crucial to the success of the chat project that all the steps of the inclusion cycle take place at each inclusion.

Session 2: Facing technical difficulties again

By the time the next chat session took place, IRC had already been installed. The system administrator showed the participants how to log in to and save the chat logs in IRC. Consequently, the opportunity to use the chat medium and to save the chat logs was ensured. However, at the next session, on 30 September, only one pair of the four, Ben and Tom saved the chat. The others either did not succeed in saving the text or forgot about it. After the class, I told the learners again that saving the chat logs was important for our project and I showed them again how to do it.

Session 3: Achieving the complete inclusion cycle

At the next session, on 7 October, the chatters were given a discussion task. The following extract from the journal describes the task and the session.

LTJ extract, 7 October Tuesday

*We read the text *Customs abroad* (Doff and Jones, 1994, p. 30) to prepare discussion about what they know about people from different countries. They match pictures with descriptions of customs, and then discuss the customs in chat. The questions posed in the course book are: 'Which customs surprised you?'*

'What would you tell a foreigner about Hungary?'

We concentrate on saving the texts, which results in a lot of stress at the end of the class. The right mouse button does not work on Footie's computer, so he can't copy the text. He is very annoyed.

⁴ The site of Pilot 2.

All the pairs managed to save their chat logs, some of them with their peers' or my help. The cycle could thus be completed and I could use the lessons learnt from the session and the texts when designing the next chat session. I was eager to read the texts, and discussed my impressions with the participants. I asked them how they felt about the previous chat session and the task. The only definite answer was given by Ben.

LTJ extract, 8 October Wednesday

Yesterday's chat texts don't really make sense, I think they misunderstood the task. Ben thinks the task was not very good.

When reviewing Ben and Tom's chat log, I found that they made sense, but the task did not trigger much interaction between the two chatters. Topics were often changed, as the extract from the chat log in which they answered the second question, 'What would you tell a foreigner about Hungary?' showed. Ben did not react to any of the topics brought up by Tom. Tom reacts to (2) with posting (5), to (4) with posting (6), and to (7) in (9), but these 11 turns are actually just a list of ideas, no real interaction takes place.

Chat extract, 7 October, Ben & Tom

- 1 [ben] *Suggests for foreigners to Hungaria:*
- 2 [ben] *Dont thin that anything is punctual, you can be late*
- 3 <tom> *Avoid the skinheads*
- 4 [ben] *In restaurants you should give tip.*
- 5 <tom> *You can be late but not more than 15 minutes*
- 6 <tom> *Yes give tips a lot of tip*
- 7 [ben] *Its common to jump the queue, until you meet a stonger person*
- 8 [ben] *Than you're in trouble*
- 9 <tom> *Yes I am the stronger man*
- 10 [ben] *People are happy if you try to talk to themin Hungarian, but its quiet difficult*
- 11 <tom> *Sometimes I push the old grammys aside to get the sitting place*

I found that the criterion for a good chat was interaction between the learners. I expected them to cooperate and react to each others' postings. In Clark's theory of language use (Clark, 1996, see Chapter 8), interaction between the chatters entails joint projects of presentation and acceptance. A presentation-acceptance sequence usually involves a question-answer, or a statement-reaction pair. When reviewing the learners' texts, I was looking firstly for presentation-acceptance sequences. The presence or absence of these sequences proved to be a reliable meter of how good a text was and how involved the learners were. The extract shown above was a text I did not judge to be interactive enough.

The chat logs also contained stretches of playful discourse, which is a typical feature of chat discourse on internet chat sites (Werry, 1996). The quality of the chat logs revealed that the task may not have given the chatters enough ideas to chat about. The extract below is the closing of Martin & Lara's chat log from 7 October.

Chat extract, 7 October, Martin & Lara

- 1 [martin] *That's allû*
- 2 [martin] *all*
- 3 [martin] *.sjkdfs8oÁFIOZ*
- 4 <lara> *really?*
- 5 [martin] *Do you want to know more about the country*
- 6 [martin] *?*
- 7 [martin] *?*
- 8 [martin] *?*

9 [martin] ?
10 <lara> well, yes but i dont really know at this moment.
11 <lara> so i think i am done asking questions
12 [martin] Oh, I have a question for you.
13 <lara> okay
14 [martin] Can you chat with your nose?
15 [martin] Look!
16 [martin] gbghj
17 [martin] Haha

Having read the chat logs from 7 October, I figured that although the task fitted well with the topics we were dealing with in the class (customs abroad), it was not a very authentic task. In line 3, Martin just played around with his keyboard and pretended this sequence of letters and figures was a message. A dialogue or an interview on a given topic, the two genres characteristic of real-life chat, seemed to be more authentic and thus possible tasks for future chat sessions. Another task type which was potentially interesting for classroom chat was a game where the lack of shared visual context presented a challenge to the chatters.

Session 4: Reflections on the composition of pairs

For the 14 October session, I planned a chat task with two steps. The course book contained interviews with people whose jobs everyone hates. The answers in the interview were printed in the book. The learners were asked to work out the questions to these answers in pairs, in chat, and then as a follow-up task, to perform an interview role-play in chat. One learner was supposed to be a journalist, the other learner a person whose job everybody hates. I made the following notes in the journal:

LTJ extract, 14 Oct Tuesday

I ask the students to conduct interviews with a person whose job everyone hates. IRC is not working properly, and some of the floppy discs get stuck in the drive. It's all very annoying. I walk around monitoring the students who managed to get into the chat. The task is to work out the questions for the answers of the interviews in the book (Doff and Jones, 1994, p. 40-41). I see the mistakes they make while writing the questions; we should have discussed these in advance. Later, I read the texts. Ben and Tom produced a very funny text, while Dot and Martin were obviously bored to death by the task. Piper and Footie did the intro tasks so precisely that they never got to the interview.

Ben and Tom were a good match as far as typing skills and level of English were concerned. They could both grasp the task quickly. However, in each of their chat logs, either Ben, or Tom, or both of them, got to a point when they started to use bad language. Below is an extract from the interview chat. Tom uses *WTF* in line (10) to show he had difficulties understanding what Ben had written. This is an abbreviation of the sentence 'What the fuck'. The sentence is often used in English-language films by certain characters to make their partner repeat what they have said, but it was a style not welcome in classroom chat. Tom was either irritated by Ben's post, or he thought it was cool to use these three letters.

Chat extract, 14 October, Ben & Tom

1 [ben] 5 feladat⁵: Im a BKV ticket controller. Interview me!
2 <tom> Do you like your job?
3 [ben] Hello, I'm Ben, your ticket please!
4 [ben] I think its the most beautiful job in this city.

⁵ Feladat is the Hungarian word for exercise.

5 <tom> No I'm an journalist, not a passenger
6 [ben] I like to piss people off.
7 Tom> Beautiful why
8 [ben] I like to piss people off.
9 [ben] I have more than 1000 tickets home
10 <tom> WTF?
11 [ben] and 100 season tickets
12 <tom> And what can you do with it?
13 [ben] I just collect them
14 [ben] Its my hobby
15 <tom> And how much money do you earn?
16 [ben] I earn 65800 plus a bonus of 120 forints per fine
17 [ben] If I fine you, I get 120 forints
18 <tom> but I am not a passenger!
19 [ben] If you're inside the metro, then YOU'RE

I was satisfied with the content of Ben and Tom's chat, but at the same time I warned them not to use rude language in chat each time I gave them feedback on their chat log.

Dot and Martin produced a chat log that had little to do with the task. It was more like a chat log one can see at free internet sites. They did not really grasp the task, or did not have the motivation to carry it out properly. Below is a extract from their chat log.

Chat extract, 14 October, Dot & Martin

1 [martin] It's too many informations for me
2 <dot> Can you ask something interresting?
3 [martin] Or much
4 <dot> sorry my little boy
5 <dot> but
6 [martin] but
7 [martin] butt
8 [martin] Heke

Martin also noted in the end-project interview (EPI, Martin, Question 8) that 'they' (he was talking about himself and his chat partner) were not much interested in the chat tasks at the beginning of the chat project. Nevertheless, I decided not to change the pairs at that point, as I hoped that the repeated, improved inclusions would help the participants improve their chats.

Session 5: Booking success

For the following chat session, on 28 October, I planned an interview task again. The participants played roles. One of them was a scientist, the other one a journalist. They had read a text entitled 'The new ice age' as homework. The journalist was asking the scientist questions about the phenomenon of the new ice age. The journal notes show that I was content with the chat class.

28 October Tuesday

In any case, today's chat was really positive - they spent 30-40 minutes fully on task. A good warm-up with a meaningful task (based on Doff and Jones, 1994, p. 43).

In the extract below, Piper plays the role of the scientist who believes that a new ice age is coming. Footie, who is playing the journalist, finds the idea of a new ice age unrealistic, so he posts Piper a smiley to show this in line (5).

Chat extract, 28 October, Footie & Piper

- 1 <piper> nowadays in hungary is the weather much colder than a few years ago
- 2 <piper>
- 3 [footie] in summer with the 40 degrees as well?
- 4 <piper> yes thats right
- 5 [footie] :-D

The combination of the chatter being on task and voicing their own opinion was something I considered to be the optimal approach to completing an interview chat task. This combination meant that the learner was involved in the task, and at the same time was using their English to express their own opinion, and thus used the language in an authentic situation, spontaneously.

Session 6: Cheating in chat

The task for the next occasion, 4 November, was Taboo. The learners worked in pairs. Each of them received a list of 10 words. Under each word there were 3 other words which were closely associated with the original word. The learners worked in pairs. Their task was to define their words to their partner without using the three words and the original word. The four words were thus taboo. The partner had to guess the word defined. This task proved to be the most popular among the tasks used in Pilot 2. While the participants in the camp enjoyed the challenge in this game, the members of the chat group at the BHS sought alternative ways to solve the task. The journal entry about the chat session reads as follows:

LTJ extract, 4 November Tuesday

Today's task is Taboo. Some of them are trying to cheat and find their partner's words by walking up to them and asking questions. If the words are too difficult, using a dictionary might help.

Some of their comments, and lots of negotiation of meaning are lost, because they do it in speaking. They opt for the easier, more economic way of communication. While monitoring their chat, I encourage them to ask each other questions in chat.

Some pairs are sitting really close to each other. I should be more careful next time. No wonder they can't simulate chatting with someone far away.

It became obvious to me that classroom chat communication had its maxims, just as face-to-face conversation does. The setting of the project made some of the participants feel that it was uneconomical to complete the task by making definitions and guessing words in chat. The following extract revealed how Martin gave up the game after one guess, and asked his neighbour (Seth) for the solution. Martin's partner, Dot, posted the remark *Ejnye-bejnye* [a playful expression of disapproval in Hungarian] in line (7) to show Martin that she noticed how he had managed to find the right word.

Chat extract, 4 November, Dot & Martin

- 1 [dot] a place
- 2 [dot] where you can find your grandparents
- 3 <martin> graveyard
- 4 [dot] grand-grandparents
- 5 [dot] other word
- 6 <martin> cemetery
- 7 [dot] you aren't allowed to ask Seth...Ejnye-bejnye
- 8 [dot] yes.
- 9 [dot] 3.
- 10 <martin> sorry

This goal-oriented task thus did not necessarily force the learners to be more explicit in their language use, as I had expected. Instead, they found alternatives to making a linguistic effort and found the solution to the task by ignoring the rules.

Session 7: Role-play: a new approach to chat tasks

After having tried a number of different task types in chat, such as a jigsaw crossword, two opinion exchange tasks, two interviews, and a vocabulary game, I decided to give the learners an open-ended chat task. The task was a role-play based on the essays they wrote about their 'new identity'. (The instructions the learners received for writing the essay are included in Appendix 15.)

Although open-ended chat tasks are said to trigger less negotiation of meaning than goal-oriented tasks (Pica, 1994), open-ended tasks allow the learners to use their English in a creative way. This presupposes that learners use a wider range of vocabulary, and experiment with the language they are learning. On the 11 November session I asked the learners to chat with their partner, and get to know as much as possible about their partner's new identity. Here is the journal entry of 11 November.

LTJ extract, 11 November Tuesday

The students chatted with their new identities. The texts are pretty good - there was quite a lot of interaction, and they asked each other questions.

As I was not entirely content with the chat logs of the first six weeks, I decided to rearrange the pairs in the chat group. Dot and Martin formed a pair, but they could not produce serious chats together. Ben and Tom were a good match, but their chat logs regularly contained rude language, as this text from 11 November shows a dialogue between the two 'new identities'. Tom was a famous sumo fighter, and Ben was a dock-worker in Csepel, a suburb of Budapest.

Chat extract, 11 November, Ben & Tom

1 [ben] Do you earn so much money as a sumos
2 <tom> I'm the yokozuna ,so yes
3 <tom> Like an Amrican buisnissman
4 <tom> Like an Amrican bisnissman
5 [ben] OK
6 [ben] I dont earn that much
7 <tom> You poor peasant!!!!
8 [ben] YOu f*** fatty ass****

Such exchanges were frequently present in the chats produced by Ben and Tom, as the chat extracts show. In the end-interview Tom mentioned that Ben was not the ideal chat partner for him, because Ben's character was that of a primitive dock-worker, and it was difficult to converse with him (EPI, Tom, Question 10) Although my initial hypothesis was that students at a similar level of proficiency and with similar typing skills would make a good match, I realised that making sure that the partners' personalities were compatible was equally important.

Mitch and Seth were also problematic as a pair. Mitch proved to be a much faster typist than Seth, so I decided to separate them. Piper and Footie were a very good match. They both grasped the tasks quickly and carried them out well together. However, I realized they would be just as good in combination with other group members. I decided to make new pairs for the following session.

Session 8: A boring task

At the following session, on 18 November, the task was goal-oriented again. The class was based on the previous day's class activity. The chat task on 18 November proved to be the least popular in the first half of the project, as the Task Evaluation Questionnaire revealed. The reason for this was probably that the task in the traditional class was not very interesting either. Here are the journal entries about the two classes.

LTJ extract, 17 Nov Monday

We learn expressions with music and then play a guessing game with them (Kay, 1995a, Worksheet 5). There are two teams, and they are hostile with each other. I am not happy with the atmosphere of the class. Is this a meaningless task? Or it does not work because of the way I introduced it? They do not really get enthusiastic about the task. :(

LTJ extract, 18 Nov Tuesday

Chat task with a vocabulary exercise with expressions with music. There is an information gap, but it doesn't seem to make sense to them to work on bridging this gap, I feel. Not a very authentic task.

Although the chat task at this session was relevant to what we had learnt in the English class, the learners did not find it as enjoyable or relevant to their learning.

Session 9: Role-play: back to a task that worked

I intended to use the 'new identities' regularly, so after the 18 November session I decided to return to open-ended tasks. On 25 November, the task was the same as two weeks before: the new identities met each other and asked questions. I rearranged the pairs so that each learner had a new partner: Footie worked with Dot, Tom with Seth, and Ben with Martin. Mitch and Piper were not present. I found that, disregarding the information I gained from the Background Questionnaire, it was worthwhile trying new pairs in chat.

I expected the task would create a gap between the chatters, and this gap could be bridged by asking questions, as often happens on free chat sites between chatters who meet each other for the first time. After the 25 November session, I wrote the following in the journal:

LTJ, 25 Nov Tuesday

They chat with their new identities again, with differing levels of enthusiasm. I ask Martin what keeps him from asking his partner the words he doesn't understand. It is embarrassing and it appears in the chat text, he says.

Although during the chat class not all the learners were enthusiastic about the role-play task, the chat logs turned out to be interactive, coherent texts. The success of the task was thus evidenced by the chat logs.

Session 10: A shift in evaluation

On the following occasion, on 2 December, only 4 of the learners were present. I asked them to chat with their new identities again. I made the following note in the journal:

LTJ extract, 2 Dec Tuesday

They chat with their new identities again. They don't seem really enthusiastic. Seth says if he had known he would need this so often, he would have written a better one. I tell him to take up any identity he likes. He chooses to be James Bond.

When I ask them to finish chatting, they ask for some more time. They are involved, I figure. Mitch says his text needs to be censored. I think he deleted some lines in the text pad version of

the chat text, where the text is copied before the students save it. Why is it so much fun using bad language in chat?

I have the impression that they get better and better at grasping the task. They get deeper into topics, and ask more questions from each other.

The enthusiasm the learners showed when I was presenting the task was a kind of barometer for me of how interesting they found the task. I was influenced to a great degree by how the learners reacted to the chat task when I presented it to them. I found the students' positive attitude crucial to the success of the inclusion. The fact that I placed such an emphasis on the students' enthusiasm was due to two main factors. On the one hand the students had an important role in designing the new chat task. On the other hand I had limited experience of teaching at secondary school, and there were important lessons I had to learn about how far the students' first reactions reflected the usefulness of a classroom task.

As the project progressed, however, I learnt that their first reaction to the task presented was not decisive. Their lack of enthusiasm at the presentation phase did not mean that they would not be involved when carrying out the task. This observation had two consequences for the inclusion cycle: I remained open to the learners' feedback at the presentation and completion phase of the task, but I also realized that the learners' initial lack of enthusiasm could quickly change while carrying out the chat task, and the learners could produce 'good chats' on these occasions, too.

Session 11: Combining role-play with a grammar point

At the following session, on 9 December, I decided to combine the new identities with a task focussed on the grammar point we were dealing with: reported speech. The task came from the course book (Doff and Jones, 1999, p. 79). The learners went to an imaginary party, where they met and talked to two of the guests. Learner A and B talked to different guests. The learners received a picture of the guest they talked to, and a list of the sentences the guests told them. The learners were asked to report what they had 'heard' to their chat pair. Here is an extract from one of the chat logs:

Chat extract, 9 December, Dot & Footie

1 [dot] *So, I met a guy*

2 [dot] *His name is George and he is 35 years old*

3 <Footie> *are we still the same personalities, as last time?*

4 [dot] *What you want*

In line (4) Footie asked if they were supposed to take up their identities. This showed that the task instructions were probably not entirely clear, or that Footie did not pay attention throughout the task presentation phase. The focus on what the party guest said, having to report it in chat and playing a role, all in one task, might have been too complicated for Footie. This reminded me that task instructions should be kept simple.

During the 9 December session, there was a lot of collaboration between the group members. Here again, classroom chat turned out to have its maxims and some of the chatters completed the task relying on more efficient means of classroom collaboration than those facilitated by IRC. They asked for words from each other and clarified chat posts orally.

LTJ, 9 Dec Tuesday

They asked me about a lot of words and sentences during the chat. Probably because the task was focussed on grammar. They are helping each other, too. If someone needs a word, (s)he asks his/her question aloud, sort of sending it into the middle of the classroom, and another student, who knows the answer, helps him/her.

I feel that this way of using the common discourse space of the classroom is positive. (As opposed to using it to fool around and make funny comments in Hungarian, which often happens in our traditional English classes.)

Although I saw this form of communication as a positive event from the viewpoint of group dynamics, I kept encouraging the chatters to keep quiet during the chat and only use the computer to communicate. On the one hand, using only chat to communicate could ensure that the language of communication was English. On the other hand, I was very much interested in how they solve their communication problems, and when they solved the problem orally, this type of collateral communication could not be recorded. I reminded them that in the situation they were acting out, their partner was far away, and that was why they communicated in chat.

The chat logs showed that the task was successful, as they contained many instances of correct use of reported speech. But the task was not a very interesting one, as the following extract produced by the Ben-Piper-Lara trio shows:

Chat extract, 9 December, Ben & Piper & Lara

1 <ben> Piper, what did the womwn say about the Rockefeller family?

2 [piper] well, she said she had known them for years

3 <ben> OKû

4 [piper] I'll fall asleep

5 <lara> sounds good to me

The reason for this could have been the fixed content of the chat. However, what they wanted to say about how they feel, they said in chat. This was an obvious sign of involvement from the learners' side. I considered getting the learners involved in the task pivotal for the success of the inclusion of chat tasks in the EFL classes.

Session 12: The beginning of the second phase of the project

After the 9 December session, the Christmas holiday came. There was a break of four weeks before the following chat session. I had plenty of time to think about how to improve the chat tasks and the way the tasks were included in the EFL classes. I made the following notes during the first chat class in January:

LTJ extract, 6 January, Tuesday

I decided to try group chat. Having 2 partners at the same time might make chat more interesting and challenging for them. For some of them it is difficult to enter the same chat room, and to use the same server. Seating is not perfect either, groupmates are sitting too close and communicate orally. Their chat paces are different, and there is a lot of talking.

Seating was often a problem in the chat classes, as IRC was only installed on 8 of the computers in the room, six of which were on one side. The learners preferred to work with the same computer every class.

The task for the 6 January session was story-telling, based on a task from the course book. The learners chatted in trios, and gave extended responses to the following questions from the book: 'What's the silliest thing you've ever done?

What's the biggest surprise you've ever had?

What's the luckiest thing that's ever happened to you?' (Doff & Jones, 1999, p. 9)

As the journal entry shows, there were obvious signs of involvement in the chat group.

LTJ extract, 6 January, Tuesday/2

Footie, Tom and Mitch make a good trio, they look very involved. They ask me not to look at the text while they are chatting, only afterwards. Tom says 'Tanárnő díjat fog kapni, hogy ilyen jó szórakozást talált ki nekünk!' [You are going to get a prize for giving us such a funny task.] I suspect they are sharing their 'coolest' adventures.

The three learners took turns to tell each other about the silliest thing that had ever happened to them. The chat log consisted of three short stories told by the three chatters. The story-tellers posted their stories in several instalments. The postings were sometimes interspersed with the partners' questions and comments, as in the following extract, in which Mitch was the story-teller:

Chat extract, 6 January, Mitch, Tom & Footie

- 1 <mitch>On the beach was sitting, many german young, and they have drunk.
- 2 <mitch>And I sad: Earlier we bought a glass of BLACK VELVET.
- 3 [tom]Good choice
- 4 <mitch>And we drinking and drinking.
- 5 [tom]And what happened in the morning?
- 6 <mitch>A littke bit late, we have tried go home.
- 7 <mitch>Trying and trying.
- 8 <mitch>And that is not an easier thing.
- 9 <mitch>When the peaple is hmmm... ..
- 10 <mitch>Then we arrived home...
- 11 <mitch>In the mourning i woke up and i see:
- 12 [tom]If you want to keep your honor, please don't tell us more
- 13 <footie>That's a silly story indeed!

When reading the chat log, I was really content with the degree of interaction between the chatters, and also with the involvement of the chatters.

Session 13: The learners want to relax in chat

A week later, on 13 January, I chose a goal-oriented task again. Here is the journal entry for that day:

LTJ extract, 13 January Tuesday

One of the classes is cancelled because they have to see the school's doctor. They ask if we can just chat in that one class. I approve, because the conditions seem ideal for a good chat. The task is picture dictation, and they work in pairs. Student A describes a picture in chat, student B has to draw it and may ask questions about it. Then they change roles.

The chatters produced fairly good, coherent texts, but the task was not very interesting for them, as the following extract from Lara & Tom's chat log testifies:

Chat extract, 13 January, Lara & Tom:

- 1 <tom> I think this is enough for me... yet, and forever. I don't like painting!
- 2 [lara] ok...that is good with me
- 3 <tom> compare!

