Learning English Vocabulary via Online Communication

- a study of vocabulary learning strategies used by English learners in Lithuania

Natalja Tolstikova

Kristianstad University

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Tutor: Lena Ahlin

Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to investigate vocabulary learning strategies that are used and perceived to be helpful by English learners while communicating online. The participants of the study are 20 young Lithuanian English learners (23-28 years old) who use online communication on a weekly basis. The method of the research is a combination of a questionnaire and a follow-up email interview. The questionnaire items are based on Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies (1997), while the interview questions deal both with certain choices in the questionnaire and general attitudes towards online communication. The results of the study show that an overwhelming majority of the respondents are experienced users of a number of online communication types and mostly interact via emails and short messages about leisure and work issues. The most used vocabulary strategies are different from the ones perceived to be most helpful. Although the respondents tend to choose individual determination strategies to discover a new word's meaning, they believe social strategies to be highly beneficial. A conclusion might be made that as long as language learners are provided with instructions, socializing on the Internet might be a tool of English vocabulary learning.

Keywords: online communication, vocabulary learning, strategies

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1. Introduction

The role of the English language in the modern society cannot be overestimated. The spread of English makes it a medium of communication which unites people across the globe and opens new horizons. More and more children start learning English as a second language at school, which makes language educators look for new, improved techniques of language teaching.

A great number of language teaching methods have been proposed until now. Firstly, the proponents of the Grammar-Translation Method, which originated as early as the 16th century, paid no attention to speaking and listening skills as the main goal of language study was to read its literature. Later, in the 19th century C. Marcel and F. Gouin observed language from a different angle and emphasized meaning and context. The establishment of phonetics gave a new insight into the study of the spoken language and good pronunciation habits. The focus shifted towards the use of language and oral proficiency that served as a foundation for such movements as the Direct Method, Situational Language Teaching and the Audiolingual Approach. Finally, in the late 1960s the proponents of Communicative Language Teaching emphasized the role of communicative competence and highlighted the importance of interaction. The proponents of this approach viewed a language as a tool to perform a number of functions and suggested communication as the main learning activity. It might be noticed that Communicative Language Teaching is still popular today and many language schools still pay special attention to communication as a tool of language learning.

With the development of modern Internet technologies the possibilities to communicate with foreigners without leaving the home country increased dramatically. Computer-Mediated Communication has become a part of our life and attracts the attention of foreign language educators. Not only does CMC provide an opportunity to practice a language and communication skills but it is also a splendid chance to take part in a joint activity, enhance the cultural knowledge and make new friends. A great variety of CMC forms are available nowadays including public chats, personal blogs and discussion forums. Each kind has its own restrictions and possibilities, but all of them provide an opportunity to exchange opinions and ideas.

Although CMC is popular among students, it is not usually included in the foreign language teaching syllabi in most European countries. For instance, in Lithuania foreign language educators often choose traditional teaching approaches and focus on grammar rather than

communication skills. Although there is a tendency to invite exchange students and teachers from abroad and encourage authentic communication in class, no attention has been paid to CMC with its wide range of vocabulary learning possibilities. In order to improve the situation, there is a need to study the ways the online communication is used by language learners as well as the attitudes towards this kind of activity as a tool for vocabulary expansion.

1.2 Aim

This study aims to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies used by English learners in Lithuania while communicating online. The attitudes towards the same vocabulary strategies and online communication as a tool for English vocabulary expansion are analysed as well in order to provide a guide for language learners and educators how to benefit from online communication.

1.3 Participants

The participants of the study are 20 young Lithuanian people (age range 23-28) with a Bachelor's Degree in English who all graduated from the same Lithuanian university. The university is one of the most acknowledged higher education establishments in Lithuania. The Bachelor's Degree indicates an advanced level of English of all the respondents. All participants are females who speak Lithuanian as their first language. The same native tongue is necessary to avoid any cultural differences and make the results as reliable as possible. The researcher made sure that all the participants communicate online in English at least twice a week. They are contacted via the Internet. Although the questionnaires and interviews are not anonymous, the names and personal information are strictly confidential and are not disclosed anywhere in the work.

1.4 Method

The method chosen for the study is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The two-phase sequential design of the research starts with a questionnaire and is

then followed by an email interview to explore some of the findings in greater depth. Such a design was chosen to gather both information and insights that are important for the study.

In order to find out which vocabulary learning strategies are used and how helpful learners perceive them to be, an online questionnaire was created and distributed among the participants. According to Z. Dornyei, questionnaires can yield three types of data: factual (demographic characteristics), behavioural (people's actions) and attitudinal (people's attitudes, opinions, beliefs) (Dornyei, 2003: 8). In our case, all of the outlined question types are included in the survey. Therefore, the questionnaire consists of three sections. Each section starts with a detailed instruction in order to avoid any misunderstandings.

The first section (8 questions) relates to the general information about age, native language, degree in English, most used forms of online communication, the topics of communication and the level of language formality. The respondents are also asked if they think their English vocabulary is expanding via online communication. All these questions are placed at the very beginning in order to make sure a respondent meets the requirements of the research as well as provide us with the information of a general nature. Since we do not expect the participants to be experienced in the area, the definitions of some forms of online communication are included in the questionnaire. The second and third sections each include 8 yes/no questions based on the taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies presented by Schmitt (1997) and discussed in detail in the theoretical part of this work (page 15-17). The first 8 questions (section 2) relate to the strategies actually used by the respondents, while the next 8 questions (section 3) are to find out which strategies are believed to be helpful.

Due to the nature of the research Schmitt's taxonomy is not used in its entirety. First of all, only the strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning are taken into account due to the time restriction of the thesis. Second, such strategies as analysing pictures or gestures, using word lists or flash cards, and asking a teacher for an L1 translation, meaning or a sentence including a new word are left out since they are not applicable to online communication. Finally, the option of asking classmates was changed to asking an online interlocutor. Therefore, although the questionnaire items are based on Schmitt's taxonomy, the strategies proposed by Schmitt are applied to a traditional class situation. As there are some obvious differences between face-to-face and online communication, the strategies were slightly altered in order to match the area of research.

On the basis of the questionnaire results, 2 of the participants who showed their interest in participating in the follow-up email interview were selected in a random way in order to get a deeper understanding why certain strategies are believed to be helpful or not, and what the respondents think of online communication as a vocabulary learning tool. The interview consists of 13 questions, of which the first 8 are based on the third section of the questionnaire and the next 5 are of a more general nature. While the first 8 questions give us an insight into why certain strategies are preferred over the others, the last five questions were included to find out the respondents' attitude towards online communication as a vocabulary expansion activity, whether they feel more open communicating online than in face-to-face conversation and whether they prefer synchronous or asynchronous communication.

It is true that email interviews have some disadvantages over face-to-face interviews as in the first case the answers are not spontaneous and the researcher gets no extra-linguistic data such as body language. However, in our case email interview data is particularly helpful. The respondents have time to think over and edit their answers as there is no time pressure. Emailing interviews also avoids the risk that asking questions face-to-face may suggest to the respondents the goals of the researcher, and thus provoke desirable responses. Finally, the interview transcripts are easily stored and analysed.

Since the priority of the research is to find out which vocabulary learning strategies are used and believed to be helpful in online communication, the attitudes towards online communication itself are given less weight.

2. Theoretical Background

The theoretical background of the study is divided into five sections. Starting with a general overview on Communicative Language Teaching and Situated Learning, the focus moves to Computer Mediated Communication, different forms of online interaction and previous research on vocabulary learning strategies.

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching

The idea that communicative ability is the goal of foreign language learning lies at core of a number of language teaching theories and is not new in the linguistic world. A communicative approach makes us pay special attention to the communicative functions a language performs rather than its grammar and vocabulary. Communicative Language Teaching aims at relating language structures to communicative functions in real life situations. It is believed that a successful language learner needs to acquire both linguistic items and strategies for using them, the latter being closely related to the social meaning any language carries. It is important to understand that the foreign language learner needs more than a fixed number of language forms that match some communicative functions. Since usually the relationship between forms and functions is variable and unpredictable, the learner needs an opportunity to make this connection by actually using language in different situations (Littlewood, 1981: x-4).

To choose socially appropriate speech is particularly important as the language might determine the social atmosphere during the communication. Therefore, formal speech might cause social distance while informal speech might help to develop a personal relationship. The proponents of Communicative Language Teaching often emphasize the importance of cooperation through the new language as this helps students to develop a wide range of communication skills as well as produce positive relationships between learners. Moreover, creative and unpredictable interaction might make language learners express themselves in a new way since they are not provided with ready-made linguistic solutions. Although it is obvious that some errors will occur during spontaneous interaction, the process is believed to be highly beneficial in general (Littlewood, 1981: 30-32).