In the following week, I decided to spend the double class with traditional, non-chat activities. I felt that after 12 weeks of chat classes, and having tried so many different types of task, the learners might profit more from traditional activities for developing speaking skills.

Session 14: The first sign of Dot's change of attitude

On the following occasion, on 3 February, the learners chatted in trios again. One of them interviewed the other two about their experience of learning English. Dot asked me a question which made it clear to me that she kept thinking about how to produce a chat log for which she could get a good grade.

LTJ extract, 3 February Tuesday

We get to the chat tasks. Dot asks what grammar structure she is supposed to use in chat. She would like to know what I expect. I like that.

Her question about the tense she was supposed to use showed that Dot had become sensitive to the goals of the tasks and was making an effort to learn from the tasks.

Session 15 & 16: Recording speaking

As part of mapping out how the inclusion of chat affects the participants' learning process, I wanted to explore how performing a classroom chat task differs from performing a speaking task. I designed a task in two versions and recorded the first version in speaking, the second one in chat with the learners. The class on 10 February was spent on doing these tasks. The task was goal-oriented, with one possible outcome. The learners worked in pairs, and each learner was given different sets of cartoons. Some of the pictures were identical, others were different. The pairs were asked to find out how many identical pictures there were.

When the 15th session took place, only 4 of the 8 members of the chat group were present. In order to have the same chat task performed by all of them, on the 17 February session I asked the learners who had been absent on 10 February to perform the task of the 16th session. The other learners were given a similar task, but instead of cartoons, there received geometrical shapes to compare.

Session 17: Role-play again: repeating a successful type of task

When planning the task for the next session, 24 February, I was trying to find a task which would be interesting for the chatters, and allow them to use their English in a creative way. It was a role-play task in which they could say/write what they meant, but at the same time I included a goal in the task so that the learners would have a topic to chat about. A couple of days before the session I asked them to write a description of their new identity again, because some of them complained that they got bored of the first identities they had written in November. The 24 February session was the first time they chatted with their second 'new identity'. Here are two extracts from the journal entry on 24 February. The description of the task is included in Appendix 15

LTJ extract, 24 February Tuesday

Chat in groups of three, with their identities. I invent a situation in which they chat with their identities, and there is a gap between what the personalities want to do, they do not know what their partners' aims are, so that they have enough to chat about.

...

In some of the groups it works. Tom feels he is on the margin and keeps complaining about it while chatting.

I put Tom in one group with Ben and Lara to make sure that the language level of the 3 chatters in the group was similar. A week later, Tom told me how he felt about chatting in threes. The problem was that there was not much interaction between Tom and the other two participants. Here again, it became obvious that the students' personality traits played a more important role in creating good pairs in chat than other factors such as proficiency level or typing skills.

LTJ extract, 2 March Tuesday

Tom broaches the subject of chatting in threes. He tells me it is more fun to do a task like this with students he knows well. (He chatted with Ben and Lara.) I think the point is that his friends make an effort to involve him in the conversation. It is a good point. It did not happen last time: Ben & Lara did not accept his topics.

Session 18: Describing games in chat and speaking

For the 2 March session I selected a task which included 4 identical subtasks. Again, I wanted to learn about the effect of the medium on performing a task. The task included 4 descriptions of so-called parlour games (Hadfield & Hadfield, 1995, Game 1). Each learner was given two of the descriptions. The learners read the descriptions and tried to memorize the main points, so that they could explain the game to their partners. I asked them to explain one game in speaking, and the other one in chat to their partners. Here is the explanation of one of the games, the Adverb game, in chat.

Chat extract, 2 March, Tom & Mitch

- 1 <mitch> *The Adverb game*
- 2 [tom] *Can you begin?*
- 3 [tom] *Super*
- 4 <mitch> *The players sit in a room. The group choose a man who go's out.*
- 5 [tom] *OK*
- 6 <mitch> *The group stay in the room and think an adverb. for example: angrily, lazily, unhappily*
- 7 [tom] *OK*
- 8 <mitch> *The person who goes out, come in.*
- 9 [tom] *OK*
- 10 <mitch> *He has to guess the adverb they have chosen, by asking members of the group tp perform actions in the manner of the adverb.*
- 11 <mitch> *to perform*
- 12 [tom] *OK*
- 13 <mitch> *For example: Rosita, could you look out the window, with the manner oh the adverb?*
- 14 <mitch> *of the*
- 15 [tom] *OK*
- 16 <mitch> *The person asked must then perform the action lazily, unhappily etc*
- 17 [tom] *OK*
- 18 [tom] *Is it the end?*
- 19 <mitch> *And if enough player perform an action,*
- 20 <mitch> *the man who goes out, guess the answer*
- 21 <mitch> *I think thats all*
- 22 [tom] *OK*

The learners complained about the games being very complicated. I noticed in the chat logs that the learners tended to copy whole sentences from the original description of the game into their chat explanation, like Mitch did in lines 4 and 6 in the extract above, with inaccuracies. The fact that the learners needed to memorize the instructions of the game in order to be able to describe them, made it difficult for them to concentrate on accuracy in the task. This suggested that tasks leaving more room for selecting the content would make practice more useful.

Session 19 Combining role-play with a reading task

The next session took place a week later, on 9 March. There were two tasks in chat, both of them based on a reading text in the course book. The text was about a man who had committed murder and then disappeared (Doff & Jones, 1997, p. 28). The learners were first asked to choose 4 difficult words from the text and think of definitions for these words. They sent their definitions to their partners in chat. The partners tried to find the words in the text. The second part of the chat task was a role-play in pairs. Both learners were detectives. They got different pieces of information about the man who disappeared. They could only find the man if they managed to cooperate. The chat logs showed a high degree of learner involvement. This suggested that the role-play task should include guidelines on what to chat about.

After the 9 March session a longer period without chat sessions followed. This was because the Easter break came, and also because I needed the double classes to administer the post-test proficiency papers to the group.

Session 20: Practising new vocabulary in chat

The following session took place on 27 April. It was based on the vocabulary we had learnt in the previous class. In the first part of the task, learners defined and guessed words related to cooking in pairs. In the second part they compared two sets of different pictures. The pictures showed different stages of preparing a dish. Some of the pictures were the same for both learners, others were different. Their task was to find out how many identical pictures they had in common.

Although this was a task with a fixed scenario, and not much creativity was needed to complete either part of it, I found it a useful task because it made the learners practise the particular items of vocabulary we had learnt in the previous class. I could be sure that the learners used those words and expressions again in chat. In the chat logs, I could also see how they used the new words. I also found that the learners used the chat medium to manage the task, as shown in the following extract from Footie and Martin 's chat log:

Chat extract, 27 April, Footie & Martin

1 <footie> do you have this with the SOY sauce?

2 <footie> which is poured on the food?

3 [martin] No

4 <footie> Yes? or No?

5 [martin] Not obn the food, only to a plate

6 <footie> plate with food?

7 <footie> or there's no food on the plate?

8 [martin] There isn't any food on the plate

9 <footie> baaad

10 [martin] Sorry Footie, it's not our day!

Session 21: A relaxing, inspiring task

Two weeks later, for the 4 May session, I designed a chat task based on their new identities again, just as on 24 February. I also decided to include a text from the workbook. The text was about a special drug called burundanga, which makes its users forget who they are and what had happened to them before taking the drug. It was a long and difficult text. The learners were tired and not in the mood to work hard in class.

It seemed to me that they were happy to begin the chat task because then they could be 'alone with the computer' as Ben worded it at the beginning of the project (LTJ, 4 November). After the class I read the chat logs immediately. I was surprised by how good and creative their texts were. Even though it was difficult to convince them to read the text, it became obvious to me from their

texts that they enjoyed stepping into the imaginary world of the chat task with their identities. (See the LTJ for instructions for the task.) Here is an extract from Dot and Lara's chat log:

Chat extract, 4 May, Dot & Lara

1 [dot] so, hello my friend?

2 [dot] How are you?

3 <lara> well i am a bit confused. i am in a hospital in colombia and cant remember how i got here

4 [dot] oh...

5 [dot] no

6 [dot] really?

7 [dot] What happened?

8 <lara> i cant remember at all what happened

9 <lara> i just woke up here

In the chat log produced by Seth and Mitch, the length of the posts evidenced the chatters' involvement:

Chat extract, 4 May, Seth & Mitch

1 <seth> I would like to ask you for help. I dont remember what happened to me and how can it be zhat Im in a hospital?

2 <seth> that)

3 [mitch] I have an Idea.

4 [mitch] The drugs is my speciality and i think, somebody put something in your drink.

5 [mitch] Maybe burundanga

6 <seth> I cant remember anything. Could you explain it me how did it happened?

7 [mitch] Maybe my friend, maybe.

8 [mitch] If somebody use it, they have hypnosis. and loss his memory.

9 <seth> So what happened? Sombedy put this drug to my food and the moment I eat from it, I lost my memory. I dont remember what I have eaten and drunk, and what happened after that.

The degree of involvement the chat logs showed suggested that we should go on with role-play tasks.

Session 22: playing roles and having a good time

In the last couple of weeks at school, from the beginning of May onwards, the learners were really tired. They had to write tests almost every day and there were recitations in different subjects as well. All these tests made the participants' life fairly stressful in those weeks. I decided to use the last couple of double classes for chat. I laid emphasis on designing enjoyable, and of course, useful tasks for the chat classes. I followed the role-play track as I had experienced that this was the type of task in which the participants were really involved. In role-play tasks they used their English in life-like situations, in a spontaneous way. All of the members of the chat group were planning to take a language exam during the following school year, so I chose 4 role-play tasks (situations) from an intermediate exam preparatory book written for Hungarian learners of English. I asked them to perform two of the tasks orally, and two of them in chat.

In one of the tasks, one learner was the father, the other learner the daughter who would like to go to a party. In the following chat extract, Dot played the daughter. She was trying to persuade her father to let her go to a party. Ben played a strict father who was not willing to let her daughter go to parties. He used block letters, which signifies shouting in chat.

Chat extract, 25 May, Ben & Dot

1 <dot> She has birthday today so all of my friends are going to go to the disco

2 [ben] EXCEPT FOR YOU!!!
3 <dot> to celebrate this big day
4 [ben] YOU STAY HERE!!!
5 <dot> and so... so I want to go as well
6 [ben] NO WAY!!!
7 <dot> He! I am 16 Dad
8 [ben] Thats why I dont let you, you're ONLY 16.
9 <dot> Please Papa it is so important for me

I had the impression that the tasks were optimal for the learners' mental state. I noted the following in the journal:

LTJ extract, 25 May

Some of them ask if we are going to chat. After the chat, to my great surprise, we complete another task on relative clauses. They are soooooo tired!

Mitch broke his arm, it is in plaster. He tells me at the beginning of the class that he is not able to write, but later he types and writes a little as well.

While the students continuously complained about being exhausted, I was impressed by the degree of involvement they showed in the chat session.

5.2.23 Session 23, the last role-play in the last chat session

Before the very last chat session, on 1 June, I noted the following in the journal:

LTJ extract, 1 June, last chat

I design the last chat task so that it provides some kind of closure for what the students' different identities have been doing in the past few months.

The description of the chat task is included in Appendix 15.

I found the texts really good again. I concluded that the success of the task was due to the fact that the goals were obvious, and they were involved as they chatted with their self-invented 'identities'. Here is an extract from Tom and Mitch's chat, both of whom had related identities:

Chat extract, 1 June, Tom & Mitch

1 [tom] Then let's start with it!!!!!!
2 <mitch> now begin the task, my friend
3 [tom] Now Sanchez I have something to tell you!
4 <mitch> what?
5 [tom] One of my friend, an astrologer said something!
6 <mitch> Its interrestin, last night i dreamt something...
7 <mitch> something very silly
8 [tom] What I want to say that's silly too!
9 <mitch> Than say it, I am a brave man
10 [tom] I am too! So...
11 [tom] He said that I have to change my lifestyle
12 [tom] Unless something wrong will be happen!
13 <mitch> I dreamt : the ***japos catch you, and then they kill you!!!

The 1 June session closed the series of inclusions of chat tasks in the EFL classes. In that week, my project with the chat group also ended.

5.3 Lessons from the inclusion cycles

As the descriptions above of the 23 sessions show, including chat tasks in the EFL classes was a process of continuous analysis of the sessions completed, and a constant fine-tuning of the steps of the inclusion cycle. The success of a session depended on a number of factors, as described below.

The first and most important factor was the *chat task*, which had to be well-described and easy to grasp, and related to the context of the EFL classes, including the subject matter of the previous classes, or the framework of identities the learners had created for themselves. The tasks included in the project emerged as the chat project progressed, so I could continuously improve the tasks and suit them to the objectives of the EFL classes. The most important findings about chat tasks were firstly that the students' own input in the task, such as creating a personality for themselves, can increase the degree of involvement in the chat sessions. Secondly, the instructions for the tasks should be given in written form to the participants, and the instructor should check whether the participants have understood the objectives of the task before beginning the chat. As far as the development of chat task design was concerned, I was satisfied with the outcomes of the project. The fact of improvement in the chat tasks was also confirmed by the participants in the End-project Interview (4.3.7.3) and the Member checks (4.3.7.9).

The second factor in the inclusion was finding *an optimal chat partner* for the participants. As the descriptions in 5.2 showed, I made a considerable effort to find the best matches by talking to the students, evaluating their chat logs, and administering the Task Evaluation Questionnaire (see 4.3.7.4) to them. In the End-project Interview (see 4.3.7.3 and the results in 7.2.3.1), all of the participants could name at least one person in the group with whom they both enjoyed chat and found it useful at the same time. However, my initial proposition that learners at similar levels of proficiency and typing skills make an optimal pair was only partly justified: while typing skills turned out to play a crucial role in making good pairs, proficiency level was not of primary importance. My efforts to find the chat pairs in the group who can cooperate well had satisfactory results. On several occasions, the composition of pairs had to be handled flexibly, as some of the learners were not present at the class. However, the most important point was that *all* learners found at least one group member they liked chatting with.

Technical conditions, like the computers and the servers IRC was connected to, also had a role in the chat sessions. Technical difficulties could impede the success of the chat session or shorten the time the learners could spend on the task. These were conditions provided by the school setting that I could not alter. As the project progressed, the participants became more skilled with computers, they handled IRC with ease and saving the chat logs became a routine task. This implies that even secondary schools with a fairly old set of computers, like BHS at the time of the chat project, can set up projects involving chat.

The fourth factor that had an impact on the inclusion of chat was *the classroom environment*. The chatters shared the same physical space so I, as the instructor, had to make sure that the situation of the chat tasks was simulated well. This entailed keeping the chatters far from each other, so that they could only communicate in chat. In the first phase of the project, it was also very important to monitor what the participants were doing in the sessions, and to make sure that they were on task during the chat sessions. Putting the chatters in two separate rooms could have made it possible to exclude oral communication in the chat classes. However, at the time of the chat project, it was not possible to separate them as there was only one computer room at BHS. Separating the chatters would also have made monitoring and helping them difficult for the teacher. Furthermore, as time went by, and the participants became accustomed to the chat sessions, they also showed development in sticking to the rules of classroom chat, and refraining from oral communication during the sessions.

The results of the member check interviews confirmed that the four factors above shaped the product of the chat sessions, the chat logs. Interestingly enough, in the interview, both learners

completed the description of the project I gave them with the following: they mentioned that the task and their chat partner was decisive from the viewpoint of their own involvement in the task. They also both commented that although they had had the opportunity to say what they thought of the chat tasks, they thought their opinion did not shape the course of the chat project considerably. My view of their involvement, and their evaluation of their own role thus differed considerably. They also mentioned that it was the revision and correction of chat logs that made the inclusion of chat an opportunity for language improvement for them.

After this detailed description of the chat sessions, I would like to show how the inclusion affected the participants' language learning process in terms of proficiency test results, and how their repertoire of learning strategies changed in the course of the school year. These issues will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

6 The effect of the inclusion of chat on EFL proficiency and language learning strategies

In the present chapter, in order to answer research question 2:
How does the inclusion of chat influence the participants' EFL proficiency and language learning strategies?

the changes in *EFL proficiency* and *language learning strategies* are investigated. The investigation was started with the following hypotheses:

H1: The effect of the inclusion of chat on proficiency is comparable to the effect of regular communicative tasks in the classroom.

H2: The inclusion of chat will result in increased frequency of language learning strategies.

A combined methodology approach was chosen to explore the changes in *proficiency* and *strategy use*. The investigation was carried out in two stages. These two variables, and the instruments used for measurement: the proficiency test and the strategy inventory questionnaire, were selected before the beginning of the project. The scores for the *general proficiency test* and the *strategy inventory* were analysed quantitatively. Following this stage, the *end-project interviews*, the *journal* and the *chat logs*, the three data sources which also contained information about changes in the learners' proficiency and strategy repertoire, were analysed qualitatively.

In section 6.1, the pre- and post-test English language proficiency test scores for the chat group and the control group are shown, and the differences between the two groups are discussed. Section 6.2 presents the pre- and post-test strategy inventory scores for the chat and the control group, and the discussion of the changes in the scores. In these paragraphs, the findings of the qualitative analyses are also included and the convergence between the two types of analyses is shown.

6.1 Results on the general proficiency test

The proficiency test consisted of 5 parts, each of which focussed on a different skill. Table 6.1 below shows the pre- and post-test scores for the chat group and the control group on the five

parts of the test: reading (read), language elements (lang), writing (writ), listening (list), speaking (speak), and the total test score (total).

Table 6.1 Pre- and post-test scores on the proficiency test (all scores are given in percentage, the maximum is 100%)

<i>name</i>	<i>n</i>	pre - rea d	post- read	pre- lang	post- lang	pre- writ	post - writ	pre- list	post -list	pre- speak	post- speak	pre- total	post- total
<i>chat</i> <i>group</i> <i>total</i>	8	81	87	69	76*	50	71*	80	79	60	65	67	75*
<i>contr</i> <i>ol</i> <i>group</i> <i>total</i>	12	80	77	52	72*	59	62	71	73	61	70*	63	71*

* p < .05

T-tests were used to reveal if the changes between the pre- and post-test results of the two groups were significant. The asterisks mark the mean scores that show a significant positive change in the post-test result compared to the pre-test result. In the case of the *chat group*, the results of the *language elements* paper, the *writing paper* and the *total result* of the proficiency test were found to be significantly better in the post-test. The *control group* produced significantly better results in the post-test when compared to the pre-test on the *language elements paper*, the *speaking part* and the *total score* of the proficiency test.

The following sections will discuss the test scores in which there was a significant increase for both groups: Firstly, language elements and the total score are focussed on, then the two skills in which only one group showed development: writing in the chat group and speaking in the control group. In the last part of the discussion, the two skills where no significant development took place: reading and listening are discussed.

6.1.1 Language elements

The t-tests showed that both groups made significant progress on the language elements paper of the proficiency test. In the case of language elements, which include grammar and vocabulary, the increase in scores can be explained by the regular development of the learners' grammatical competence and vocabulary in the English classes. Elements of grammar and items of vocabulary are present in virtually all types of classroom activity. If learners take part in five English classes a week over an extended period of time, as was the case in both groups, their participation can result in the improvement of their skills in these areas.

As both groups show a significant increase in the language elements paper of the test, the usefulness of chat classes appears to be comparable to the usefulness of 'traditional' classes, as far as the acquisition of language elements is concerned. The chat logs produced by the chat group also contain evidence that there were opportunities to learn while performing tasks in chat. The following chat extract shows an instance of negotiation of vocabulary, which is a regular phenomenon in the chat logs produced in the BHS Chat Project⁶.

Chat extract, 2 December, Seth & Tom
[tom]I've just protect him. I wasn't smuggler.

⁶ In the total corpus of 69 chat logs, there are 32 instances of meaning negotiation.²

<seth>What does proteckt mean?
[tom]Defend, guard...
<seth>ok

Sequences in which grammar is negotiated hardly ever occur in the chat logs. In both groups, the participants' development in grammar can be attributed to the instruction, and in the case of the participants of the chat group, to the regular production of English texts in the chat classes.

6.1.2 Total test score

Besides the language elements paper of the test, both groups made significant increase on the total score as well. The groups' progress on the total score can also be interpreted as the outcome of the regular English instruction the learners acquired. Making progress between the beginning and the end of a school year is probably what every secondary school language teacher expects from her learners.

There are learners in probably all language groups, like Mitch in the chat group, who do not make progress, or at least not in a way that can be measured by a proficiency test. Not making progress can have several reasons. The learner may lack motivation, or the instruction may not match his learning style. Following the post-test proficiency test I gave the participants their results and conducted a short interview with all of them about how they interpreted the results. My first two questions were:

- 1 *How would you explain the changes in scores?*
- 2 *What differences are there between the test in September and this one? Which one did you take more seriously?*

Here are the answers Mitch gave to the questions:

LTJ, 30 March, Tuesday

- 1 *'I was not interested in the test, I was in a bad mood when writing it.'*
- 2 *'I took neither of them seriously.'*

6.1.3 Writing skills in the chat group

The chat group performed significantly better on the post-test writing paper than on the pre-test paper. The writing part was a letter writing task in both cases. The score for the writing paper had three components. The first component was *communicative value*, which indicated how well the learners completed the task. The second component was *accuracy*. The third component was a score for *the form of the letter*.

As the inclusion of chat tasks in the EFL classes entailed that the learners understood the tasks and carried out the instructions precisely, they probably became fairly task-sensitive, and learnt to pay attention to task instructions. The inclusion of chat tasks also involved regular spontaneous writing practice, and the regular correction of the chat logs. This explains why the participants could focus more on accuracy in the post-test. During the regular English classes, we devoted a lesson to letter writing conventions. Reviewing expressions used in letters was also a useful activity that could have been conducive to good results on the writing part of the post-test.

During the interview in which the participants of the chat group individually evaluated their own performance, Martin said he was surprised by the increase in his score, but he also added that he had prepared for the post-test in order to perform better (LTJ, 30 March). Piper, Footie and Tom all mentioned that they attributed their progress in the writing part of the test to the fact that we had talked about letter writing conventions in class. The interview with the control group's English teacher (see Member checks, 4.3.7.9) revealed that the control group also received

instruction on writing letters. This showed that as far as training in letter writing is concerned, the two group's situations were similar.

6.1.4 Speaking skills in the control group

The control group performed significantly better on the speaking part of the post-test than on the pre-test. As the control group's English teacher explained, this positive change can be attributed to the speaking activities done in class. A good part of the free production activities the control group did in class was in speaking, and consequently, the learners developed a certain routine in face-to-face conversations.

The control group's gain in the speaking part is especially important from the viewpoint of the chat project, because practising speaking skills was a dominant theme in the chat group. A considerable proportion of the free production activities was spent with chat tasks in the chat group, and the time devoted to class chat exceeded the time spent on free production speaking activities, such as role-play or discussion. Four of the eight participants mentioned in the end-project interview that there should have been more speaking in the classes. One of the questions I asked in the end-project interview was:

Was there anything you missed from the English classes? Below are the answers Footie, Dot, Seth and Piper gave to this question.

EPI, Footie, Question 9

Footie: (szünet) Hm. Hát a chatból például a szóbeli kommunikáció hiányzott. De ugyanakkor az írásbelit azt fejlesztette. Tehát szóbeli kommunikációban is kellett volna ilyen feladatokat csinálni, de igaz, hogy azok nem maradnak így meg, mint a chat.

[Footie: (pause) Hm. What I missed from chat for example was oral communication. But then again, it developed written communication. So we should have done such tasks in speaking a well, although those cannot be saved like chat.]

EPI, Dot, Question 9

Dot: A többi óráról: talán a beszélgetéseket. Szerepjáték stílusú, két ember a csoportból. Talán beszédből volt a legkevesebb.

[From the other classes (Dot means the classes without chat): maybe oral conversation. Role-play-style, between two people in the group. Probably we did the least of speaking.]

EPI, Seth, Question 9

R: Mi volt, amit esetleg hiányoltál az órákról?

Seth: (nevet) Hát talán többet kellett volna így beszélni, hát ilyen párbeszéd feladatokat kellett volna többet oldani.

[R: Was there anything you thought was lacking from the classes?

Seth: (laughs) Well, maybe we should have done more talking, we should have had more conversation tasks.]

EPI, Piper, Question 9

Piper: Picit több beszédes feladat.

[Piper: A few more speaking tasks.]

As shown above, four of the eight learners in the chat group felt we did too little speaking in class. The lack of focus on speaking is an explanation for the lack of significant progress in speaking skills. However, there is an overall tendency for numerical increase between the pre- and post-test scores in both groups. Significant changes in all fields of a learners' proficiency can hardly be expected to result from one year's instruction at school. Depending on the focus of instruction, the learners' development will vary in the different areas of their proficiency.

6.1.5 Skills unchanged: reading and listening

There were no significant changes in either groups in their reading and listening skills. There are two possible explanations for this. The first one is that in both groups, the pre-test scores are relatively high, so in order to increase the score, the group members should have performed at a near perfect level on the tests. It should also be taken into consideration that both groups received instruction aimed at developing the productive skills, speaking and writing. Significant development in reading and writing, without special training focussed on the receptive skills, was not possible.

In spite of the lack of statistical differences between the pre- and post-test scores in these two skills, the chat group's score in reading increased from 81% in the pre-test to 87% in the post-test. This positive tendency, which was not characteristic of the control group (see table 6.1), could be a result of the regular reading the participants did in the chat sessions. While performing the chat tasks, the learners were reading and interpreting the messages in real time, and responded to what they had understood. Consequently, they both provided and gained evidence of understanding their partner's message correctly. Although the length of a chat post is just a fraction of the length of most reading texts learners have to tackle, the quick and spontaneous understanding of these is crucial to the success of the conversation.

6.2 Results on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

Table 6.2 shows the pre- and post test mean group scores on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). An average score of 2.5 points on a part of the SILL is supposed to mean that those language learning strategies are *sometimes used* by the students, while scores below 2.5 are given to strategy types which are *generally not used* by the students. Language learning strategies *generally used* should fall between 3.5 and 4.4. None of the two groups' mean scores fall in the *generally used* or the *always or almost always used* category. The mean group scores on the subparts of the SILL show that these strategies are *sometimes used*, with the exception of the chat group's post-test score on Part A (2.29) and Part E (1.9), and the control group's pre- and post-test mean scores on Part A (2.1 and 2.37) and post-test mean score on Part E (2.29). The mean scores on these parts show that these strategies are *generally not used*. According to their pre- and post-test total scores, both groups fall into the *medium* frequency user category according to Oxford's (1990) interpretation of the scores.

Table 6.2 Pre- and post-test mean group scores on the SILL

<i>Part/Group</i>	<i>Part A Remembering more effectively</i>		<i>Part B Using your mental processes</i>		<i>Part C Compensating for missing knowledge</i>		<i>Part D Organizing and evaluating your learning</i>		<i>Part E Managing your emotions</i>		<i>Part F Learning with others</i>		<i>Total score</i>	
	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>	<i>Pre-Test</i>	<i>Post-Test</i>
<i>Chat group</i>	2,57	2,29	2,54	2,73*	2,9	2,82	2,92	3,82	2,86	1,9*	3,04	2,92	2,83	2,61
<i>Control group</i>	2,10	2,37	2,33	2,82*	3,39	3,36	2,75	2,95	2,75	2,29	2,58	2,8	2,68	2,75

The paired samples t-tests of the *chat group*'s mean scores on the six parts and the total SILL showed a significant positive change on Part B, *Using your mental processes*, where the pre-test mean 2.54 increased to 2.73, and a significant decrease on Part E, *Managing your emotions*, where the pre-test score 2.86 decreased to 1.9. The chat group's pre-test score on Part E suggests that students used these strategies *sometimes* when the pre-test was administered to them. The post-test scores reveal that the strategies meant to manage emotions were generally not used at the time when the post-test was taken by the participants.

As far as the *control group* is concerned, the t-test showed a significant change in one part of the SILL, Part B, *Using your mental processes*. The pre-test mean score 2.33 increased to 2.82 in the post-test. The pre-test mean score belongs to the domain *generally not used*, while the post-test mean score to the domain *sometimes used*.

6.2.1 Using mental processes

Both the chat group and the control group showed a significant increase on *Using your mental processes*. This part includes strategies of using one's mental processes while learning a language. Part B contains the following statements (statements 10-23 in the questionnaire):

10. *I say or write new English words several times.*
11. *I try to talk like native English speakers.*
12. *I practice the sounds of English.*
13. *I use the English words I know in different ways.*
14. *I start conversations in English.*
15. *I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.*
16. *I read for pleasure in English.*
17. *I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.*
18. *I first skim an English passage then go back and read carefully.*
19. *I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.*
20. *I try to find patterns in English.*
21. *I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.*
22. *I try not to translate word-for-word.*
23. *I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.*

Using language learning strategies implies that the user spends time on learning the language, and engages in various activities that help them to learn. The increased scores on the post-test in both groups show that the learners spent more time on these activities at the time of the post-test than at the beginning of the school year, when the pre-test was administered to them.

The majority of activities listed in Part B concern the acquisition of vocabulary. The improvement in mental strategies is in accordance with the finding that the two groups made progress on the language elements part of the proficiency test (see 6.1.3.1). In the End-project interview, the members of the chat group were grilled about the ways chat influenced their language learning process. During the EPI, Dot gave the following answer to question 6: *In what ways did chat contribute to your language learning?*

EPI, Dot, Question 6

D: Nem tudom, sokat segített-e. Inkább érdekes volt. Nekem nem segített a nyelvtanban. Mégis gondolkodtam közben, meg szavakat tanultam.

[I don't know if it actually helped. I'd be more inclined to say it was interesting. It didn't help me with grammar. But I was thinking while doing it, and I learnt new words.]

Seth mentioned in the EPI (Question 6) that if using a word repeatedly can be called learning, he learnt new words in chat. This is the first strategy listed in Part B of the strategy inventory.

As the participants made progress in proficiency, and used mental strategies to improve their English, also in chat, it can be concluded that the regular inclusion of chat involved the learners in language learning activities that lead to the improvement of their language skills.

6.2.2 Managing emotions

The chat group's significant decrease on Part E *Managing your emotions* of the SILL can be attributed to the fact that producing language in the chat context is less stressful than doing the same thing in speaking (Beauvois, 1996, Lee, 2002, Warschauer, 1996) This is especially true if the learner has to speak when the whole group is listening. It was often a problem during our classes that the learners would not listen to each other, and made negative comments about each other's performance. The following extract from the language teacher's journal shows that speaking in class was a continuous problem.

LTJ, 30 March Tuesday

I have all the test results. I am amazed to see how little difference there is between pre- and post-test scores on the speaking part. I should not be surprised, speaking in class is a continuous problem. 'We should speak more,' some of them keep saying, but they will switch to Hungarian all the time, and when they do answer in English, I can hardly hear what they say.

Dot talked about how she felt about her group members in the EPI. Her comments were in line with my observation that she was anxious to speak in class because of her classmates.

EPI, Dot, Question 11

R: Milyen a jó nyelvtanuló csoport?

Dot: Kevesen legyünk, 8-10 ember. Ez itt ideális. Középmezőnyben szeretek lenni, de legyen aki jobban tud nálam. És fiúk legyenek. De itt milyen fiúk vannak! Nem érzem, hogy van aki rosszabbul tudna. Footie-nak kicsit toleránsnak kéne lenni.

[R: What kind of group is ideal for language learning?

There shouldn't be too many learners, only 8-10. It is ideal here. I like to be in the middle, but there should be learners who are better than me. And there should be boys. But not like these! I don't feel there's anyone whose English is worse than mine. Footie should be a bit more tolerant.]

Three of the eight learners also talked about the chat classes being more relaxed than the traditional classes. The first two questions in the EPI were the following:

1 *What was the atmosphere of the chat classes like?*

2 *How did the chat classes differ from traditional classes?*

Here are the answers given by the three learners:

EPI, Ben, Question 1

R: Milyen volt szerinted a chat órák légköre?

Ben: Hát felszabadultabb, mint egy ilyen általános óráé.

R: Szerinted miért?

Ben: Talán a számíték terem miatt, mert ott háttal is ülünk,

R: Ühüm

Ben: meg hát nem tudom.

[R: What do you think, what was the atmosphere of the chat classes like?

Ben: Well, they were more relaxed than traditional classes.

R: Why was that do you think??

Ben: Maybe because of the computer room, because we were sitting with our backs (to each other),

R: Uh-huh

Ben: and well I don't know.]

Ben's remark shows he usually did not enjoy 'facing' his group mates in the English classes. The Language Teacher's Journal, and chapters 5 and 7 describe the difficulties in group dynamics that made the cooperation between the members of the group difficult at times. Ben's sentences suggest that these difficulties were not present when they were working together in chat.

In the following extract, Dot emphasizes the autonomous nature of chat tasks, the feeling of having the chance to decide what she wants to do within the framework of a given task.

EPI, Dot, Question 1 & 2

Dot: Jó, tényleg, jobb, mint a rendes óra, jobban élveztük, mint a nyelvtani dolgokat. Kicsit azt csináltunk, amit akartunk.

[Dot: Good, really, better than traditional classes, we enjoyed it more than grammatical things. We sort of did what we liked.]

Piper mentions autonomy in the chat sessions, too, and the fact that she felt chat tasks were more positive than other tasks in class:

EPI, Ben, Questions 1 & 2

Piper: Jobb a hangulat a chat órán, könnyedebb, a feladat is, meg a gépekkel a munka, önállóbb is. [Piper: The atmosphere is better in the chat class, more relaxed, the task too, and working with the computers, it is more autonomous.]

As the extracts above reveal, the chat classes had a relaxed atmosphere. In the non-chat language classes the students often had to answer questions in front of their classmates, maintain a pace dictated by me when doing the tasks, or face conflicts with their classmates or their teacher. These are fairly normal events in language classes. However, they can cause anxiety in learners and potentially impede their learning process (Dörnyei, 2001, Piniel, 2004). According to the results of the SILL, the members of the chat group profited from the relaxed atmosphere of the chat classes and needed less strategy to compensate for anxiety in class than at the outset of the project.

6.2.3 Strategies unchanged: remembering, compensating, organizing and learning with others

In four of the six parts of the strategy inventory: remembering, compensating, organizing and learning with others, there were no significant changes in either group. In the control group, the teaching approach and the activities used in class were not new in the school year investigated, which can explain why there were no marked changes in the use of these strategies. In the case of the chat group, the inclusion of chat tasks did not influence these areas of strategy use.

As far as *remembering more efficiently* is concerned, the visual record of the chat conversation can help learners remember new words they encounter in chat. In order for this to happen regularly, more tasks for learning vocabulary could have been included. However, the evolving insights of the chat projects showed that the participants could benefit more from open-ended task types.

In the case of *compensating for missing knowledge*, four types are included in the SILL: guessing, gestures, word coinage, and approximation (for a comprehensive list of compensation strategies and their definitions, see Dörnyei and Scott, 1997). These strategy types are only partly relevant in compensation in chat. *Guessing* the meaning of unknown words and *approximation*⁷ are strategies that can greatly help the learners in chat to understand their partners and get their own message

⁷ Approximation is when the learner replaces words he or she does not know with a synonyms or related word.

across. *Gestures* are not present in their traditional form in chat, as the chatters do not share the same visual context. Although emoticons and other text-based devices can be used in chat communication to express emotions and add extra meaning to the verbal message (for an inventory of these devices in chat, see Werry, 1996 and Negretti, 1997), these were not included in the SILL. Instances of *word coinage* in the chat logs are rare. A possible explanation for this is that when learners were not sure about how to say a word in English, they often resorted to using another language, Hungarian or German, because they knew their partner would understand. Word coinage is an efficient technique in the case of learners who do not share the same first language.

Organizing and evaluating one's learning involved learning activities outside the school, like doing homework or reading, writing, or speaking in English. The former activities in the group were not changed by the project, and from the latter activities, there were only a few mentioned by the learners. An example of such activity was that Dot preferred to correct the chat logs at home, or that Piper and Dot e-mailed their friends in English (see LTJ, 2 February). An intercultural chat project in which the learners have partners from another country can inspire the learners to correspond, e-mail or chat in English in their free time, given of course that they become friends with their partners.

The last group of strategies which remained unchanged was *learning with others*. Three of the six statements in this part of the SILL referred to oral communication, the other three were general. As group dynamics were fairly poor in the chat group, and did not improve considerably in the course of the project, the lack of change is not surprising. However, as completing a chat task successfully requires collaboration between the chatters, and the chat logs indeed provide evidence that the learners made an effort to collaborate in chat (the analysis of the chat logs in chapter 8 confirms this), an increase in this field could have been expected. All the learners had group members they liked chatting with, and in the end-project interview Tom, Footie and Martin explicitly mention that they enjoyed working together with their pals in chat (see 7.2.3.1). Statements oriented more towards communicating in the target language in all media, including CMC, could have better shown the changes in the chat group. This implies that with the expansion of CMC in language classrooms, strategy inventories should be modified in order to include these recent forms of communication as well.

6.3 Conclusions

The results of the proficiency tests showed progress in the use of language elements and the total score on the test in both groups. The main finding concerning the effect of the inclusion of chat on proficiency, is that performing chat tasks and performing traditional, non-chat tasks in class proved to be equally useful. The first hypothesis is thus justified, although the two groups developed in partly different skills. The chat group's score also increased significantly in writing skills, while the control group showed a significant increase in speaking skills. The chat group's gain in writing skills scores can be explained by the dominance of writing activities in the English classes, including chat.

The inclusion of chat tasks brought about an increased use of mental strategies, and a decrease in the use of strategies for managing one's emotions. The positive change in the frequency of using mental strategies also took place in the control group, and can thus be considered the effect of regularly engaging in meaningful activities related to language learning, which includes chat tasks as well. The second hypothesis is thus not justified, the inclusion of chat tasks did not stimulate the use of more strategies than the regular communicative classroom activities. In the case of emotional strategies, the beneficial effect of chat tasks on language learning was shown by the decrease of strategies. The drop in the frequency of strategies for managing emotions in the chat group shows that the inclusion of chat tasks creates the possibility for a relaxed, autonomous environment for learners to practise and improve their English in.

In the following chapter, the participants' motivation for learning English, and their attitudes towards classroom chat will be investigated.

Chapter 7 Motivation for learning English and attitudes towards the inclusion of chat

The aim of the present chapter is to describe the changes in

- 1) the motivation to learn English,
 - 2) and the attitudes towards the inclusion of chat
- in the EFL classes in the chat group during the BHS chat project.

The concept of *motivation* is interpreted as “the *direction* and *magnitude* of human behaviour, that is

- the choice of a particular action,
- the persistence with it,
- the effort expended on it.” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 8)

Motivation is a key element in language learning and a prerequisite of progress. The learner’s motivation to learn induces them to execute actions that lead to learning. Persistence entails that the learner will perform these actions over an extended time period. The degree of effort the learner expends on the actions is closely related to the degree of progress they make.

In the case of the BHS chat project, the human behaviour investigated was learning English in the chat group. *Attitudes* are described as the opinions and feelings the participants voice about learning English and participating in the chat sessions, and also their actions related to the chat sessions.

The contents of the present chapter are the following. In section 7.1, Dörnyei and Ottó’s (1998) model of motivation is presented. Section 7.2 gives a detailed description of the learners’ state of motivation in the three stages of the study. In section 7.3, the learners’ attitudes towards chat tasks are investigated.

7.1 Dörnyei and Ottó’s model of motivation

The chat group’s motivation is described with the help of Dörnyei and Ottó’s (1998, cf. Dörnyei, 2001) model of process-oriented L2 motivation. This model depicts motivation as a dynamic process, and divides motivation into three stages, referred to as *states* in the model: pre-actional state >> actional state >> postactional state.

The changes in motivation were investigated using qualitative methods, by describing the issues relevant to the inclusion of chat according to the chronological framework of the three states. The case of each learner in the chat group is presented in order to give a full picture of the changes that took place during the course of the project.

The chat group’s attitudes towards chat as a tool in language learning were compared to the control group’s, whose members did not perform chat tasks regularly. Quantitative methods were used to analyze the differences between the two groups.

7.1.1 The pre-actional state of motivation

In the pre-actional state, the learner is planning and preparing the action of language learning. This state includes three sub-processes:

goal setting >> intention formation >> the initiation of intention enactment

Goal setting entails that the language learner defines their objectives for language learning. Intention formation is a step further than goal setting. Setting objectives takes place at an abstract

level, while intention formation “involves commitment” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 87). Intention formation is thus a process in which the learner makes a concrete action plan of how they will achieve the goals set. The last step before the learner actually engages in action is the initiation of the action, an event and point in time at which the action potentially leading to the goal set is undertaken by the learner.

7.1.2 The actional state of motivation

The central state of the model is the actional state, which involves the activities that are conducive to language learning. In this state, “one continuously generates (or is assigned) subtasks/sub-goals” (p. 89). The execution of the *subtasks* is followed by the learner’s *appraisal* of their accomplishment on the task. The self-evaluation can also be influenced by the environment’s assessment of the learner’s achievement. This is often the case in a school learning situation, where the teacher’s assessment of the learner’s actions is a key factor. The third process that plays an important role in the actional phase is *action control*, which is a set of strategies the learner can employ to regulate their learning. These strategies include the activities listed by Oxford (1990) in her strategy inventory (see 4.3.6.6).

As the action itself is composed of sub-actions, or subtasks, the actional state is made up of a series of subtasks, which are followed by the learners’ self-evaluation and supported by the learner’s action control strategies. In my interpretation, the sequence of these actions; the task, the evaluation, and the control strategies can form a cycle, and the lessons learnt from earlier cycles can be used in later ones within the same actional state.

7.1.3 The postactional state of motivation

The postactional state follows after the series of activities in the actional state have been completed, suspended, or in some cases, abandoned. In this last phase, the learner evaluates the preceding states, and compares the goals set in the pre-actional state with their achievements in the actional state. Just as in the actional state, lessons can be learnt from comparing the plans to the actual achievement. When the learner engages in a new cycle, and arrives at the pre-actional state once again, what they learnt from the previous cycle can help in improving planning and implementation in new phases of learning.

Dörnyei and Ottó’s model is focussed on how motivation to learn a L2 can be explained in terms of action, and also, as it happens, in terms of activities which typically make up language learning. The ‘natural’ unit of language learning for most secondary school learners is the school year, which begins in September and lasts until the middle of June in Hungary. The motivation of the members of the chat group is described for one school year, the duration of the BHS chat project, within the framework of Dörnyei and Ottó’s process-oriented model of the three states of motivation.

7.1.4 Applying the model to the BHS chat project

The group’s initial level of motivation is considered the pre-actional state, which is described in this chapter with the help of two sources of data. The first source is the Questionnaire on Background the participants filled in at the beginning of the project. The second source is the information I gathered from my colleagues at BHS, and a former teacher of the chat group, N. A., who was no longer teaching at the school at the time of the project. This was recorded in the Journal.

In the context of the BHS chat project, I considered the actional state of motivation the school year 2003-2004, in which the 23 chat sessions took place. I recorded the events relevant to the group’s motivation in the Language Teacher’s Journal. The main events from the viewpoint of the actional state in the chat project were the chat inclusion cycles, especially the step at which the participants performed the chat task. The product of the chat session was the chat log produced by the

participants. The chat logs were also used as data in the investigation of the chat group's motivation in the actional state.

The end of the BHS chat project is interpreted as the postactional state. The end of the project consisted of the last two weeks of the school year, in which the Questionnaire on Attitudes (QA) was administered to the participants, and the End-project Interviews (EPI) were conducted. According to Dörnyei and Ottó's claim, in the postactional state the learners evaluate their learning activities. In the QA and the EPI, they also had the opportunity to evaluate the activities they were engaged in, their own part in the activities, and explain in what ways the chat project could contribute to their language learning process.

7.2 The three states of motivation in the BHS chat project

7.2.1 The pre-actional state

7.2.1.1 Qualities of language learning

First of all, I read the participants' answers in the background questionnaire (see 4.3.6.1) about how they felt about learning English. In this item, they were asked to mark the adjectives which they thought were characteristic for learning English. The following options were listed (after the sentence-beginning *Language learning is...*): *a lot of work, interesting, horrible, boring, involves a lot of rote-learning, easy, nerve-racking, difficult, and entertaining*. The participants were asked to answer the questions about learning English.

I gained the following information about the members of the chat group: 75% of the group, that is six out of eight learners, thought that language learning was interesting. One learner thought it was boring and nerve-racking. One learner did not mark any adjectives for this question. The answers led me to conclude that the majority of the group had a positive attitude to learning English.

7.2.1.2 Language learning objectives

As far as language learning objectives were concerned, all learners in the group wanted to speak English fluently, though only two of them answered the question 'By when would you like to reach this aim?' The two answers were 'as soon as possible' and 'this year'. Seven of the eight participants were going to take an English language exam. The students wanted to have language certificates because these could bring them extra points when applying to a university. Four of them wanted to read in English, and one participant wanted to use her English for writing letters and e-mails, and during her travels.

Thus the group was oriented towards learning to speak English fluently and taking an English language exam. I considered both of the objectives to be ambitious, and expected a hard-working group. My expectations were confirmed by S. M., the leader of the English teaching team at BHS. She told me at the outset of the project that the group was looking forward to working hard in the English class. The journal extract below reports on the conversation I had with S. M. in June 2003. I underlined the last sentence in the extract. This refers to the group's eagerness to learn English.

LTJ extract, 10 June, 2003

She [the leader of the English teaching team] tells me about them [the students who later became the chat group]. The group has 9 or 10 members, students from classes 5a and 5b. The year that is about to conclude has been their second year of studying English in BHS.

...

When they came to BHS two years ago, they knew some English already, but they did not want to be in the more advanced first foreign language English group. N.A., an experienced teacher, taught them in the first year. She retired at the end of the year. S. M. says I should call N. A. and promises to give me her number.

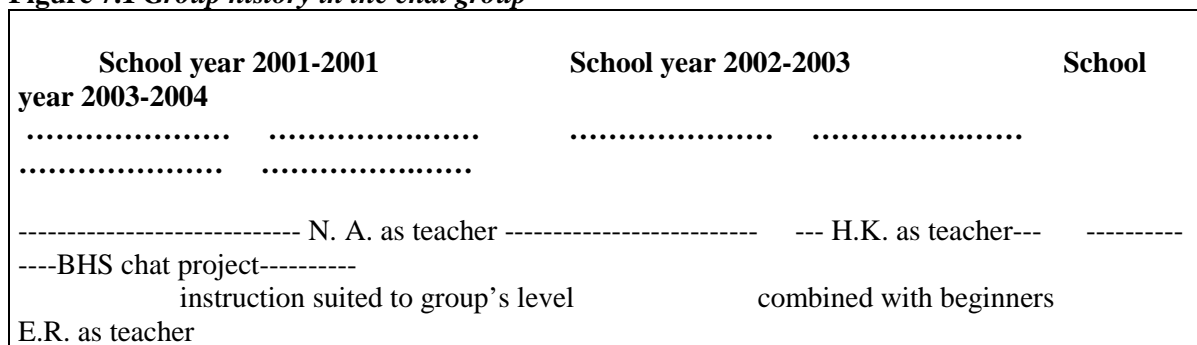
The group was united with H.K.'s group of beginners in the second year. This situation was not really favourable for learning for either the beginners or the more advanced students. The latter complained a lot, and S. M. thinks they would love to work hard in their English classes again. So my task is to make them work really hard and learn a lot.

The information I gained both from the learners and from S.M. showed that the group was motivated to learn English.

7.2.1.3 Group history

As has already been described in section 4.3.3.2, the group had a fairly vicissitudinous history. By the time of their third year at BHS beginning, I was their third English teacher. Figure 7.1 shows the three stages with the three different teachers in the group's life.

Figure 7.1 Group history in the chat group



In the first year, N. A. was their teacher. I called her, and enquired about the group from her. During the telephone conversation I had with her at the outset of the project, she told me the following:

LTJ extract, 8 September

I called N.A., their former teacher, on the phone to talk about the group. Ben seems to know everything, Tom, Mitch and Footie think they know everything, but they are wrong. She said she felt sorry for them, because they kept fooling around in class. N.A. thinks Piper is an exemplary student, she is kind and diligent.

I also learned from the conversation I had with N. A. that some of the members of the group were undisciplined in the English classes. After the first days of the school year had passed, I experienced this problem myself in the classes, as the extracts below show.

LTJ extract, 10 September, Wednesday

When they are tired, they put their heads on the desks. This shocked me. Are they so uninterested?

LTJ extract, 29 September, Monday

The first class is quite messy, their attention is not focussed on me or the blackboard, but somewhere in the middle of the desks, where Tom's, Mitch's and Footie's eyes and comments meet. Most of the students do not have their textbooks, and they will not listen to each other. I have a sinking feeling. I guess the task was not challenging enough for them.

During my English classes with the chat group, the students sometimes told me stories about their first year. On one occasion, Dot told me in class how N. A. evaluated the group as a part of her career as a teacher.

LTJ extract, 20 January, Tuesday

Dot tells me N.A. said they were the worst group in her life, and she retired after that year with them.

I never asked anyone about the truthfulness of this statement, but I did not doubt the group had a role in her decision. Although this was a sad story, it revealed to me that the discipline problems I sometimes had in the group had probably always been there, and were not due to my limited experience with secondary school learners. The group was indeed difficult to manage, and group dynamics and cooperation were at a low level. My observations about the group's discipline and cooperation problems were confirmed by the member check interviews with the participants.

The group got a new English teacher in the second semester of their second school year, and they were united with a second-year group. The intermediate learners were united with learners at a lower level, who had only been learning English for a year. I figured that it was probably just as hard for the new teacher, H. K. to handle the group as it was for N. A., if not harder. In H.K.'s group, students of two different levels of proficiency were put into one group.

7.2.1.4 Synthesis of the pre-actional state

Having collected information about the group's history, attitudes to English and learning objectives, I concluded that the chat group was interested in and motivated to learn English. However, when it came to action in favour of learning English, the members of the group had problems with discipline and working together.

In spite of these negative experiences, I was convinced that well-defined, challenging tasks can help participants get involved and make them work together in the English class. The conditions were provided for successful language learning, as the learners had similar proficiency levels (unlike in their second year), and they all claimed to have aims concerning English.

7.2.2 The actional state

In the following section, I will describe how the chat group's motivation to learn English changed in the course of the chat project. The initial move in the actional state of Dörnyei and Ottó's model is *subtask generation and implementation*. In this move, the learner sets a sub-goal and then takes *action*, which involves learning activities. The action move is influenced by *appraisal*, or in other words the evaluation of the action, and *actional control*, the sum of the strategies the learner uses to regulate their learning process. The result of the action is the *actional outcome*. After reaching the phase of the actional outcome, the learner can either modify or continue the action. The appraisal of the outcome can also lead to the modification of the goal. The outcome is followed by the *achieved goal*, or *terminated action*. In the first case, the cycle was completed with some degree of success, while in the second case, the action is terminated before it could reach its end. Both events lead to the postactional state.

7.2.2.1 The actional state in school learning environment

As I pointed out above, the actional state of the chat group coincided with the school year and the English classes at school, including the chat sessions. In the case of most secondary school learners, language learning is a regular part of their school programme, and the actional phase is something they can plan and prepare for. In the school environment, the tasks are usually assigned by the language teacher, who might involve the learners in choosing the tasks presented during the school year. In the chat group's case, I assigned the tasks to the learners, and, as shown in the chat inclusion cycle in figure 5.1, I encouraged the learners to take part in planning the tasks, and give

me feedback about the tasks. As far as the material of the regular classes is concerned, I was also instructed by the leader of the English teaching team about what to teach.

LTJ entry, 3 September Wednesday

S. M. [the leader of the English teaching team] suggests that I cover the most important grammar points in the intermediate book, Language in Use (Doff and Jones, 1994) with the group first, which should not take more than a few weeks, and then start the upper-intermediate book (Doff and Jones, 1997). This is so that the students feel they are making progress, and the course is challenging enough for them.

I did not know I was supposed to use Language in Use (LU), I thought I could choose my own coursebook. (I thought we had agreed on that in the summer.)

S. M. says LU is an excellent book for beginners (like me???) from a linguistic point of view. She offers to go through the intermediate book and show me the topics worth dealing with. In this language course, units on grammar alternate with units on vocabulary. She lists virtually all the grammar topics from the book. We could start the upper-intermediate book in October or November.

As I was a guest teacher at BHS, I considered it important to follow S. M.'s instructions concerning the syllabus of the regular classes. However, covering grammar points quickly was not at all in line with what the members of the chat group had set themselves as a goal at the beginning of the project (see the section on the participants in 4.3.3). This conflict between the team leader's expectations and the chat group's desires influenced the participants' motivation in a negative way. However, it is often the case that learners' *wants* do not converge with their *needs*. As the learners get to the evaluation phase in their motivational cycle, they might realise the tasks they did not find meaningful at first were beneficial to their learning in the long run (Bygate, 1999).

7.2.2.2 Chat cycles in the actional state

In the following section, I investigate the learners' *subtask generation* and *implementation* moves. The learners' moves will be investigated in terms of their involvement in the chat tasks while doing them, their involvement in planning the tasks and their self-evaluation of their performance on the task. The learners generated a subtask each time they decided to take part in a chat cycle. Taking part could involve asking for a certain task type, or encouraging one's partner in chat to begin the task, as illustrated in the following extract:

Chat extract, 7 October, Mitch & Seth

- 1 <mitch> hi
- 2 [seth] Hi
- 3 <mitch> lets beginning the work!
- 4 <mitch> First Task:
- 5 [seth] TSpain
- 6 [seth] What kind of tips should we give?

Implementation entailed making an effort to carry out the task in chat. The posts in chat aimed at managing the task provide evidence that the learners made such an effort. The following extract is an example of how Martin is trying to achieve the goals of the task by asking Footie about his personality.

Chat extract, 2 December Martin & Footie

- 1 <martin> Please tell me something about your personalities
- 2 [footie] What for example?

The outcome of the chat sessions was tangible: the chat logs were saved and printed out. The appraisal of the action took place in several stages. After the chat sessions, I read the chat logs and

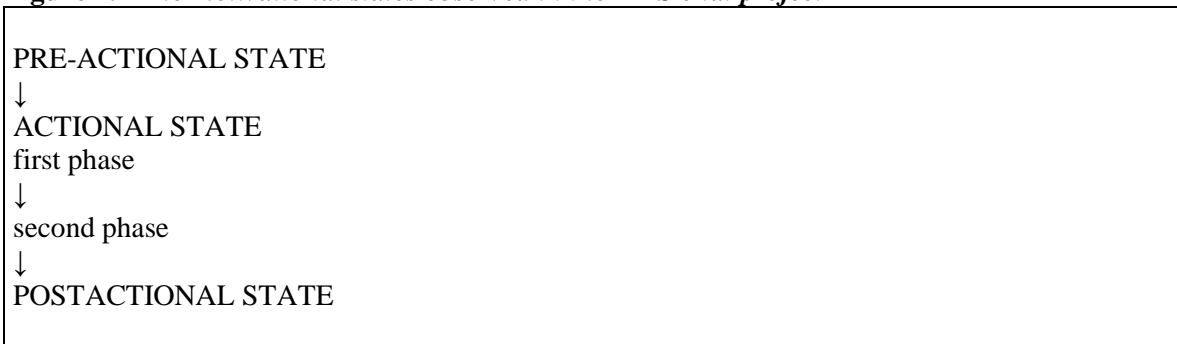
commented on the chatters' English and the content of the chat. An example of my comments can be seen below. I wrote my comments and questions in the margin of the printed text. Here the comment is printed after the arrow. Martin posed the question 'What had you use?' My question (> What tense is this?) about the verb tense aimed at eliciting the correction of his sentence. (I ignored the typo in 'Whad'.)

Chat extract, 4 May, Martin & Footie
[martin] Whad had you use? > What tense is this?

The day after the chat session took place, the learners read their texts and my comments, reacted to the comments and corrected the texts. I immediately discussed their corrections with them. As a result, the learners gained insight into their chat outcome, and could evaluate their own work. If the learner had set as their goal the production of a good chat, they had the opportunity in the chat cycle to read the outcome and appraise it.

In the following sections, I will describe the actional state in the chat project in two phases. The first phase lasted from the beginning of the project in September until 18 December, when the Christmas break began. The second phase lasted from 6 January 2004 until 3 June, the last day of the project. Figure 7.2 shows the motivational states observed during the project.

Figure 7.2 *The motivational states observed in the BHS chat project*



7.2.2.3 The first phase of the chat project

The actional outcome is followed either by the achieved goal, or the termination of the action. A chat cycle is a sub-action or sub-task within a participant's actional state. I divided the group into three sub-groups in the first month of the project according to how the learners acted in the chat sessions. The characteristics the members of the three sub-groups shared were confirmed by two participants in the member check interviews.

The first sub-group: skilled with computers

The first sub-group consisted of four learners: Mitch, Tom, Footie and Ben. All of them were daily computer users, and very skilled with computers. They could type faster than the other four members of the group, and I had the impression that they found the new medium, chat, fun to work with in the English class. The *technical condition* aspect of classroom chat mentioned in chapter 5 was thus hardly ever a problem for these four learners during the sessions.

As far as correcting the chat logs was concerned, Ben and Footie were good at correcting, and from the beginning of the project, they made an effort in class to learn from their chat logs. When it came to evaluating the first set of chat texts and corrections on 26 November, I evaluated the two learners' work as follows:

LTJ extract, 26 November

Footie: good texts, but lots of German words and interjections. Sometimes fooling around, visiting other people's chat room, 4/5.

Ben: good corrections, you are good! Often you went too far with Tom (rudeness)! 5

Tom and Mitch were somewhat irritated by having to review their texts. As the journal extract below shows, they did not think it made sense to correct spelling mistakes, and their approach was often similar with grammatical errors, too.

LTJ entry extract, 4 November

Tom and Mitch seem to think that correcting the chat logs is not a worthwhile goal, and there is a difference between a grammar mistake and a typo. There is no need to correct the latter, they say.

The chat extract below shows how inaccurate Mitch's English was in the chat dialogue he had with Seth.

Chat extract, 11 November, Seth & Mitch

1 <mitch> NO, NO, NO!!! We are legal mans!, The Friend of freedom don't against the law.

2 <mitch> But, the police thinking, we are criminals.

3 <mitch> I hate the polce! I like kill all of them!

4 [seth] That's why I said that you need a good lawyer.

I evaluated the first set of chat texts with the following words and grades:

Tom: Lots of instances of WTF (abbreviation of rude language) in the texts! The texts are sometimes unambitious. Only a few of the texts are corrected. ¾

Mitch: very few texts corrected, language inaccurate, it could be much better! You are very handy with computers. 3

The second subgroup: diligent and disciplined

The second sub-group contained the two most disciplined and diligent learners in the chat group, Seth and Piper. As opposed to other members of the group, it seemed natural for Piper and Seth to be on task in the English classes, and this held for the regular as well as the chat classes. In the first weeks of the project, I could not tell how they felt about performing the tasks and correcting the chat logs. I had the impression that they just carried out the tasks they had been assigned in the class. Piper was really ambitious in both the content and the English she used in chat. I could only praise her when it came to evaluation:

Piper: very good, ambitious, 5

Seth did not prove to be a good match with Mitch. I evaluated him as follows:

Seth: The content could be better, there are Hungarian words in the text. Corrections are good, 4.

Nevertheless, he worked hard in the classes, and made an effort to learn from the chat cycles as well. For example, he asked questions about the new words in chat from his partner, as it will be shown in the following extract.

Chat extract, 2 December, Seth & Tom

1 [tom]I've just protect him. I wasn't smuggler.

2 <seth>What does proteckt mean?

3 [tom]Defend, guard...

4 <seth>ok

This was an action control strategy Seth used to improve his English. The rest of the learners in the group often ignored unknown words used by their partner, or asked the meaning of the word from their neighbour or from me.

LTJ entry extract, 28 Oct Tuesday

There are things they do not want to do in chat, e. g. when they don't know a word, they do not want to ask their partner in chat. Are they ashamed of not knowing words? Maybe they don't want to leave a trace? Seth seems to be an exception. He often asks questions from his partners in chat.

After the initial phase of the project, on several occasions Seth mentioned that he would rather do speaking tasks instead of chat. I figured this was his evaluation of the chat sessions. As the description of the postactional state of the chat group will show (see section 2.3.1 Seth), he in fact kept his reservations concerning the inclusion of chat to himself throughout the whole project.

Piper was not convinced of the usefulness of the chat cycles either, and mentioned several times in the informal conversations I had with her that she would rather speak than chat in class, because she was not good at speaking.

The third sub-group: not making sense

The third sub-group was formed by Martin and Dot, who were both slow typers and fairly slow producers of English, which became obvious to me during the first couple of chat sessions. They worked together in the first four sessions. The fact that they both had these characteristics could have made them a good match in chat. However, in the first phase of the project, they both had doubts about the usefulness of the inclusion of chat. I was not impressed by the first set of their chat texts (see examples of chat logs by Martin and Dot in 5.2.4). As the evaluation below shows, Dot was involved when it came to correcting the texts, but she did not make an effort when producing them, while Martin often skipped the classes in which the texts were corrected in the first phase of the project.

Dot: Corrections are OK, but you could be much better. There is a lot of nonsense in it, the content is often unambitious. 3/4

Martin: I have not found any corrected texts! There is a lot of nonsense in your chat texts. No grade.

However, in the case of both Dot and Martin a change of attitude came about in the second phase of the project.

7.2.2.4 The second phase of the chat project

The second phase began in the New Year, in January 2004. The first phase of the project proved to be critical from the viewpoint of the learners' motivation to learn English in the chat cycles. They got to know the medium, had their first encounters with chat tasks in the English classes, and they saw how the chat cycle worked. When a longer break, the Christmas holiday came, there was no school for almost three weeks, and the action was thus terminated. The learners moved into the postactional, evaluative state, and then the pre-actional state again. When they set their new language learning goals, they knew they would take part in chat sessions again, and they might have given a thought to how they could make the sessions more conducive to their language learning goals.

Both Dot and Martin began to show signs of a positive change in the second phase. In the chat, they concentrated more on the task and made an effort to make sense. The comments Dot and

Martin made in this period also confirm the change. Dot asked me questions about the task in order to be able to produce a good text.

LTJ entry extract, 3 February

We get to the chat tasks. Dot asks what grammar structure she is supposed to use in chat. She would like to know what I expect.

Dot often found it difficult to correct her chat texts, and preferred to take them home with her, where she could talk to her brother about it. At first I was against this, as it was a classroom task to correct the text:

LTJ entry extract, 3 March

Dot tells me she prefers to correct her chat texts at home. I prefer to answer their questions and see their corrections immediately.

Later I realised that Dot could profit more from the corrections in the stress-free environment of her home than in the 10-15 minutes allotted to this task in the English class.

In the second phase, Martin worked harder to improve his English in the chat cycles and I reported one occasion in the journal when he was looking forward to getting feedback on his product.

LTJ entry extract, 19 February

I didn't manage to have a look at their chat logs for Wednesday. Martin keeps asking me about it. He feels he did well.

During the evaluation interview (recorded in the LTJ) I conducted with Martin about his progress in the proficiency test, he said the following:

LTJ entry extract, 30 March

'I think my total result on the second test was pretty good. The scores give a realistic picture of my progress. My improvement in writing surprised me.'

...

'I have taken English more seriously recently, I didn't do well at all in September.'

They also talked about a positive change of attitude they had during the chat project in the End-project Interview. I am going to quote the interview in the section about the postactional phase of the project (see 7.2.3.1, Martin).

In the case of Piper and Seth, I saw no visible change in their attitudes during the project. I felt that even though they did the chat tasks well, and regularly corrected their texts, they were not convinced of the usefulness of the chat cycles. Seth told me several times during the year that he would rather do other activities instead of chat. In the journal extract below, I reported a conversation I had with Seth and Footie before a chat session, in the break.

LTJ entry extract, 24 February

Seth and Footie ask me before the class if we are going to chat or speak. Footie would like to chat, Seth would rather speak, because he does not like communicating in chat, he says.

Ben and Footie kept the same level of enthusiasm in the chat classes and during the correction phase throughout the whole project. On a few occasions, they fooled around in chat, like Footie in the following extract. He used a German word, 'aussteigplatz', because he probably knew his partner, Piper could understand it, and he thought it was funny to substitute a word he did not know in English with its German equivalent.

Chat extract, 7 October

1 <piiper> what happened

2 <piiper> are you alive?

3 [footie] The tram hasn't come because of technical mistakes, and the bus took up the passengers from the aussteigplatz, and we couldn't get in.

However, on the whole I found that they could profit from the chat cycles and I was content with their participation.

Mitch was much more involved in the chat tasks than any other regular classroom tasks. He was often fairly negative about learning English, and he hardly ever did his English homework. He also had a negative image of BHS, as the journal extract below also suggests.

LTJ entry extract, 20 January

Mitch asks me in class if I'll be teaching them next year. I tell him I'm not sure and talk about my plans to teach a group Dutch in BHS. Mitch thinks I won't succeed in doing that, because nothing works in this school.

On a number of occasions it became obvious that he enjoyed working with the computer in class, but he was not motivated to think about corrections in his texts, and this state did not change at all during the project.

Tom seemed to like chat sessions, and he was animated most of the time when it came to doing chat tasks.

LTJ, extract, 6 January

Footie, Tom and Mitch make a good trio, they look very involved. They ask me not to look at the text while they are chatting, only afterwards. Tom says 'Tanárnő díjat fog kapni, hogy ilyen jó szórakozást talált ki nekünk!' [You are going to get a prize for giving us such a funny task.] I suspect they are sharing their 'coolest' adventures.

In the End-project Interview, Tom also gave us numerous ideas about what kind of chat tasks can make learning enjoyable. He explained that he and Mitch could chat about music or go on with their gangster identities.

As far as feedback is concerned, he was very interested in it, and eager to hear my positive comments about his English and his creativity in the open-ended chat tasks. Unfortunately, he often didn't have the patience to correct his chat texts, or did not believe me that some parts of his text were not correct. Whenever Lara, the American student, was present at the correction, we checked these problems with her so that Tom could see that a native speaker did not find his sentence acceptable either. He often argued that he heard certain expressions in English-language films or saw them in video games, which he was very fond of. However, in many cases, Tom just ignored his language mistakes. In the evaluation interview about the proficiency test scores, he said: *'I wrote the Language Elements part intuitively. .. Grammar will come intuitively after a while.'* (LTJ, 30 March)

7.2.2.5 Synthesis of the actional phase

In the first phase of the chat project, the first step, subtask generation and implementation did not function properly, as the medium and the cycles the tasks were part of were unfamiliar to the participants. The regular inclusion of chat in the EFL classes enabled the learners to learn to appraise their own chat performance and develop a set of action control strategies. Examples of such strategies are; asking clarification questions from one's partner in chat, like Seth did, or correcting the chat text as homework, like Dot did. The actional outcome in the case of a chat cycle

was the chat text produced by the learner, and their level of satisfaction with the outcome, which depended on what goal had been set at the beginning of the cycle.

From the beginning of the second phase, I found that the chat cycles ran quite smoothly, and the participants had an optimal system in the chat cycles for learning. Their performance mostly depended on the goal they had set themselves when beginning the chat task. The participants' appraisal of the chat project in the EPI confirmed my evaluation of the project.

When the project ended, the actional state was terminated. In the last two weeks of the project, I administered the questionnaire on attitudes to the learners, and conducted an interview with each of them about the chat project. The outcome of the questionnaire and the interviews are discussed in the following section, which is about the post-actional, evaluative state of the learners' motivation.

7.2.3 The postactional state

The postactional state begins when the learner achieves their aim or when the language learning activity is terminated. In the case of the BHS chat project, the actional state ended when the school year came to an end. The postactional phase in the learners' language learning process involves the evaluation of the two preceding phases, the pre-actional state, in which the goal was set, and the actional state, which was spent on activities that were potentially conducive to the desired goal. As figure 7.3 shows, in this state, the learner looks for reasons to explain their success or failure, and draws conclusions which can help them in the planning and actional phases to come, and become a more successful learner. Before the learner steps into a new pre-actional state, the original intention has to be replaced. In the new cycle, the learner will set new goals.

Figure 7.3 Factors in the postactional state of motivation

forming causal attributions ← POSTACTIONAL EVALUATION → elaborating standards and strategies
↓
dismissing intention and further planning

7.2.3.1 Eliciting the participants' evaluation: the End-project Interview

At the end of the chat project, I wanted to find out how the participants evaluated the project, and how their progress in English was influenced by the inclusion of chat in the EFL classes. In the following section, I will describe the picture I got in each interview of the learners' assessment of their participation in the chat project. The answers reported are the ones which I think best characterise the learners' attitudes towards the inclusion of chat in EFL learning.

Martin: a change of attitude and sensitivity to text quality

Martin mentioned several times in the interview that chat classes were more interesting and relaxed than regular classes. He described the chat classes as follows:

EPI, Martin, question 1

Hát talán jobb hangulat volt, mert azért ez a, a chatnél azért tudtuk hogy általában ilyen jópofa témák lesznek, és ezáltal talán egy kicsit így fel voltunk fokozva, vagy ilyesmi, és így felszabadultabban lehetett dolgozni.

[Well, perhaps the atmosphere was better, because when we had a chat session, we knew that we were going to get cool tasks, and because of this, we were animated, or something like that, and we could work in a more relaxed way.]

He suffered from boredom in the regular English classes. When I asked him what made the English classes boring, he said the following:

EPI, Martin, question 2

R: *Mitől unalmas egy rendes óra?*

M: *Hát nem tudom, hát így, ott ugye külön időt időt kell fordítani arra, hogy mindenkinek esetleg a véleményét, hozzászólását, kérdését meghallgatni, nem tudom, és akkor ez a többiek, akik tudják, vagy nem tudják, vagy nem érdekli őket, ők ilyenkor unatkoznak. És hát ilyenkor végülis mindenkinek a saját dolgával kellett foglalkozni, és nem kellett úgymond a többiek gondjaival szembesülni, tehát, így tudnám megfogalmazni.*

[R: *What makes a regular class boring?*

M: *Well I don't know, there [in a regular English class] you have to devote time to listening to everybody's opinions, comments, questions, I don't know, and then the others, who know it, or do not know it, are not interested, they are bored. But then here [in a chat class] ultimately, everyone can do their own task, and you're not confronted with, so to say, other people's problems, so, this is how I can put it.]*

Frontal teaching in the English class, and having to listen to his group members talking caused Martin's attention to switch off.

He talked about a turning point in his attitude to chat. He did not like chat tasks at first, and he did not think the cycles were useful for his English, but as the project reached its second phase, he felt the tasks got more interesting and he began to enjoy them.

EPI, Martin, extract from question 8

M: *Néha, hát még az elején, amikor nem voltak még ezek az identity-s dolgok, akkor az elején ilyen érdekes, hát épp az, hogy nem érdekes, hanem hogy szerintem nem annyira jó témák voltak az elején, és ebből, év elején a véleményünk erről a chatről lényegesen más volt, mint most.*

Legalábbis az enyém. Akkor még annyira nem tetszett ez az egész dolog, de idővel, ahogy a témák egyre jobbak lettek, és egyre jobban el lett találva az a szint, amiről tudunk is beszélni, mert szeretnénk is, úgy egyre jobb volt, és már nem csak az volt, hogy hát ezt most meg kell csinálnunk, és essünk túl rajta, hanem tényleg élvezetes is volt.

[*Sometimes, at the beginning, when we didn't have these identity things yet, at the beginning it was interesting, or no, just the contrary, not interesting, I think the topics were not interesting at the beginning, and because of this, at the beginning of the year, our opinion of chat was completely different from now. At least in my opinion. At that time, I did not like this whole thing much, but as time went by, the topics got better and better, and also the level at which we could and wanted to talk, it got better and better, and we did not just think that we had to do [the task], and let's get over it, but it was really enjoyable.]*

In Martin's description above, he contrasts two types of attitude to a task: one in which he is involved, the other in which he would like to get over the task quickly.

As far as the ideal chat partner is concerned, Martin said it was a person with whom he could 'achieve good results, make something good together' (extract from question 10). Making here referred to producing the chat text. *Making a good text* was a concept the participants of the chat project often referred to. The references to this concept showed that they had developed a sensitivity to the quality of the chat they produced, and that they evaluated their activities afterwards.

Mitch: enjoying the relaxed environment but no development in accuracy

Mitch said that the atmosphere of the chat classes was more relaxed, without the boundaries of regular classes. As Mitch put it, regular classes:

EPI, Mitch, question 2

Mitch: Hát ott tök csöndben kéne ülni, ugye elvileg, ez ugyan ritkán valósult meg. Meg hát sokkal szabadabb ez a feladat azért szerintem. Hogyha chatelni kell, sokkal több minden belefér, mint abba, hogy mondatokat írogatok a munkafüzetbe.

[*Mitch: Well, one should sit there in complete silence ideally, though this was hardly ever the case. And this [chat] is a much more open task I think. If I have to chat, there's much more I can do than when I'm writing sentences in the workbook.*]

Mitch claimed that he could pay attention to grammar in chat, while in speaking, this is much more difficult. In the following extract he describes how role-plays contributed to his learning process:

EPI, Mitch, extract from question 6

Researcher: Mennyire érezted ezeket a szerepjátékokat hasznosnak? Hogyan illeszkedett ez a te nyelvtanulásodba?

M: Hát az, hogy, egyrészt itt azért a nyelvtanra is figyeltem, főleg, amikor ketten voltunk. Meg próbáltam így normálisabban fogalmazni, szerintem (nevet).

R: Aha.

M: Nem olyan alpárian.

[*R: How useful did you think role-play tasks were? How did they fit into your language learning process?*

M: Well, on the one hand, I paid attention to grammar here, especially when there was just the two of us. And I paid more attention to formulating what I wanted to say, I think (laughs).

R: Uh-huh.

M: Not in such a vulgar way.]

He mentioned accuracy again when I asked him what he had found useful in chat:

EPI, Mitch, extract from question 7

R: Mi az, amit szerettél a chat órákban? Mit éreztél, milyen haszna volt ennek a számodra?

M: Hát az, hogy a nyelvtant fölhasználtuk. Lehet gyakorolni.

[*R: What did you like in the chat classes? What did you feel, in what way were they useful for you?*

M: Well, the fact that we could use grammar. We could practise.]

The concern for accuracy Mitch was talking about seemed strange to me though, as he hardly ever made an effort to correct his chat logs after the sessions. He approached learning English in his own, extremely practical way: he only participated in tasks he found enjoyable. Some of the chat tasks belonged to the 'enjoyable' category. Activities like discussing grammar in class or correcting texts he had produced seemed either useless, or boring to Mitch, so he did not get involved in these. Some of the chat tasks also belonged to this 'useless' category for Mitch, as he explained in the interview:

EPI, Mitch, extract from question 8

R: Mi az, amit esetleg nem szerettél?

M: Hát ezek a feladatok, amik amik úgy nem nagyon tetszettek. Abból nem is nagyon vettem ki a részemet. Emlékszem, akkor nem nagyon foglalkoztam azzal, hogy ezt most komolyan csináljam.

[*R: What was the thing that you did not like?*

M: Well, these which I did not like very much. I did not really participate in those. I remember, I did not really care about doing those seriously.]

Mitch's remarks in the interview, and his classroom behaviour, made me think that he had hardly any motivation to learn in the English classes. His level of motivation did not change in the course

of the project. Mitch was the only person whose result on the general proficiency test did not increase between the pre- and the post-test. He produced some very good chat texts indeed when he found the task interesting, but taking part in just one step of the cycle, and omitting the next one, correcting, did not prove to be conducive to development in English proficiency in Mitch's case.

Tom: getting to know his classmates better but no concern for accuracy

Tom emphasized the social aspect of chat in the interview, and said he liked in chat that he only communicated with one or two people, not the whole group. He said he enjoyed learning more about some of his classmates in chat.

EPI, Tom, question 1

R: *Az első kérdésem: milyen volt az órák légköre?*

T: *Órák légkör, szerintem jók voltak, és eh, nem az van, mint egy általános órán, hogy mindenki mindenkivel megpróbál valamilyen szinten kontaktust keresni, hanem egy-két emberrel. Azokkal viszont sokkal közelebb sikerült így jutnom. Tehát gondolom Bennel soha nem dolgoztam volna együtt, ha nincs ez a chat.*

R: *Ühüm.*

T: *És ez jó.*

[R: *My first question is: what was the atmosphere of the chat classes like?*

T: *The atmosphere of the classes, I think it was good, and er, it was not like in a regular class, where everyone is trying to make contact with everyone else to a certain degree, but only with one or two people. But to those people I could get much closer. So I think I would never have worked with Ben if it were not for this chat.*

R: *Uh-huh.*

T: *And this is good.]*

Tom said he had enjoyed the chat classes much more than the regular classes:

EPI, Tom, extract from question 2

R: *Milyen különbség van?*

T: *Különbség? (szünet) Igazából jobban el van eresztve az ember, és a fantáziára tud hagyatkozni, és nem az van, hogy oda kell figyelni egy pontra, és akkor tanár, és akkor tanulunk. Ez ilyen kreatív, sokkal kreatívabb, és többet ér szerintem, mint akármilyen másik tanulási forma, szerintem.*

[R: *What sort of difference is there?*

T: *Difference? (pause) You are freer and can use your imagination, and you do not have to concentrate on one point, and the teacher, and then we are learning. This [the chat task] is creative, much more creative and valuable than any other form of learning, in my opinion.]*

Tom, just like Mitch, talked about the restrictive nature of the regular classes, and the lack of this restricted feeling in the chat classes, which he thought was a merit of chat. Tom also mentioned that chat was much like speaking, but in chat, he had the opportunity to correct his mistakes. He sounded very enthusiastic about chat as a medium to learn English. He produced some really good, imaginative texts in role-play. I thought it was a pity that he had no patience to correct his texts and learn from them. His scores on the language elements part of the general proficiency test did not increase between the pre- and the post-test. He said he was tired when writing the post-test, and that was the reason for his low scores.

I thought that in both Tom and Mitch's case, the lack of effort to correct the chat texts was partly the reason for the lack of improvement in the Language Elements paper. Just being involved in (some of) the chat tasks did not prove to bring about progress in English. It was the whole chat cycle that a learner could benefit from. I felt that Tom did not improve in grammar, because he did not make enough effort during the chat project. He probably overestimated the value of mere involvement in the chat sessions, and underestimated the usefulness of correction.

Footie: good grades, good fun

Footie used positive adjectives to describe the chat project, but he modified each adjective with adverbs like ‘quite’ or ‘fairly’.

EPI, Footie, question 1

R: Az első kérdésem, hogy milyen volt szerinted az órák légköre?

F: Hát viszonylag könnyed, és eléggé jó. Tehát ezek az órák így nagyjából érdekesen teltek.

[R: My first question is, what was the atmosphere of the chat classes like in your opinion?

F: Well, relatively easy-going, and quite good. So these classes were, on the whole, interesting.]

I figured that Footie enjoyed the chat tasks, but at the same time, he had his reservations about the way evaluation functioned in the English class. When seeing Footie’s second Task Evaluation sheet, I was struck by how low the scores were which Footie had given for the tasks. I wondered if the scores showed his reservations about the chat tasks, or was this his response to the fact that he did not get the ‘five’ he longed for at the end of the first term of the school year? He was convinced he deserved a five, but I found his classwork was not quite at the level of excellent, and gave him a four (see LTJ, 11 February). Grades were very important to Footie, and he wanted to get a five as his end-term mark. He said he was happy to get grades for his chat texts, because he usually got good grades:

EPI, Footie, question 4

R: Észrevetted azt, hogy így jegyeket kaptatok a chatre? Vagy jobb lett volna csak szóbeli értékelést?

F: Jó ez így, hogy jegyeket kaptunk, mert így általában, tehát nagy általánosságban jó jegyeket lehetett vele szerezni, mert nagyrészt jól sikerültek a dolgok. Úgyhogy emiatt ez inkább pozitív irányba befolyásolta a jegyeket.

[R: And did you like the fact that you got grades for the chat texts? Or would you have preferred just being told what your text was like?

F: It was OK like this, that we got grades, because like this, usually, we usually got good grades, because most of the time we did well. Therefore, it influenced grades in a rather positive way.]

Talking about the ideal chat partner, Footie said he liked Martin the best:

EPI, Footie, question 10

R: Milyen szerinted az ideális chat partner?

F: Hát szerintem a Martintal tudtunk legjobban dolgozni, mert hát könnyeden vettük a dolgot, de ugyanakkor meg is csináltuk a feladatot. Tehát viszonylag szórakoztató volt dolgozni.

[R: What is the ideal chat partner like in your opinion?

F: Well, I think I could work the best with Martin, because we took it easy, but at the same time, we completed the task. So it was quite entertaining to work.]

Footie emphasized two issues in the description of chat: one of them was completing the task, which involved producing a text Footie could get a good grade for, and at the same time, having fun, enjoying the chat session.

Ben: goal-oriented learning

Ben found that the atmosphere of chat classes was more relaxed than the atmosphere of regular classes. When I asked him what made the difference, he said the following:

EPI, Ben, extract from question 1

B: Talán a számíték terem miatt, mert ott háttal is ülünk

[Maybe because of the computer room, because we were sitting there with our backs to each other.]

Ben was the only person who said he did not like role-play chat tasks, and preferred goal-oriented tasks:

EPI, Ben, question 3

R: Milyenek voltak a feladatok?

B: Hát változó, mert mondjuk azok a karakteres feladatok, azok nekem annyira nem tetszettek, de mondjuk mikor egy ilyen képet kellett leírni, az érdekes volt.

R: Ühüm

B: Vagy egyéb ilyen szituációs feladatok.

R: Tehát azt pont nem szeretted, amiben volt egy

B: Amikor volt ez az identity, és azzal kellett ilyen dolgokat eljátszani, az annyira nem.

R: És szerinted az miért nem jött be neked?

B: Nem tudom. Meg az volt a baj, hogy néhányat így le lehetett volna rendezni így két-három mondatban,

R: Aha

B: dehát azért még kellett ott valamit.

[R: What did you think about the tasks?

B: Well it varied, because those tasks with the characters, I did not really like those, but when we had to describe a picture, it was interesting.

R: Uh-huh.

B: Or other tasks with a situation.

R: So the ones you did not like were....

B: When there was an identity, and we had to act out different things, I did not really like those.

R: And why do you think you did not like them?

B: I don't know. The problem was that some of them [the tasks with identities] could be completed with two or three sentences,

R: Uh-huh

B: But we were expected to write more.]

He thought that in the chat cycles, his mistakes could be corrected, even the smaller ones, and chat tasks could also improve his writing skills.

When asked about the role of grades in learning, Ben said the following:

EPI, Ben, extract from question 4

R: Mennyire érezted réálisnak a jegyeket, amiket kaptál?

B: Hát szerintem nagyjából azt nézte a tanárnő, hogy mennyire törte magát az ember.

R: Ühüm.

B: Tehát aki most nem nagyon igyekezett, az nem kapott ötöst.

[R: What do you think, how realistic were the grades you were given?

B: Well, I think you were mostly interested in how much effort we made.

R: Uh-huh

B: So those who did not make a great effort did not get a five.]

Ben was involved in most of the chat sessions, and he was very good at corrections. He achieved the goal he had written about in the Questionnaire on Background: he passed an intermediate

English exam in October 2003. Most of the time he got a five, the best grade, for his tests and chat logs in English. In the extract above, he revealed the way he achieved the best grade in chat, by making an effort.

Dot: autonomy and good grades

Dot described the atmosphere of chat classes as follows:

EPI, Dot, extract from question 1

D: Jó, tényleg, jobb, mint a rendes óra, jobban élveztük, mint a nyelvtani dolgokat. Kicsit azt csináltunk, amit akartunk.

[It was good, better than the regular lessons, we enjoyed it [chatting] more than the grammar things. We could, sort of, do what we wanted to.]

She mentioned in the interview that it was easier to get a five in chat than for a test. Dot explained that this characteristic of the chat cycle contributed to her change of attitude to using chat in the English class:

EPI, Dot, extract from question 4

D: Chatre könnyebb ötöst kapni, mint egy dogára, és akkor van valami motiváció.

Volt ez a kis problémánk az elején. Nem jutott eszünkbe, hogy azért írjunk jó chatet, hogy ötöst kapjunk rá. Az elején azt gondoltam, nem reális. Az elején nehéz, szokatlan volt, inkább magyarul [írtunk], vagy hülyéskedés volt. Volt ez a kis problémánk az elején.

[D: It is easier to get a five for a chat than for a test, and then there is motive.

We had this little problem at the beginning. We did not realise we should write a good chat text in order to get a five. At the beginning, I thought it was not realistic. At the beginning, it was difficult, unusual, we preferred to write in Hungarian, or fooled around. We had this little problem at the beginning.]

In her description of the chat tasks, Dot mentioned that she had found some of the role-play tasks boring:

EPI, Dot, extract from question 8

R: Mi volt az, amit nem szeretnél a chatben?

D: Néha túl sok idő volt rá, néha túl kevés.

[R: What did you dislike in chat?

D: Sometimes we had too much time, sometimes too little [for the task].]

Dot mentioned that for her, the ideal group was one in which she was in the middle, with some of the group members better, and others worse than her.

EPI, Dot, extract from question 11

D: Középmezőnyben szeretek lenni, de legyen aki jobban tud nálam.

És fiúk legyenek. De itt milyen fiúk vannak! Nem érzem, hogy van aki rosszabbul tudna.

Tom annyival nem tud jobban, csak a hülye számítógépes játékból jönnek a szavak.

A hülyéskedés nagyon sok. [BHS tanárral] sokkal nagyobb fegyelem lenne.

[D: I like being a mid-level student in the group, but there should be people who are better than me. And there should be boys. But not like the ones here! I don't think there's anyone whose English is worse than mine.

Tom is not so much better, he just knows words from those stupid computer games.

There's a lot of fooling around. Discipline would be much better with a teacher from BHS.]

I found Dot's tone in the interview slightly bitter about the English group and the classes. Dot found the way some of the boys, especially Tom and Footie, wanted to dominate the classes

disturbing. She thought that her English was the weakest in the group. This was indeed true at the beginning of the project, but her post-test result was in at a mid-level, so she had in fact reached the goal she was talking about in the End-project Interview.

In May 2004, Dot wrote an article about the chat project for the school newspaper. (The original article is included in the LTJ.) I was surprised by how positive her tone was. It was written in Hungarian. Here is the English translation I made.

New methods in English teaching

This year a new teacher, Eszenyi Réka came to BHS to teach a 5th year English group. The group welcomed her new teaching methods. We spent two out of the five lessons every week in the computer room and performed various tasks.

In the first half of the class we learnt grammar rules, and then practised them with the help of the computer. We were divided into groups of three, and we performed the tasks with the help of a chat program.

The chat tasks brought us closer to each other, they helped me get to know my fellow group members better and develop my imagination. They did not only make the classes more interesting, but we could also break free from doing the usual, fixed series of exercises.

The greatest success among the entertaining tasks was role-play. I feel that this method could be employed successfully next year as well.

I was happy with this completely positive attitude. I am convinced that Dot would not have written an article in this tone if she had not enjoyed the chat classes. But at the same time, Dot had her reservations about the chat project, and told me in the interview that chat had not helped her improve her English much. She was thus inconsistent in her evaluation of the chat project. Dot's inconsistency may be explained by her mixed feelings about learning English. There were parts of the course Dot visibly appreciated, although she did not feel entirely comfortable in the English classes.

Seth: all tasks lead to language learning

Seth described the atmosphere of chat classes as follows:

EPI, Seth, questions 1 & 2

S: Véleményem szerint jó volt. Tehát nem tapasztaltam semmi rosszat.

R: Milyen volt összehasonlítva a többi angolórával?

S: Hát így érdekesebbnek tűnt, meg különösnek tűnt számomra, mert ilyenben még nem vettem részt soha. Tehát eltért az eddigiektől.

[S: In my opinion, it was good. So I did not experience anything bad.

R: What was it like, compared to the other English classes?

S: Well it seemed sort of more interesting, and it seemed unusual to me, because I had never participated in anything like this before.]

When it came to evaluating the chat tasks, Seth claimed that tasks did not matter in language learning as long as one was engaged in a meaningful task. When I asked Seth how chat could contribute to his language learning process, he gave the following answer:

EPI, Seth, question 6

M: Mivel olyan gyakran nem volt, tehát nem chateltünk, ezért talán nem volt olyan nagy hatással. Lehet, hogyha gyakrabban csináltuk volna, akkor hosszabb távon lehet, hogy segített volna.

R: De volt olyan, hogy hetente mindig a dupla órán chateltünk, az se volt rád hatással?

M: Szerintem nem.

[M: As it did not happen so frequently, that is to say we did not chat, maybe that's why it did not have a great effect. If we had done it more often, then maybe it would have helped in the long run.

R: But sometimes, for several weeks, we always used the double class for chat. Didn't that have an effect?

M: I don't think it did.]

Seth participated in 17 of the 23 chat sessions in the project, so I thought he had considerable experience with chat. I found his answer very contradictory and concluded that Seth probably did not want to say in the interview that he disliked the new medium in class. When I posed him the question, 'what did you like in chat?', he gave a very diplomatic answer:

EPI, questions 7 & 8

R: Mi az, amit szerettél a chatben, ha szeretsz benne valamit?

M: Hát, ezt így nehéz megválaszolni.

R: Vagy ha nem szeretted, akkor inkább úgy kérdezem, akkor mi az, amit esetleg nem szerettél benne?

M: Nem tudom, én inkább így beszélni szeretek. Tehát én a nyelvtanulásban a beszédet tartom a legfontosabbnak. De ez is fontos. De nálam ez így másodrendű.

[R: What did you like about chat, if you liked anything?

M: Well, this [question] is difficult to answer

R: Or if you disliked it, what did you dislike about it?

M: I don't know, I prefer speaking. So in language learning, I think speaking is the most important part. But this [chat] is important too. But for me it is not of primary importance.]

In spite of his reservations about chat, Seth had produced a number of very good, imaginative chat texts during the project. I asked him what he thought was necessary to produce a good chat.

EPI, Seth, extract from question 10

R: És amikor jól sikerült a chat szövegetek, az min múltott?

M: Talán hogy a téma mennyire volt érdekes. És ha valakinek tetszett a téma, akkor, tehát megoldotta a feladatot is.

[R: And when your chat text was a good one, what did that depend on?

M: Perhaps on how interesting the topic was. And if someone liked the topic, then they completed the task, too.]

Seth's reference to the relation between how interesting the task was and how involved he got in it confirmed my view that the participants' opinion needs to be incorporated by the teacher when planning the chat tasks.

I found that although Seth was not motivated by the medium of the chat tasks, he made an effort to use classroom activities to improve his English, and he improved considerably on the general proficiency test.

Piper: easy fives and boring partners

Piper thought that the atmosphere of the chat classes depended on the topic of the class and also on how her day was. She pointed out the following differences between a chat class and a regular class:

EPI, Piper, question 2

P: Jobb a hangulat a chat órán, könnyedebb, a feladat is, meg a gépekkel a munka, önállóbb is.

[The atmosphere is better in the chat class, the task is easier too, and working with the computers, we have more autonomy.]

When I asked her how chat tasks fit into her language learning process, she said they were a bit of a relaxation for her in the English classes. Piper found that the group fooled around a lot in the

English classes. It was because of the grades I gave them for the chat texts that this did not happen in the chat classes. I figured from Piper's description that she thought that serious work had been done in the chat classes, while the regular classes were not so serious. Piper also mentioned that good grades were easy to obtain in the chat cycles:

EPI, Piper, question 4

R: Mit gondoltál arról, hogy jegyeket kaptatok a chatre?

P: A jegy miatt nem hülyéskedtük annyira el a dolgot. Nem segített a jegy az eligazodásban. Erre általában jó jegyeket kaptunk.

[R: What did you think about getting grades for the chat texts?

P: It was because of the grades that we did not fool around [in the chat class]. The grades did not help me in self-evaluation [she uses the word 'orientation']. We usually got good grades for this.]

Piper's words revealed that she was not entirely happy with the fives she got for her chats. She thought these good grades were too easily earned, and did not help her differentiate between the quality of the chat texts. However, I found that Piper's involvement in the tasks, together with her English, were both at a very high level, so she always deserved the good grades she got.

Being able to get good grades was mentioned as a positive feature of the chat project by several other participants in the group, such as Dot and Footie. The chat cycle provided a framework within which the participants could work hard in English, and get a good grade for their effort, not just their level of English proficiency. Piper probably found that getting good grades in chat devalued good grades. Piper's approach to grades in chat surprised me. By the second phase of the task, she had learnt to produce chat texts in which there were virtually no grammatical errors. I found that if anyone in the group really deserved good grades, it was Piper.

A possible explanation for Piper's attitude towards getting good grades for chat is that she thought only great effort could lead to achievement. The chat cycles were rather easy and relaxing for her, so she did not value them as much as other language learning activities. Another factor that could have contributed to Piper's lack of enthusiasm for chat is that her main goals were getting an intermediate language certificate and improving her speaking skills. In November 2003, she successfully passed a Pitman Intermediate Exam, so one of her goals was achieved. However, Piper's scores on the speaking part of the general proficiency test did not change between the pre- and the post-test.

I asked Piper what she disliked about chat in the interview. She gave the following answer:

EPI, Piper, question 8

R: Mi az, amit nem szeretnél a chatben?

P: Kitől és miről, attól függött. Az elején idegenkedtem, de mostanára teljesen megszerettem.

[R: What did you dislike in chat?

P: It depended on with who [I was] and what the topic was. At the beginning, I thought it was strange, but I got to like it completely by now.]

The only partner she liked working with was Ben:

EPI, Piper, question 10

R: Milyen az ideális chat partner?

P: Ő is odafigyel, érdekli, tetszik a téma. Bennel [jó volt], tényleg írt, válaszolt, gondolkozott. A többiekkel unalmas volt, lassan válaszoltak.

[R: What is the ideal chat partner like?

P: He or she pays attention, is interested, and likes the topic. It was good with Ben, he really wrote, answered, and gave it some thought. It was boring with the rest, they answered slowly.]

Although Piper was not enthusiastic about chat most of the time, she participated actively in the chat cycles, just as in the activities in the regular classes.

7.2.4 Synthesis of the three states

In the previous sections, the three stages of motivation in the chat group were explored. The learners' *pre-actional state* was described in terms of how they thought about learning English and what goals they had as learners at the beginning of the school year. In this stage, the learners all claimed to have the motivation to take an active part in the lessons, but at the same time, I was told by the group's previous teachers that the group had had problems working together. The description of the *actional phase* was based on the qualitative analysis of the chat logs and the language teacher's journal. In the description of the actional phase, each learner is presented as a case study, and the changes in their involvement in the chat sessions are focussed on. The case studies reveal how the learners' differing levels of self-confidence, capabilities, ambitions and expectations shaped their motivation for learning in chat. The *post-actional state* of motivation is presented through the analysis of the end-project interviews, in which the learners evaluated the project as part of their learning process. During the interviews, the learners talked about motivating aspects of the chat project, like the interesting tasks and enjoyable interaction with their peers, and also the negative sides of chatting in class, such as disliking the chat medium, or boring tasks.

A motivating aspect mentioned in all the interviews was the relaxed atmosphere of the chat classes. When the participants compared the chat classes with the regular English classes, they found the former more interesting, and the atmosphere in the chat classes better than in the regular classes. All of the participants were positive about getting grades for the chat. Four of them mentioned that it was easy to get good grades in chat, and they thought this was a merit of the chat project and it could motivate them to work hard in the chat cycles.

In the post-actional phase of the project, the members of the chat group judged chat tasks to be a meaningful way to learn, except in the case of Seth. For him, chat did not prove to be a motivating or inspiring medium of communication. All the participants had produced chat logs that showed they could use their English in chat situations in an authentic way.

7.3 Attitudes towards chat tasks

The question of the effect of chat inclusion on attitudes was investigated quantitatively. The hypothesis was the following:

H3: The regular inclusion of chat tasks in the EFL classes will result in more positive learner attitudes towards chat than the occasional use of chat tasks in class.

As part of the postactional phase, the members of the chat group, and control group 2, were given the questionnaire on attitudes (QA). In the following section, I will discuss the learners' responses to the items concerning their attitude towards the inclusion of chat tasks.

The chat group participated in 23 chat cycles, and the participants became experienced chatters. The members of control group 2 took part in only two chat sessions in the course of the 2003-2004 school year. They only sampled chatting, and had a novice's conception of what chat tasks were like. In order to gain insight into how doing chat tasks regularly differs from just trying chat on two occasions in class, I compared the chat group's and the control groups' attitudes towards chat tasks.

The QA contained three parts about attitudes towards the inclusion of chat tasks in the EFL classes. The first part consisted of 37 statements about chat tasks in language learning. In the second part, the learners were asked to assess which areas of their language proficiency had developed as a result of the inclusion of chat tasks. In the third part, the learners were asked if they had enjoyed

participating in the chat project, and they were also asked to give the reasons for their answers (see Appendix 7).

7.3.1 Statements on attitudes towards the inclusion of chat

The learners were asked to react to the 37 statements about chat in language learning. They could mark their answers on a scale between 1 (not true at all) and 5 (completely true).

The statements were divided into four topics, depending on which characteristic of chat tasks they referred to. The four topics were:

- 1) The inclusion of chat tasks makes language learning more *interesting*.
- 2) Chatting is a *useful* tool for language learning.
- 3) When doing a chat task with a group member, I can work *autonomously*, without the teacher's control.
- 4) When doing a chat task, I can learn English in a *stress-free* environment.

Table 7.1 contains the chat group's and the second control group's mean scores on the four subgroups of questions on attitudes towards chat tasks. In all categories, the chat group's scores were numerically higher. The differences between the two groups were analysed with independent-samples t-tests. The only subgroup in which the chat group scored significantly higher is *usefulness*. The highest scores in both groups were given to the statements which claim that the inclusion of chat tasks makes language learning more interesting.

Table 7.1 Results of the independent-samples t-tests

<i>Sub-Group</i>	<i>Chat Group</i> <i>N = 8</i>	<i>Control Group</i> <i>N = 12</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Interest	4,14	3,88	3.341	N.S.
Usefulness	3,71	2,93	1.199	< .008
Autonomy	3,87	3,66	7.939	N.S.
Anxiety	3,67	3,50	1.689	N.S.

In order to have a more refined picture of how the learners saw chat tasks in the EFL class, the individual items of the statements on attitudes were also analysed. Independent samples t-tests were used to check if the differences between the groups' scores are significant. Table 7.2 contains the statements on chat tasks for which the groups' means differed significantly. The two groups' answers differed significantly on nine of the 37 statements on attitudes. Eight of the nine statements belonged to the second category, 'usefulness' Statement 505 in the QA belonged to the third category, 'autonomy'.

Table 7.2 Attitudes to chat tasks: mean scores per statement

<i>Number</i> <i>In QA</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Chat</i> <i>group</i> <i>n = 8</i>	<i>Control</i> <i>group</i> <i>n = 12</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
504	The most important thing in chat is that my partner understands my message.	4.00	4.75	0.655	< 0.003
505	I am happy to work with any of my classmates when chatting.	2.63	4.00	0.016	< 0.018
507	Chatting improves my reading comprehension.	3.50	2.25	0.527	< 0.010
509	Chatting does not improve my writing skills.	1.5	2.75	18.568	< 0.042
511	When correcting my chat text, I notice	4.13	2.58	4.479	< 0.002

	my mistakes.				
516	I learned some new words while doing the chat tasks.	3.63	2.17	0.422	< 0.007
528	Chatting improves my knowledge of grammar.	3.75	1.92	0.006	< 0.000
529	My chat texts would get better and better if we chatted more often in class.	4.25	2.67	1.195	< 0.002
534	When chatting, it is not important to use correct grammar.	2.12	3.67	0.252	< 0.009

In the case of statement 504, the chat group's score was significantly lower than that of the control group, which implies that they did not believe that understanding the partner's message, even if the English they used was not correct, was an important factor in chat. The control group's score is 4.75, near the maximum. This shows that almost all of the members completely agreed with this statement. The chat group seemed to think that getting their message across was not always the most important goal in chat. This suggests that the group's members had developed a degree of sensitivity to the accuracy of the English they used in chat. However, the chat group's score is 4, which is a fairly high score. It shows that the members of the group usually agree with this statement. So for both groups, being understood was crucial in chat. On a number of occasions, the chatters also used another language, Hungarian or German, to augment their chat conversation.

Statement 534 is similar to statement 504; it is also meant to elicit how important the participants think accuracy is in chat. The statement is formulated as a negation, so the lower the score, the more important accuracy is for the participant. The chat group's mean score was 2.12, the control group's 3.67. Just as in statement 504, the significant difference in scores suggests that the members of the chat group found accuracy in chat more important than the learners in the control group.

The scores given for the statement 'I am happy to work with any of my classmates when chatting' were significantly lower in the chat group than the control group. The chat group's score, 2.63 is between 2, which stands for statements usually not true for the learner, and 3, which stands for only partly true. The reason for the low figure can be that the members of the chat group had tried chat with several of their classmates, and learnt that if the partner is slow to answer, or fools around instead of participating in the task, the success of the chat task is in danger. So the partner really mattered in chat. The control group only participated in two chat sessions. Although they also reviewed their chat texts with their teacher after the sessions, they did not take part in chat cycles, as the chat group did. The learners in the control group probably viewed the chat tasks as a kind of entertainment in the English classes, and producing a good chat was not high a priority for them. This may be one explanation for their high mean score, 4 points, which means they usually agreed with the statement. Another reason for the high score can be that group dynamics were better in the control group, and the learners were used to cooperating with each other, as I learnt from the group's English teacher.

Statements 507, 509, and 516 were meant to elicit the participants' opinion about the effect of chat on reading skills, writing skills, and vocabulary respectively. On all three items, the chat group scored significantly higher than the control group. As statement 509 was a negative one, the figures were reversed. Consequently, the chat group's scores of around 3.5 for all three statements show that they were between partly and usually agreeing with the statements. These results are not particularly high. As the descriptions of the chat group's project evaluation showed in Section 7.2.3.1, some of the participants had their reservations about the chat project. The control group was between partly agreeing and usually not agreeing, as the mean scores given for the three items show. This result suggests that, after trying chat tasks on two occasions, they were not convinced that this method of practising their English can actually help them improve.

Statement 529 was as follows: ‘My chat texts would get better and better if we chatted more often in class’. The chat group’s score was 4.25, which showed that the learners usually agreed with this statement, and some of them always agreed. The high score suggests that the learners in the chat group showed a positive approach towards the inclusion of chat tasks in the English classes, and found on the whole that the time devoted to the chat tasks was meaningfully spent from the viewpoint of their development in English. The mean score of the control group was 2.67, which is between partly agreeing and usually not agreeing. This figure shows that the members of the control group saw some positive features in chat tasks, but on the whole, they were not convinced of the usefulness of chat tasks in the English classes.

To sum up, the chat group, in spite of the reservations some of the learners had about chat tasks, had a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of chat tasks in the English classes than the control group. In the end-project interviews, the participants all agreed that the revision of the chat logs and the fact that they got grades for their work were elements in the project that made classroom chat a useful part of language learning, although six of the eight participants did not explicitly say chat was useful for them. The teacher’s guidance and feedback in these two steps meant classroom chat was similar to other activities in the language classroom. The members of the chat group saw chat as a type of classroom activity which involves learning.

The chat groups attitude to chat tasks suggests that producing English in chat had become a regular part of the lessons, and had gained the ‘equally useful’ status, in keeping with the findings of chapter 6, where learning in chat proved to be as useful for the development of target language proficiency as learning in the traditional classroom. The chat group’s evaluation of the inclusion of chat, and my evaluation in lieu of all the group’s results, are divergent in their degree of usefulness.

Beside the fact that the chat group found chat tasks in the language class more useful than the control group, the members of the two groups also showed different attitudes towards the role of the partner in performing the chat task. The members of the chat group proved to be choosier about their chat partners, and believed that the chat partner had an important role in the success of a chat task. This difference may be explained by the fact that the chat group was trained to use the cycles to improve their English, and as the results above show, they believed in the usefulness of the cycles. The control group did not participate regularly in the cycles, and did not think regular chat in the classes could be beneficial for their English.

7.3.2 Development in different skills

In the second part on attitudes in the QA, the learners were asked to mark the areas in which their English proficiency had developed in the chat cycles. Table 7.3 shows the number of students who marked the skills listed in the questionnaire.

Table 7.3 Skills improved by classroom chat

<i>Skill</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Vocab</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Spelling</i>	<i>Reading</i>
<i>Chat Group</i>	8	5	7	1	1	6	7	5
<i>Control Group</i>	12	5	0	0	1	6	0	2

The answers the participants gave to the question about the development of skills in the chat cycles confirms the results of the analysis of the QA items about attitudes towards chat tasks: the chat cycles constituted a useful, meaningful part of the English course.

As the figures turned out to be much lower in the control group than the chat group, a Mann-Whitney U-test was performed to find out if the differences between the two groups were significant. The number of learners believing that their knowledge of grammar improved in the

chat tasks was significantly higher in the chat group, $Z = 3.917$ ($p < 0.000$). The difference can be attributed to the fact that the chat group regularly took part in chat cycles, and the texts produced by the participants were corrected and evaluated. As a result, the members of the chat group could develop a sensitivity to the quality of chat texts, and quality also included correct grammar. This focus on grammatical accuracy was not characteristic for the members of the control group. In section 7.3.1.1, the control group's means on statements 504 and 534 also showed that the members of this group were less interested in grammatical accuracy than the members of the chat group. The differences between the two group's choices of the other skills were not significant.

7.3.3 The assessment of the whole chat project

The very last item in the questionnaire on attitudes and motivation was the following question: *Did you enjoy participating in the chat project? Why (not)? Please give your reasons even if you did not enjoy it!* (QA, question 7). The answers *yes* and *no* were given under the question.

In the chat group, each participant marked *yes* as an answer. The motives outlined by more than one participant are the following: five learners in the chat group enjoyed participating in the project because the chat classes had been more interesting than the regular lessons. Four learners mentioned they enjoyed the project because chat had made the lessons more colourful.

In the control group, nine out of the twelve participants enjoyed participating in the two chat lessons, while three participants did not enjoy chat. These three participants did not give reasons for their answers. Out of the nine participants who marked *yes* at question 8, only six wrote about why they enjoyed the chat classes. Five of them thought it was interesting, four of them found that chat made the English class more colourful, and two learners enjoyed working with the computer.

7.3.4 Summary of findings on attitudes towards chat tasks

At the beginning of this chapter, attitudes were defined as the opinions and feelings the participants voice about learning English and participating in the chat sessions, and also their actions related to the chat sessions.

The results of the QA showed that the chat group had a positive attitude towards chat tasks in the English class. All of the participants in the chat group thought that certain components of their English proficiency were developed by the chat tasks. The number and type of skills differed according to the student. The chat group also found that chat was a useful tool in language learning, and the members of the group unanimously wrote that they had enjoyed participating in the project.

The comparison of the two groups showed that the chat group had a more positive attitude towards chat tasks. The differences between the two groups were the most marked in the judgement about the usefulness of chat tasks, and the potential of the chat tasks to develop the learners' grammatical competence. These findings suggest that the inclusion of chat tasks in the English classes was successful. The inclusion did not only bring about progress in language proficiency, as described in chapter 6, but the participants also had a positive outlook on the project, both in terms of its usefulness, and as an enjoyable way to learn English.

Chapter 8 Language use in chat

In the present chapter, the grounding techniques used by the members of the chat group are investigated using a descriptive approach. The descriptive research approach entails that the data analyzed is not collected with the research questions or hypotheses in mind, as is the case in quantitative research. Descriptive research utilizes data that already exists (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). The chat logs, which constitute the data in the investigation described here, were analyzed firstly on a qualitative basis. The grounding techniques used in the chat logs were identified. In the second phase of the analysis, the frequency of the occurrence of the techniques was analyzed quantitatively.

The theoretical background of the investigation is Clark's grounding theory (Clark & Schaefer, 1989, Clark & Brennan, 1991, Clark, 1996). As Clark's approach to analyzing communication is not part of the second language acquisition research field reviewed in chapter 2, section 8.1 will present grounding theory in detail. Section 8.2 outlines the research questions and the hypotheses. In section 8.3, the procedures of analysis are described. In section 8.4, the results are presented and discussed. The last section, 8.5, summarizes the findings of the chapter.

The present chapter is a modified version of the article I wrote with Per van der Wijst (Eszenyi & Van der Wijst, manuscript). A short version of the study is published in Eszenyi (2005).

8.1 The theoretical background of the investigation

Chatting as a mode of communication can be situated halfway between speaking and producing a written text: it does not require the linguistic depth of a written text, yet one has more time to formulate the message than in the case of speaking. Chat is frequently compared to speaking. Beauvois calls it 'conversation in slow motion' (1992, p. 455).

Yet there are a number of features that clearly distinguish chat from face-to-face communication. In media richness theory (Kock, 2001), different forms of communication are categorized according to the variety of communication channels available to the participants. In face-to-face communication, besides verbal means, further auditory and visual channels are also available, qualifying this medium as the richest one available. In text-only chat, the parties in communication have to express all their intentions with the characters available on their keyboard, so this is considered a lean medium.

Successful communication implies coherence. If the participants in chat want to communicate successfully and maintain coherence in their dialogue, they need to be more explicit in their language use than they would be when conversing face to face (Pellettieri, 2000, van Loon, 2003). Explicitness is needed to compensate for the leanness of the text-only medium. When talking to someone face to face, one has the opportunity to signal the end of one's message and give the floor to one's partner with the help of intonation or visual signals. Showing that one has understood the other person's message and is ready to go on listening can also be signalled by a nod or a smile. In chat, these clues for concluding a turn or letting one's partner continue can be communicated by using capital letters or punctuation, such as question marks. If the addressee does not understand a word or sentence in a face-to-face conversation, a puzzled look on their face might be enough for the speaker to realize this. But in chat communication, a message asking for clarification, or at the very least a question mark, needs to be posted to show that there is problem.

Verbal means of managing communication are certainly present in both the face-to-face and the chat medium, but the richer the medium, the more alternatives there are to verbal expressions. Techniques that typically support mutual understanding in chat communication are the use of

punctuation and emoticons to express emotions, making comments about the medium and managing technical problems.

Several studies have set out to explore the characteristics of chat communication (Werry, 1996; Herring, 1999) and the differences between producing language in chat and other forms of communication, such as face-to-face and telephone conversations (Warschauer, 1996; van Loon, 2003). There have also been studies investigating one specific aspect of communication, namely how participants try to establish a common ground that helps them to interact successfully. Clark & Brennan (1991) and Clark (1996) give detailed descriptions of how grounding works in face-to-face conversation. Brennan (1998), Hancock & Dunham (2001) and Monk (2003) investigated how grounding is achieved in computer-mediated communication. The following section reviews grounding theory, and describes how participants in chat conversation achieve common ground.

8.1.1 Grounding theory

Clark defines the concept of grounding as follows: ‘The hypothesis is that people try to *ground* what they do together. *To ground a thing*, in my terminology, *is to establish it as part of common ground well enough for current purposes*’ (1996, p. 221). The common ground that speakers rely on in a conversation has two sources: it is the sum of all they know and believe they know about each other *before* engaging in communication, and it is a common pool of information that they put together jointly *during* the conversation.

In grounding theory, communication is seen as a *joint action* carried out by the participants. The theory focuses on the collaborative nature of discourse. Let us investigate how a dialogue between two people progresses from the viewpoint of grounding. The theory states that communication consists of so-called *joint projects* (JPs), that is, joint efforts to achieve a mutual understanding of pieces of information. In each JP, one participant can be considered as the contributor and the other(s) as the respondent(s). In an ideal case, the contributor presents their message and the respondent accepts it. A minimal joint project is an adjacency pair (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), namely a presentation and its acceptance. Consider the following example. Two friends - Ben and Martin - have just seen a film together. Ben would like to know if Martin liked it, so he asks his friend a question:

- (1) (a) Ben: Did you like it?
(b) Martin: Yes, I did.

In (1), Ben presents a question. Martin signals his understanding by accepting Ben’s proposal and answering his question. In doing so, Martin also provides Ben with evidence that he has interpreted Ben’s question correctly. In order to be able to complete the JP, and ground it well enough for current purposes, the two participants perform a ‘ladder’ of joint actions (see Clark, 1996: 148-149). This ladder consists of four levels:

Level 1 Ben articulates the sequence of sounds ‘Did you like it?’ for Martin to attend to.

Level 2 Ben presents the signal ‘Did you like it?’ for Martin to identify.

Level 3 Ben asks Martin if he liked the film.

Level 4 Ben proposes that Martin tell him whether or not he liked the film.

The participants in the conversation move up this ladder step by step, beginning at level 1 (Ben articulates his message). If Martin attends to Ben, they can move on to the next step, where Martin identifies the signal Ben has presented. If problems arise at any of these levels, the participants cannot move to a higher level until they have resolved them.

Clark describes communication as a system of tracks, where *track 1* (T1) is about the official business of communication, and *track 2* (T2) is about collateral communication, the basic

communicative acts that help T1 run as smoothly as possible. Communication in T2 helps the parties to solve problems at one of the levels of understanding. The following example shows how T1 and T2 are represented in a face-to-face conversation. Ben would like to know if Martin enjoyed the film they have just seen together. So Ben asks Martin: 'Did you like it?' If for some reason Martin did not hear the question properly, he might answer with a 'Huh?'. This reaction makes it obvious to Ben that there was a problem with his question, so he repeats it. This time Martin understands the question and reacts with 'Yes, I did'. Here is the imaginary transcript of this dialogue:

- (2) (a) Ben: Did you like it?
(b) *Martin: Huh?*
(c) Ben: Did you like it?
(d) *Martin: Yes, I did.*

While lines (2a) and (2c-d) are about the official business of communication, namely the quality of the film, line (2b) is not. The signal in line (2b) belongs to track 2, and it is meant to support track 1, that is to ground the official business of the conversation.

8.1.2 Grounding techniques in conversation

When making an effort to ground what they want to say, parties in conversation employ various grounding techniques. In face-to-face conversations, some of these devices are non-verbal, including gestures and facial expressions. Clark & Schaefer (1989) studied grounding processes in the London-Lund corpus. In their analysis, the unit of communication is the *contribution*. By producing a presentation, the speaker is contributing to the common ground they have with the interlocutor(s). Clark & Schaefer claim that verbal devices of grounding consist of three main groups, namely *side sequences*, *acknowledgements* and *grounding via sentence parts*.

Firstly, when a party in conversation has problems understanding their partner's presentation, they can initiate a *side sequence*, which is part of the acceptance phase and is meant to clarify the form or content of the presentation. A side-sequence consists of two or more turns. This sequence of repair is concluded when the parties have clarified the problem well enough to be able to close the JP and move on to the next JP, or alternatively, to terminate the conversation. These side sequences belong to track 2 communication. They might be initiated to check understanding, to ask for the meaning of a word, to correct one's own utterance, etc. Lines (2b) and (2c) show a side sequence that is meant to clarify Ben's original utterance. Side sequences can also be initiated on the official business of communication (Clark, 1996), but in that case they belong to T1 and are not considered grounding devices. The first 12 techniques in Table 8.2 all show examples of side sequences.

The second group of techniques to achieve grounding in conversation is aimed at giving positive evidence of understanding to one's partner. Clark and Schaefer (1989) call these utterances *acknowledgements*. These signals do not constitute separate turns as side sequences do; instead they occur within turns, are short in duration and not prominent. Two types of acknowledgement techniques are identified by Clark and Schaefer: *continuing contributions* and *concluded contributions*. Continuing contributions are used by the speakers as a sign of understanding their partner, or to encourage the partner to continue. The function of *concluded contributions* is to close a joint project and signal to one's partner that the conversation can move on to the next topic or be terminated.

The third group of techniques involves *grounding* that is achieved *via sentence parts*. This group comprises devices like - *instalments*; a contributor presents a long, complicated presentation in several parts in order to make it easier for the respondent to understand,

- *trial constituents*; contributions that invite the respondent, usually by means of rising intonation, to acknowledge that the presentation was ‘factually correct or entirely comprehensible’ (Clark & Schaefer, 1989, p. 285), and
- *completions*; instances of the respondent completing the contributor’s utterance to show that the presentation can be considered common ground.

These grounding techniques belong to T2 communication, as they are not related to the official business of communication, but to the communication itself. In face-to-face communication, a technique like acknowledgement can be realized non-verbally. However, this is much less evident in text-only chat. As mentioned earlier, the participants in text-only chat have to rely on what they can express with characters in text. Contributions in chat also differ from those in face-to-face conversation in that they are finished before they are posted to the respondent. Thus, acknowledgements within turns are not possible, and chatters cannot use such techniques as rising intonation to invite the partner to provide feedback, or give positive evidence of understanding by completing their partner’s utterance.

8.1.3 Grounding in chat communication

Although the possibilities to provide and obtain evidence of understanding are scarcer in chat than in face-to-face conversation, the same ladder of action as described above applies to the case of chat communication, except Level 1 (see 8.1.1), where Ben - in the place of articulating - types characters. Martin identifies the signal with the help of a computer screen. The fact that Ben is presenting a question can be seen rather than heard: the word order and the question mark make it obvious that it is a question. Example (3) shows an imaginary transcript of this dialogue.

- (3) (a) [ben] How many spectators were there?
(b) <Martin> *Every night we played before ‘full house’*

In chat, punctuation can serve as a grounding tool. In (3), Ben asks his friend Martin about a theatre performance he took part in the previous night. In his answer, Martin puts the expression ‘full house’ between quotation marks in order to add some extra information about it. The signs are examples of using T2 to say something about the communication itself, in this case about the lexical item ‘full house’. It is important to note that in this conversation, Martin and Ben are native speakers of Hungarian, and learners of English as a foreign language at secondary school, who are practicing English in the conversation shown in (3). Since speaking Hungarian as a mother tongue is common ground to both of them, Martin uses the literal translation of the Hungarian word *teltház* to express that there were a lot of spectators. In order to show Ben that he is not sure if ‘full house’ is a good translation, he places it inside quotation marks.

As the conversation in (3) involves two non-native speakers, it is very likely that they will regularly need to make an extra effort in grounding in order to resolve problems related to their limited language abilities. In (4) below, a joint project is shown in which Martin has to initiate a track 2 sequence in order to be able to accept Ben’s presentation. In this exchange, the ladder of joint actions is hindered at level 3. Martin cannot recognize what Ben means in line (3a), because he does not understand the word ‘spectator’ So Martin initiates a T2 sequence to find out about the meaning of the word in order to be able to return to T1 (the official business of the conversation) and to complete the acceptance phase of the JP. Ben gives an explanation of the word. Martin reacts with an ‘Oh’, which signals his understanding (about this function of ‘oh’, see Clark & Schaefer, 1989), and then answers Ben’s original question, thus accepting Ben’s proposal to tell him how many spectators there were. Example (4) is taken from Ben and Martin’s chat log from 25 November (see the complete chat log in Appendix 9).

- (4) (a) [ben] How many spectators were there?
(b) <martin> *What’s spectator*

- (c) <martin> ?
- (d) [ben] SPECTATOR someone who watches a play or football match
- (e) <martin> Oh
- (f) <martin> Every night we played before 'full house'

In (4), it is the meaning of a lexical item in English that needs to become the common ground for the two participants in the conversation. Instances of grounding *form* aspects of verbal acts, like lexis and grammar, can play an important role in conversations involving non-native speakers. Grounding language form in Clark's theory of using language (1996) is related to the study of interaction and meaning negotiation in second language acquisition initiated by Long (1983), Swain (1985), Varonis & Gass (1985).

Besides the form aspects of language, efforts to clarify content, controlling entries into and exits from joint projects, signalling understanding or making comments about the joint task can also constitute methods of achieving common ground. The effort language learners make to ground what they have to say in conversation are not only crucial for successful communication, but are also potentially useful for the learners' language improvement.

Tasks in which participants are required to achieve a high degree of common ground in order to reach their goals can represent a real linguistic challenge for learners. The usefulness of a task in language learning can be judged not only by the learning opportunities it creates for the students, but also by the quality of the language they produce when performing the task. The following section focuses on the types of tasks that have been used in studies on chat in language learning.

8.1.4 Grounding and task types

By negotiating meaning, participants also add to their common ground, since modifying the message can help the participants to move on to the next level and thus conclude the joint project. Grounding is an essential element in these tasks, and goal-oriented (or 'referential') tasks have frequently been used in studies on grounding in native-speaker conversation (Bangerter & Clark, 2003; Bangerter, Clark & Katz, 2004). Goal-oriented tasks, however, have a pre-written scenario, and although the learner is required to make an effort to ask for and to provide information, and to reach the desired goal of the task, there is not much room for linguistic creativity. The type of task best suited to a group of language learners depends to a great extent on their level of language proficiency. In the case of lower-intermediate learners, creative language practice is not a high priority. For upper-intermediate and advanced learners however, being able to express their intentions and ideas precisely is important, so a task that elicits creative language use is ideal for improving productive skills.

A possible example of such a task is guided role-play: learners create a new identity for themselves and use this identity in the situations described in the task (see also Brouwer, 2003). The task descriptions provide information about the situation the participant is in, and some pointers on what they should do, so that the learners have some topics to talk about. These pointers are not identical for learners A and B, which creates a gap to be bridged in the situation. However, the outcome is not determined in advance, but depends on what the parties agree on. In such a task, they have much more freedom in creating a common ground than they do in a goal-oriented task. In the case of the chat group, guided role-play proved to be the task type in which the participants could best benefit from the classroom chat (see also chapter 5).

Besides being a motivating new medium in class, and having the potential to improve language proficiency, an added value of chat tasks in language learning is that they give learners a good opportunity to learn cooperatively. As mentioned in the section on grounding, collaboration in communication presupposes common ground. The questions arise, how do learners achieve

common ground in chat, and what techniques do learners use when chatting in a foreign language? To the best of our knowledge, no research has yet addressed these matters.

8.2 The research questions and hypotheses

To find an answer to research question 4:

What impact does the inclusion of chat have on the participants' language use?

A selection of the chat logs was investigated. The research question includes two sub-questions:

a) *What kind of grounding techniques are used by the participants in role-play chat tasks?*

b) *What kind of longitudinal changes can be observed in grounding behavior in the chat logs?*

Sub-question a) narrows down the investigation of grounding techniques to the role-play tasks the learners performed in the BHS chat project. Sub-question b) zeros in on the longitudinal changes that took place during the project.

Based on Clark's theory and the findings of the research to date, we formulated the following hypotheses concerning grounding techniques in the chat logs:

H1: The participants make linguistic efforts to ground what they have to say in classroom chat.

H2: The relative number of grounding contributions decreases with the increase in chat experience.

8.3 Analysis

The BHS chat project involved 23 chat sessions. During the sessions, 69 chat logs were produced in total. The data investigated in the present chapter consists of 19 role-play texts produced on 6 occasions in the course of the BHS chat project. Table 8.1 shows the dates of the role-play chat sessions, the number of pairs who produced chat logs, the mean number of words and turns per chat log and the mean number of words per turn.

Table 8.1 *The description of the chat logs investigated*

<i>Date of session</i>	<i>Number of pairs</i>	<i>Mean number of words</i>	<i>Mean number of turns (rounded figures)</i>	<i>Mean number of words (rounded figures)</i>
1) 11 November, 2003	3	597	100	5.9
2) 25 November, 2003	3	525	100	5.2
3) 2 December, 2003	2	466	74	6.3
4) 9 March, 2004	3	500	65	7.6
5) 4 May, 2004	4	455	64	7.1
6) 1 June, 2004	4	329	47	7

There is an overall numerical decrease between the first and the last text in the number of words and turns. As far as the length of turns is concerned, there is a slight numerical increase between

the beginning and the end of the project. The participants' utterances became longer as their chat experience increased.

The texts were printed and coded by the author of the preset study by hand. The coding system was based on the grounding techniques described by Clark and Schaefer (1989) and Clark (1996). The grounding techniques included *side-sequences* and techniques that express *acknowledgement*. The side-sequences found in the texts were divided into two sub-categories, according to their function. One group of side-sequences referred to the *form* of the contributions. The other group referred to the management of the *content* of the chat conversation. These grounding devices are listed in categories 1) and 2) in Table 8.2. Signals of acknowledgement can be found in category 3).

Four further techniques were identified which are characteristic of either *the task* or *the chat medium*. These are:

- 1) utterances managing the *chat task*,
 - 2) using *jokes or playful language* to establish or maintain a good relationship with one's chat partner,
 - 3) utterances expressing *emotions*, and
 - 4) using *signs* for additional meaning, for example capital letters or multiple question marks.
- The techniques identified in this category can be seen in the fourth part of Table 8.2. Techniques 1) and 2) are related to completing the task successfully. 3) and 4) are techniques related to the chat medium. Techniques 2-4 were identified as typical linguistic features of chat by Negretti (1999), Warner (2004), Bell (2005) and Werry (1996).

After the preliminary analysis, all the texts were entered into MaxQDa (Kuckartz, 2001), a computer program for qualitative data analysis that makes quantitative analysis of the output possible. The codes were also entered into the software. The texts were coded for the second time and discussed by the two researchers. The second analysis enabled us to refine the codes and make the analysis more accurate.

After the second coding, one sample text from each text group was given to a third rater, who had been trained to code grounding in the texts prior to her analysis. The agreement between the raters was measured with Cohen's kappa coefficient for interrater reliability. This agreement proved to be satisfactory (.69). Given the time consuming task of coding, it was decided not to submit the remaining chat logs to the third rater, and to base the analyses on the codes of the second coding.

Table 8.2 contains the 18 grounding techniques that were identified in the course of the analysis. The first column of the table contains the name of the technique, the second column shows its description and an example from the database of the BHS chat project. The italicized parts of the text extracts are the ones that were actually coded. The text extracts quoted are all authentic, and contain the errors the learners made.

Table 8.2 Grounding techniques found in the chats of the EFL learners

Type of grounding technique	Description and example
1) Side-sequences related to the form of the contribution:	
1 Self-correction	A corrects their own utterance in the following post [A] You asked me abot it. [A] <i>about</i>
2 Self-translation	A uses a word which A thinks B does not understand. A translates this word into L1 in order to make it comprehensible <A> I send policemans surroundings of the pub. (<i>környék</i> ⁸)

⁸ *Környék* is the Hungarian translation of 'surroundings'.

3 Other-help	A sees that B has difficulties expressing himself so A provides the missing element B is looking for [A] This dealer is not an easy kind of aim! Aim? [A] <i>The middle point of the shooting table. The Bullseye</i> aha
4 Other-correction	A finds that B has made a language mistake and A corrects B's mistake. Yes, but it isn't a fairplay. [A] <i>You want to say fairplay!</i> yes, sorry
5 Other-language	One of the participants uses another language, other than English. There are examples of Hungarian (L1), German (first foreign language of the students), Italian and Russian written in Hungarian <A> He is a good boss. He will the boss if i goes to <i>nyugdij</i> ⁹ .
6 Ask for help	A asks B for help because A has problems with their English <A> Because my life isnt very good heutzutage (<i>in English?</i>) [B] nowadays
7 Explicit question about word	A does not understand a word (lexical item) used by B. A asks B what the word means [A] How many spectators were there? <i>What's spectator</i>
2) Side-sequences related to the content of the contribution:	
8 Comment on language	An utterance about language use that is meant to manage or qualify the communication in Track 1 <A> <i>i thought you said this</i>
9 Question about content	A does not understand what B means and asks a question to clarify it. These problems are sentence- or text-level. [B] You will see your face last time in the barrel! Don't be stupid! <A> <i>what do you mean?</i>
10 Self-expansion	A adds some information to what they have just written in order to make it more comprehensible <A> We have a big enemy: GSP and L <A> (<i>Golden State Power and Light</i>)
11 Checking understanding	A asks B a question to check if B understands what A has said/written <A> But the owner is guilty <A> <i>Do you understand it?</i>
12 Constituent query	A asks B to confirm if A understood B's presentation correctly [B] And what does your wife do? <A> <i>My wife?</i>
3) Techniques of acknowledgement:	
13 Concluded contribution	A presents a signal that B accepts by presupposing understanding - by initiating the next contribution at the same level as A's contribution [A] the school is in the USA <i>ok...</i> and what should i do there
14 Continuing contribution	A presents a signal that B accepts by asserting understanding with a backgrounded acknowledgement, such as 'ok' or 'And?'. <A> I understand now. [B] <i>ANd?</i> <A> I do what do you want.

⁹ The Hungarian word for *pension*.

4) Further techniques:	
<i>15 Task</i>	These contributions are about the chat task itself. Their topic can be opening or closing the task, saving the text or technical difficulties related to the chat. [A] <i>So, lets start it</i>
<i>16 Joke/playful language</i>	A contribution meant as a joke, to entertain the partner or just to 'decorate' the chat text. [A] Good Bye! Good Die [A]Die another day..
<i>17 Emotion</i>	Contributions meant to show the emotions of the contributor. This contribution can be an emoticon: [A] Just correcting :-) a word written in capital letters: [A] NO, NO, NO!!! Or onomatopoeic words: <A> AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!! or a combination of these.
<i>18 Sign</i>	Using several (3 or more) punctuation signs to express a state of mind or to add extra meaning to text [A] WHAT???????

8.4 Results and discussion

The following sections contain the results of the investigations and the discussion of the results. Section 8.4.1 will present the frequency of the different grounding techniques the participants used in the chat dialogues, and the results will be discussed. Section 8.4.2 will chart the distribution of the use of grounding techniques between the beginning and the end of the project.

8.4.1 Grounding techniques used in the chats

Research question 4 a) addressed the process of achieving common ground in the role-play chats of the EFL learners. In order to get a general picture of the grounding process in the chat logs, we calculated the mean occurrence of each technique per chat log in the role-play tasks. The results are given in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3 Mean frequencies of the grounding techniques

Type of grounding technique	Mean frequency per chat log
(1) side-sequences related to the form of the contribution	
<i>1 self-correction</i>	1.94
<i>2 self-translation</i>	0.22
<i>3 other-help</i>	0.78
<i>4 other-correction</i>	0.33
<i>5 other-language</i>	0.72
<i>6 ask for help</i>	0.17
<i>7 explicit question about word</i>	0.67
Mean total form	4.83
(2) side-sequences related to the content of the contribution	
<i>8 comment on language</i>	0.89
<i>9 question about content</i>	0.94
<i>10 self-expansion</i>	0.05
<i>11 checking understanding</i>	0.33
<i>12 constituent query</i>	0.28
Mean total content	2.49

(3) techniques of acknowledgement	
<i>13 concluded contribution</i>	3.33
<i>14 continuing contribution</i>	0.67
Mean total acknowledgement	4.00
(4) further techniques related to task or medium	
<i>15 task</i>	2.05
<i>16 joke/playful language</i>	1.22
<i>17 emotion</i>	1.83
<i>18 sign</i>	2.38
Mean total further techniques	7.48
Overall mean use of grounding techniques	18.8

As we can see in Table 8.3, the learners used an average of 18.8 grounding techniques per chat log. Given the fact that the chats consisted of an average number of 55.5 turns, the proportion of side sequences in their communication is considerable. If we compare the four different categories of grounding techniques, the high proportion of techniques related to the chat medium and the task (7.48 = 40%) is remarkable.

The most marked result is thus that most of the grounding techniques addressed the specificity of the task and the medium. This suggests that chat communication within the framework of a specific task demands considerable extra effort from the learners if they want to ensure successful communication in chat. Furthermore, the form of the utterances also necessitates a considerable amount of grounding. This confirmed the hypothesis in which we stated that learners would make an effort to ground what they have to say. Besides, a considerable number of techniques aim at correcting the message the participant themselves produced. Techniques like self-correction and self-translation are often initiated because the speaker anticipates a problem that their partner will have. These instances clearly illustrate the collaborative attitude of the chatters, and the attempts they made to add to their common ground at the level of form as well.

As for *acknowledgement*, this technique is about as frequent as form-grounding, but within this category, the most striking result is the number of concluded contributions. This number is 5 times the number of continuing contributions. This is probably an effect of the medium. The time interval between each turn or reaction does not only create overlap between the turns, but also renders more or less pointless the supporting of one's partner in communication by means of continuing contributions. This property of chat most likely accounts for the difference in frequency between the two techniques.

8.4.2 Longitudinal changes

The change in grounding techniques in the chat logs was investigated using a pre- and post-test design. In order to gain insight into the longitudinal changes in grounding behavior in the texts, the chats produced at the beginning of the project were compared to those at the end. The analyses dealt with two groups of texts: the first two (1,2) and the last two role-play sessions (5,6) of the project (see Table 8.1). The reason for the selection was that on these four occasions, all of the participants worked in dyads.

Table 8.4 shows the mean frequency of the individual grounding techniques of the two text groups. Sessions 1 and 2 are treated as measurements at the beginning (Moment 1), and were aggregated. Sessions 5 and 6 were treated as measurements at the end of the project (Moment 2), and were also aggregated. The difference between the occurrences of the beginning and the end sessions were tested by t-tests for independent samples. Although the same students participated in the beginning

and the end sessions, the composition of the participants within each chat varied, thus making it impossible to treat the contributions of the learners in the chat-units as pure repeated measures.

As the figures in Table 8.4 show, grounding intensity decreased significantly for the *form-* and *task- and chat medium-related techniques* categories. The mean use of *content* and *acknowledgment* techniques also decreased, but not significantly. If all types of grounding techniques are taken together, the decrease is again significant.

Table 8.4 The mean frequency of the individual grounding techniques

Type of grounding technique	X- frequency Moment 1	X-frequency Moment 2	t-value (df=12)	p-value
<i>n-chat logs</i>	6	8		
<i>X-words</i>	640	450		
Form	7.3	3.0	2.37	0.035
1 Self-correction	3.33	1.13*	2.23	0.045
2 Self-translation	0.5	0	1.17	n.s.
3 Other-help	1	0.38	1.27	n.s.
4 Other-correction	0.33	0.38	-0.15	n.s.
5 Other-language	0.83	1	-0.22	n.s.
6 Ask for help	0.17	0.13	0.20	n.s.
7 Explicit question about word	1.17	0	3.40	0.005
Content	3.7	2.0	0.93	n.s.
8 Comment on language	1.17	0.75	0.54	n.s.
9 Question about content	1.5	0.75	0.89	n.s.
10 Self-expansion	0.17	0	1.17	n.s.
11 Checking understanding	0.33	0.5	-0.33	n.s.
12 Constituent query	0.5	0	1.71	n.s.
Acknowledgement	5	3.7	0.84	n.s.
13 Concluded contribution	4.33	3	0.96	n.s.
14 Continuing contribution	0.67	0.75	-0.20	n.s.
Task- and chat medium-related techniques	10	4.6	2.84	0.015
15 Task	3	1.25	2.68	0.020
16 Joke/playful language	2.17	0.25	1.73	n.s.
17 Emotion	3.33	0.63	3.21	0.007
18 Sign	1.5	2.5	-0.83	n.s.
Total	26	13.3	2.91	0.013

The independent-samples t-tests revealed that, if considered individually, the grounding techniques of *self-correction* and *explicit question about word* decreased the most at the end of the chat project. The mean occurrences of almost all other techniques also showed a decrease, although it was not significant in any of those cases. One can safely assume that these decreasing numbers contribute to the significant overall decrease in *form*. The grounding techniques that are oriented towards *content* also show a decrease. As for the terms of *acknowledgement*, both techniques remain at the same level of use. Within the cluster of *task- and chat medium-related techniques*, the number of task-related contributions and expressions of emotion decreased significantly.

The comparison of the mean occurrences of the grounding techniques revealed a decrease in techniques addressing the *task* and the *chat medium* on the one hand, and the *form* of the utterances on the other hand. The former result indicates that at the end of the sessions, the students had become more used to the medium, and also more familiar with the roles they played. Both of these aspects of the task had become part of their common ground.

The latter result shows that the chatters had fewer problems at the *form* level of their utterances. This indicates that their English, at least at the level of their wording, did not need to be grounded as often as it did at the beginning of the chat lessons. It could also mean that their English had improved to such an extent that less grounding was needed. The investigation of the chat texts also revealed that the participants' utterances were longer in the second group of texts than the first one. The fact that at the end moment, they didn't inquire at all about the meaning of a word suggests however that their vocabulary in English did improve. This assumption is corroborated by the fact that their score on the language use part of the proficiency test (Table 6.1) increased significantly between the two points of measurement. The absence of questions about unknown words also implies that the participants became better at estimating their partner's linguistic abilities, and also the elements that are common ground between them.

Grounding of *content* issues remained, statistically speaking, at the same level. This means that at the end of the course, the number of problems associated with content matters was comparable to the number at the beginning of the course. This is quite plausible if one considers that content problems can be independent of the problems caused by proficiency factors. It is quite conceivable that content grounding would occur in communication by native speakers as well.

A similar picture arises for the grounding techniques which address the management of the interaction: the *acknowledgement* techniques. The frequency of their use at the end of the school year was comparable to that at the beginning. This confirms the idea that this form of grounding functions as a general tool for grounding the interaction and is not influenced by the level of proficiency of the interlocutors. The parties in conversation need to add to their common ground in order to complete their joint projects.

In view of the results of the longitudinal comparison, the second hypothesis, which predicted a decrease in the number of grounding techniques over time, is only partly justified. There is an overall tendency for numerical decrease in the frequency techniques. The intensity of grounding form, task and the chat medium, and the overall grounding activity decreased significantly. The change in grounding behavior was probably influenced by factors like the learners' development in English, their getting used to the context of the classroom chat, and the increased common ground between the participants. However, the use of content and acknowledgement techniques did not alter significantly. These two types of techniques are the ones which are least influenced by the medium, and by the use of a foreign language.

8.5 Summary of the findings and implications

The investigation in the present chapter focused on the process of grounding in role-play chat tasks produced by EFL learners. The results show that learners made a considerable effort to ground what they had to say in chat. The analyses of the chat logs revealed that they also used specific medium- and task-related grounding techniques that have not been described in empirical studies before.

The longitudinal analyses of the texts showed that the regular use of chat tasks in the EFL class stimulates the development of common ground between the participants. Expanding the common ground concerned different areas in this context. The participants had to ground

- the language form,
- the content of communication,
- the entries into, and exits from the joint projects they engaged in,
- the task they were performing,
- and they used signs and symbols made up of the characters available on the keyboard to add extra meaning or show emotions in chat.

The techniques aimed at grounding form, the use of task management and signs, decreased in the course of the chat project. The frequency of techniques grounding content and controlling the joint projects remained statistically unchanged.

When two learners engaged in a chat conversation, they already had some common ground, and during the conversation, they also added to their common ground. It is quite conceivable that the learners' common ground concerning the language they used in chat, the expectations of the task, and the signs and symbols they needed to compensate for the text-only nature of the medium increased, and this is why less of these techniques were used towards the end of the project. The content and the management of joint projects needed to be grounded anew in the case of every chat session, as these elements of the conversation could not be predicted in the role-play tasks. This explains the lack of change in these techniques throughout the project.

When learners used grounding techniques in chat, they made an effort to understand their partner(s) and communicate successfully, independent of whether grounding involved management of the conversation or problem-solving. In the course of the grounding process, the learners interacted with each other in the target language, and thus actively participated in the classroom chat tasks. They also monitored their own and their partner's understanding of the messages in chat. This interaction and monitoring entailed that the learners read, interpreted, formulated and produced messages in real time. Performing these activities regularly in chat undoubtedly improved the learners' general proficiency skills and made them more conscious users of the target language. This claim is corroborated by the results presented in chapter 6: the development in general proficiency skills and the increase in the frequency of the use of mental strategies in the chat group.

The fact that the participants in chat made an effort to add to their common ground and gain evidence of how well they had understood their partner shows that regular chat is evidently not detrimental to the learners' English, and does not necessarily result in unambitious language use (contrary to what Herring (1999) claims about native speaker chat, and what Kern (1995) found in chat between language learners). Well-planned chat tasks can serve as useful and motivating tools in the EFL classroom. Research on learning in both chat and face-to-face conversations has shown however, that putting learners into situations where they need to negotiate meaning, meaning that the target language forms are not common ground, is potentially beneficial for their development. Language teachers should take this into consideration when planning tasks for their learners, and be aware that the task should elicit linguistic problem solving, whilst at the same time being interesting, and involving an element of cognitive challenge. Such tasks prompt collaboration between the learners and an attitude to language use that has a positive impact on the learners' progress in the target language.

9 Conclusions and implications

9.1 Summary of the findings of the study and their implications

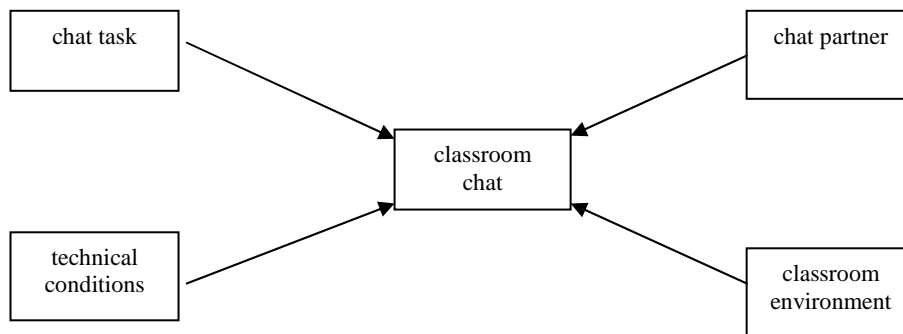
The present study was conducted in order to shed light on how the inclusion of chat tasks in the EFL classes influenced the language learning process of the participants at a Hungarian secondary school. The underlying assumptions of the study were based on research on chat in second and foreign language learning, as described in Chapter 2. In the following paragraphs, the main findings of the study will be summarized with respect to the four main aspects through which the study approached the inclusion of chat in language learning. These include:

- techniques for including chat in the secondary school language class, and the changes in the following variables:
- the learners' proficiency and language learning strategy repertoire,
- the learners' motivation for learning English and attitudes towards chat tasks in the class,
- and the learners' language use in chat.

9.1.1 How to include chat tasks in foreign language teaching

In chapter 5, a thick description of the chat project at BHS was given. The description aimed to demonstrate the different facets of the inclusion in class, which were the following: the composition of the chat pairs or trios, or in other words, the *chat partners*, the characteristics of the *chat tasks*, the *technical conditions* of the computers and IRC, and the *classroom environment* the chat sessions took place in. Figure 9.1 depicts the factors that influenced classroom chat in the BHS chat project.

Figure 9.1 Factors influencing classroom chat



The chronological account of the chat sessions was meant to show the evolution of the chat project and the interactions between the researcher-teacher, that is myself, and the participants of the project, the learners, who were supposed to benefit from the inclusion of chat. As the project progressed, I gained new insight into how the *chat partners* should be combined. The mutual acceptance of the partner's personality and willingness to cooperate turned out to be more pertinent than the partners' relative level of proficiency and typing skills. The participants did not seem to have preferences about partners at the outset of the project, but as their experience with chatting increased, some of them came up with wishes about who they would like to chat with. In most of the cases however, I gained information about the composition of the pairs from the chat logs and the participants' class behavior.

During the repeated chat sessions, it also emerged what kind of *chat tasks* best combined usefulness and enjoyment in class. The open-ended, role-play and storytelling types of task, which resemble real-life chat dialogues, proved to be superior to goal-oriented chat tasks advocated by

several studies (Blake, 2000, Pellettieri, 2000, Nilakanta, 2002). This finding is in line with Warschauer's (2000) claim that CMC activities which are socially and culturally relevant for the learner yield better results in learning. The fact that open-ended tasks worked better in chat might also be explained by the participants' advanced level of English. Goal-oriented tasks aimed at practicing a grammatical structure or a given field of vocabulary were considered monotonous by the learners.

As far as *technical conditions* are concerned, the participants needed to be trained in how to use IRC and save their chat logs at the beginning of the project. This enabled them to use the software autonomously for the rest of the project. Occasionally, they asked their peers or myself for help. The participants became confident users of IRC fairly quickly. The problems they sometimes had with IRC were partly solved through speaking, and are partly recorded in the chat logs. All in all, the technical background of the project was very simple and a similar chat project can easily be set up at any school that has computers set-up on a local area network.

The classroom conditions in the project were such that, during the chat sessions, all the participants sat in the same room, sharing the same physical space. This meant that although during the sessions, the only medium allowed was chat, and the only language English, the participants sometimes broke these rules and opted for more efficient ways of communication, like speaking Hungarian with each other. The advantage of having all the chatters in one classroom was that I could monitor the chatters and I, or their peers, could help them solve problems related to the computers, the task or their partner(s).

In the course of one school year, the four major aspects of including chat in the EFL class: the partner, the task, technical conditions and the classroom environment were continuously monitored and fine-tuned. As a result of this, an inventory of techniques for including chat in the EFL class emerged. The process is described in Chapter 5. Although the description is primarily relevant for the case of the chat group in the BHS chat project, the techniques of using chat in the secondary school foreign language class are transferable to other settings as well. The thick description given in chapter 5 will help the reader judge what modifications are needed for their classroom.

9.1.2 Development in proficiency and language learning strategies

Besides the description of the project, the investigation also intended to show how the inclusion affected the participants' proficiency in English and language learning strategy repertoire. The two variables were investigated using quantitative methods in a pre- and post-test design. The chat group's results were compared to a control group's, whose members did not participate in chat sessions.

Proficiency in English

Both groups made significant progress in the *total score* of the tests. This result implies that the effectiveness of chat is comparable to that of the 'regular' communicative classroom tasks the control group was involved in.

The proficiency test contained five sub-parts: *language elements*, *reading comprehension*, *listening comprehension*, *writing*, and *speaking*. Both the chat and the control group made progress in the *language elements* sub-part of the test, which contained multiple choice and matching items about grammar and vocabulary. The results suggest again that the regular, communicative classroom, and the classroom where chat tasks are regularly performed by the learners, are equally suitable for developing the learners' *linguistic competence*, as termed by Canale and Swain (1980).

The chat group also made a significant gain in *writing skills*. Since chat is a written form of communication, and the participants spent a considerable amount of time producing the target language in written form during the chat sessions, and correcting and revising what they had written after the chat session, this gain is hardly surprising.

The control group's *speaking skills* improved significantly. The members of the control group performed communicative tasks similar to the chat tasks orally, in pairs or small groups. The fact that their English teacher placed an emphasis on speaking skills (as opposed to writing skills) explains the results of the proficiency test. The difference between the media used for practicing in the two groups is thus also reflected in the divergent development of the productive skills, speaking and writing, in the two groups.

Language learning strategies

In the chat group, the learners spent a considerable amount of time on autonomous work, and could define the pace and the content of the target language production to a great extent. The hypothesis was that this would result in the extension of their learning strategy repertoire. The investigation of the changes in the *language learning strategy* repertoire of the two groups showed that both groups showed a significant increase in only one area of strategy: *using mental processes*. This area involved language learning activities like revising what one has learnt, or making an effort to use one's English outside the classroom as well. In the areas *remembering more effectively*, *compensating for missing knowledge*, *organizing and evaluating your learning*, and *learning with others*, there were no significant changes in either groups.

Concerning strategies for *managing emotions*, the chat group used these strategies significantly less frequently in the post-test. These strategies were aimed at reducing anxiety and encouraging oneself to carry on learning in difficult situations. The fact that the members of the chat group needed to take these actions less frequently confirms the view that chat can provide a stress-free learning environment for language learners (mentioned by Lee, 2002, Poulisse, 2002, Toorenaar, 2002, Warschauer, 1996).

All in all, the inclusion of chat did not bring about striking changes in the language learning strategy repertoire of the participants, yet the inventory of strategies showed that activities in chat are on a par with regular communicative classroom activities as far as the cognitive work they require is concerned. If one considers the affective aspect of language learning, the inclusion of chat shows promising results: the members of the chat group benefited from the autonomy and self-regulation possibilities the chat medium can offer.

9.1.3 On motivation and attitudes in the chat class

The effect of the inclusion of chat on the motivation of the participants was described based on the qualitative analysis of the chat logs, the end-project interviews and the language teacher's journal. The learners' attitudes towards chat tasks were investigated quantitatively, with the help of a questionnaire on attitudes towards chat tasks in the language class.

Several studies on chat in language learning conclude that chat tasks have a motivating effect on the language learners (Beauvois, 1995, Lee, 2002, Toorenaar, 2002). Building on these results, my proposition at the outset of the project was that the inclusion of chat tasks in the language class will yield similarly positive results at BHS. The chat project showed that developing chat as a motivating tool in the second language EFL class was a process in which the learners needed to

- understand the goals of the chat tasks,
- get involved in the tasks,
- learn to give useful feedback to the instructor,
- and be able to benefit from the revision of the chat tasks.

The instructor who would like to motivate their learners should thus facilitate these processes.

The participants' attitudes towards chat tasks were compared with a control group whose members did not perform chat tasks regularly, only on two occasions. Out of the four areas investigated: *interest, usefulness, learner autonomy* and *reduced learner anxiety*, usefulness was the only area in which the chat group scored significantly higher than the control group. When assessing which skills chat tasks developed the most, the members of the chat group almost unanimously wrote that chat developed their knowledge of grammar. None of the members of the control group thought chat improved their grammar. This striking difference is due to the fact that the chat group performed chat tasks regularly, and revised the chat logs after the sessions. Consequently, the learners could better understand the goals of the tasks and use the sessions to improve their English.

To sum up, this modern medium, which has considerable motivating potential, requires careful planning on the part of the language teacher to become a useful and enjoyable form of language learning for a whole group of learners over an extended period of time. Combining usefulness and enjoyment turned out to be a key issue in the chat group. It is the combination of these two factors that give chat an added value as a tool in language learning.

9.1.4 On the role of common ground in chat

As chat is gaining ground in language learning, it is interesting to study how learners use language in this medium. One of the merits of chatting in the target language is that the learners are engaged in an interaction, which is in many ways similar to speaking. In chat, the learners' interaction is facilitated by the slower pace of the dialogue and the visual record of the dialogue, which the chatters can see on the computer screen.

In Clark's theory of language use (1996), the parties add to their common ground in the course of the conversation. In the case of the chat sessions at BHS, the learners chatting with each other had a good deal in common: they had Hungarian as their first language, they were all at least at B1 level in English, which enabled them to communicate in this language, they all knew they were supposed to use English in chat, and they were aware of the objectives of the chat task. The task was in many cases designed so that a number of issues were not common ground between the chatters, but the aim was to make these issues common ground by the end of the task.

The participants used various text-based techniques in chat to achieve common ground. These can be divided into four groups: techniques aimed at clarifying the *content* of the contribution, techniques aimed at clarifying the *form* of the contribution, techniques of *acknowledgement*, and other techniques related to the *chat medium* and the *task*. The analysis of the longitudinal changes in these techniques showed that the frequency of form techniques decreased significantly over time. The techniques related to content, acknowledging, and the chat medium and the task remained statistically unchanged. This suggests that grounding techniques play a constant role in communication, as described by Clark (Clark & Schaefer, 1989, Clark, 1996).

Grounding the form of the contribution involves negotiation of meaning. However, with the decrease of these techniques over time, one can assume that the instances of negotiation of meaning also decreased, along with the opportunities for the learners to improve. This reasoning contradicts the finding that the chat group's general proficiency, and also their knowledge of language elements, improved in the course of the chat project. The findings imply that, although solving communication problems related to the form of the message is a useful way to improve one's proficiency in the target language, the crucial steps of *noticing* that there is something to be learned, and *integrating* new elements (Gass, 1997) also take place in other situations when learners interact. This seems to hold for the case of the chat group as well, where meaning negotiation was experienced as face-threatening by some of the members.

To sum up, the descriptive analysis of language use in the chat logs shed light on the actions the learners took to structure their conversations around the 'official business' of the chat tasks. The decrease of techniques aimed at grounding the form of the conversation suggested that the participants' common ground in this area increased in the course of the project. This was due to their increased experience with the medium and the tasks, and their improved language proficiency. The results imply that the inclusion of chat had a positive influence on the learners' language learning process.

If the instructor's aim is to confront their learners with language difficulties in the chat tasks, they need to take into consideration that these might decrease over time. When planning the chat task, these challenges should be built into the task. This leads us again to the problem of task types, as it is the fixed goal that learners need to achieve in a class that ensures they will not avoid communication problems. However, the case of the BHS chat project showed that role-play as a chat task type could best combine usefulness and enjoyment in classroom chat. The optimal task was a guided role-play that maximised learner involvement and creativity, but at the same time gave the learners guidelines on what to chat about.

These considerations about how the inclusion of chat can be realised in the future lead us to the future research agenda in the field of using CMC in language learning and teaching.

9.2 The implications of the findings

The findings of the present study elucidate two important issues in research on CMC in the secondary school language classroom in the Hungarian context. These are *why* and *how* CMC should be used in the language class. To answer the question why, the added value chat can have in language learning was investigated in the literature. The following merits of chat are mentioned:

- chat is a popular medium of communication among young people, and is thus an attractive form of learning (Beauvois, 1992),
- chat can be a source of motivation for the language learners (Beauvois, 1995, Lee, 2002),
- dialogues in chat take place in real time, which implies spontaneous language use, but chatters have more time to formulate their message than in speaking (Poulisse, 2002),
- pronunciation has no role in chat dialogues, so learners who are too shy to speak also get a chance (Warschauer, 1996, Poulisse, 2002)
- chat gives learners an opportunity to notice gaps in their knowledge of the target language and modify their output (Blake, 2000, Pellettieri, 2000, Toorenaar, 2002),
- the logs of the chat dialogues can be saved and printed, so the learners can revise the language they produced with the help of the instructor (Toorenaar, 2002, Lee, 2002).

These findings implied that the inclusion of chat is potentially beneficial for Hungarian secondary school EFL learners as well. The question is how chat tasks should be employed so that the language learners can fully benefit from the merits of chat. The present study yielded important insights into the classroom application of chat. Based on these insights, the following sections will present recommendations on how chat should be used in the language classroom in three areas of teaching: integrating chat into the language course, developing proficiency and language learning routines, and motivating and forming positive attitudes towards chat in the language classroom.

How to make the effect of chat beneficial in the language class

We should bear in mind that the four basic conditions for the successful inclusion of chat are: choosing relevant *tasks*, finding the right *partners*, ensuring a smooth *technical background* and *classroom conditions* that help the learners stay on task.

Chat tasks should be built into the classes within a meaningful framework. This entails that the learners understand the goals of the tasks, and see how they fit into their language learning process. Doing these tasks on a *regular basis* helps the learners shift their attention from the content of the task (instructions and procedures) to the language they use in the task (also advocated in the traditional classroom setting by Bygate, 1999).

Developing proficiency and language learning strategies

During the chat sessions, the learners should be encouraged to produce the target language. After the session, when the chat logs are corrected, the learners can gain insight into the quality of their language use, and use what they have learnt in the next session. The tasks given to the chatters should include problem solving on the cognitive and linguistic level as well.

The use of language learning strategies should be encouraged, like keeping track of the new vocabulary the learners encountered in chat, or chatting and e-mailing with other learners of the target language outside the classroom.

Motivating and forming positive attitudes towards chat

The task should be presented clearly for all of the learners. The teacher should check understanding before the learners begin chatting.

The learners should be involved in planning the task. The teacher should elicit feedback about the chat sessions and the chat logs the learners produced.

The chat logs the learners produce should be revised regularly. The learners should try to correct their own logs.

The teacher should give positive feedback about the form and content of the chat logs, and emphasize the development in the logs.

The teacher should reflect on how far the tasks fulfil the six qualities of good education: are they entertaining, relevant, organised, thematic, involving and creative (O'Connor & Ross, 2004)?

9.3 Suggestions for further research

The present study explored how chat worked in the secondary school setting. Computer-mediated media and electronic literacy are gaining ground in education and everyday life, yet there are scarcely any empirical studies on how computer-mediated communication can be integrated at any level of language learning in Hungary. More studies are needed in this area. The following sections will contain suggestions for further research both in the Hungarian context and in the international context on important issues which have not been attended to thus far.

In order to see how learners from other age groups are influenced by chat tasks, similar projects could be conducted with university/college students, or adult language learners in Hungary. To make the communicative situation more authentic, the chat partners could be of different nationalities who have the target language as their *lingua franca*, as was the case in Blasszauer's (2000) or Toorenaar's (2002) studies.

More studies are needed to investigate the effect of different types of computer-mediated communication, such as e-mail and forums, on the learners' proficiency, as in Coniam and Wong's (2004) study. Emphasis should be placed on measuring changes in proficiency with more rigorous methods, in a pre- and post-test design, employing standardized tests of proficiency.

As chat and other forms of computer-mediated communication have the potential to help learners become better language learners, strategy inventories like Oxford's SILL (1990) should be extended to incorporate strategies in CMC that lead to target language improvement. Classroom observations and interviews with language learners are research methods that could help researchers chart successful CMC strategies learners use.

In the present study, the motivating potential of chat was investigated using qualitative methods. In a similar study, where it is possible to investigate variables related to motivation, the learners' motivation could be studied in a pre- and post-test design. By the use of such studies, the changes in the components of motivation could be mapped, and then compared with the qualitative patterns found in the present study.

To reveal the differences between face-to-face and chat communication in a foreign language, a systematic study comparing the two media should be conducted. Promising contributions to research in this area are Kleeser and Maassen (2005) and Van der Wijst and Eszenyi's (2006) study on grounding processes in native – non-native chat and face-to-face conversations, and Vandergriff's study (2006) that investigates how learners use reception strategies in the two media.

9.4 Significance of the study: summing up

In this dissertation I hoped to give a multifaceted analysis of how the inclusion of chat influences foreign language learning. Taking the role of the language teacher and researcher at the same time enabled me to observe the processes that took place in the course of the chat project. The study focussed on the case of an English group at a Hungarian secondary school, Buda High School . The chat project conducted at BHS was preceded by two pilot studies with secondary school learners. The findings of these studies implied that the inclusion of chat in the EFL classes can positively influence the participants' language learning process.

In the BHS chat project, the effect of the inclusion of chat was investigated for a school year lasting 9 months. To the best of my knowledge, no empirical study has investigated the effect of chat over such an extended period before, although the period of one school year is the natural unit of secondary school learning.

The effect of inclusion was studied from several angles relevant to language learning, including the effectiveness of chat tasks as a language learning tool, their potential to motivate, the way the participants evaluated chat as a tool in language learning, and last but not least, the method of including chat in the classes. The inclusion of chat tasks in the language classes turned out to have added value in the areas shown in figure 9.2.

Figure 9.2 The added value of chat in the language class

- 1) Chat tasks can be integrated into the language classes, and the topic of the conversations can be related to the topics dealt with in the regular classes and the topics the participants select in their role-play identity.
- 2) In chat conversations, the learners produce a considerable amount of discourse in the target language. The amount of output produced by the participants is approximately equal, which also means that they are all active in the task. The teacher can also control this by reading the chat logs.
- 3) Learners can see the text they have produced on the computer screen, and this helps them reflect on their own, or their peers' language use.
- 4) Learners can work autonomously in chat and define the pace at which they produce language.
- 5) During the chat conversation, the learners collaborate to achieve the goal of the task and make an effort to understand each other by verbal and non-verbal means in text. This is potentially beneficial for their target language proficiency.
- 6) The text of the chat conversation can be saved on the computer, revised by the learners and teacher, and kept in a portfolio for final evaluation.
- 7) If chat tasks constitute a regular part of the language classes, the learners will perceive producing language in chat as part of their language learning process. This will prompt the learners who want to get good grades for their chat logs to think of strategies that lead to producing good chat logs and good corrections of the chat logs.
- 8) Well-planned chat tasks give the learners opportunities to use what they have learnt in the target language creatively, and also to learn from their peers by solving communication problems in the conversation.
- 9) The chat medium and the relaxed atmosphere of the chat sessions can positively influence the learners' attitudes towards learning English.
- 10) The classroom chat tasks should be part of a cycle that includes the learners' self-revision and the teacher's evaluation of the learners' work in chat. These characteristics of classroom chat can be a source of motivation for learning, as the learners understand the goals of the chat sessions better, and can use the sessions to improve their English.

As the findings of the study show, involving the learners in planning their classroom chat tasks, making them correct their own classroom products, and engaging them in chat activities that foster their creativity and problem-solving ability are issues in line with recent trends in foreign language teaching. This implies that new, computer-mediated forms of communication might add new, inspiring channels to the traditional forms of communication in the language classroom. At the same time, teachers who decide to include these new media can rely on tried-and-trusted methodology they used in their communicative classes. In the preceding chapters, the lessons of my investigations were presented with the intention to provide an empirical basis and a practical framework for including online chat in language learning and other forms of computer-mediated communication. I hope that the results of the study will be useful for language teachers in Hungarian secondary schools, and language teachers at other levels of education in other parts of the world where foreign languages are learnt and taught.