Communicative Language Teaching suggests a number of teaching activities to be implemented in class that emphasize the necessity of the actual balance between learning a foreign language and learning through a foreign language. Students have to learn to relate language to its social meanings. Littlewood states that in order to start using language successfully, educators have to move away from a traditional teacher-learner situation and place learners into social context.

> An initial step in this direction is to free the activity from dependence on the teacher
> or tape, so that learners begin to interact as equal partners in an exchange, rather than
> merely reacting to stimuli. For example, after an initial period when they learn to

make and reject suggestions under the teacher's control (as in preceding sections),
they may be asked to interact in pairs. (1981: 12)

 The suggested activities also include conversation and discussion sessions that are believed to serve as a stimulus for interaction and new experience through the foreign language. The purposes of communicative activities are to provide a whole-task practice and improve motivation. Since most learners treat language as a means of communication rather than a structural system, learning a language via communication might be a clearly better teaching method. Moreover, communication creates a positive atmosphere that supports learning and provides opportunities for positive relationships to develop between learners and teachers (Littlewood, 1981: 17-18). It is quite important to remember that during discussion sessions a teacher should act as an insider rather than a director as informal arrangements and a shift of teacher domination resemble the reality of communication that takes place outside the classroom and ensures a successful teaching process (1981: 44-47).

2.2 The Affective Filter Hypothesis

The idea of a teacher being a co-communicator rather than a dominating director is closely linked to Stephen D. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis which claims that language performers with optimal attitudes have a lower affective filter. A lower filter encourages language learners to be more open in communication and ensures a better input acquisition. Assuming that a student with a lower filter acquires more, language teachers are highly advised not only to supply optimal input but also to create a positive atmosphere in class (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 37-38).

It is important to notice that the affective factors mentioned above are directly related to language acquisition rather than a conscious learning process. Krashen makes a clear distinction between the two ways of developing competence in second language. According to him, language acquisition is the natural way to acquire language via communication, while language learning is a conscious process also referred to as 'knowing about' language. The Natural Approach proposed by Krashen and Terrell emphasizes the language acquisition process. One of the main principles is that in-class activities should aim at lowering the affective filter by encouraging students to express their opinions and desires, and establish friendly relationships with other students and the teacher (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 21; 26).

Krashen and Terrell pay special attention to the correction of speech errors since the Natural Approach is based on the acquisition activities. They claim that overt error correction is likely to have a negative effect on students' willingness to be open and express themselves. It has been noticed that most of the time people avoid correcting grammar mistakes of a non-native speaker. What they usually do, is to paraphrase or ask a question in order to verify the non-native speaker's intent. Since natural conversational exchange lies at core of the Natural Approach, language educators are highly recommended to use reformulations as in real-life situations. Such a method is believed to reduce tension and have a positive effect on the teaching process (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 177).

Finally, since vocabulary acquisition lies at core of the Natural Approach, the proponents of the approach claim vocabulary to be basic to communication. According to Krashen and Terrell, knowing lexical items enables us to convey the meaning and participate in the conversation, therefore, morphology and syntax should not be given a priority while teaching a foreign language (1983: 155). Not being able to understand the key lexical items makes students unable to participate in the communication.

> The popular belief is that one uses form and grammar to understand meaning. The truth is probably closer to the opposite: we acquire morphology and syntax because we understand the meaning of utterances. Acquisition depends crucially on the input being comprehensible. And comprehensibility is dependent directly on the ability to recognize the meaning of key elements in the utterance. Thus, acquisition will not take place without comprehension of vocabulary. (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 155)

The idea of communication as the basis of successful language acquisition outlined above leads us to the theory of situated learning proposed by Lave and Wenger which claims that learning is first of all a social practice that happens in context.

2.3 Situated Learning

According to Lave and Wenger, learning should be viewed as a situated activity. In their view not only is learning situated in practice but it is also an inseparable part of the social practice of our everyday reality (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 35). The authors of *Situated Learning* also suggest that a participant of social practice cannot be reduced to a person but should rather be seen as a 'person-in-the-world', a member of society. Therefore, learning involves the whole person and presupposes becoming a full member of a particular group.

The process of engagement in social practice that entails learning is called legitimate peripheral participation, a term first introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991: 52). Briefly, peripherality is a way of gaining access to knowledge through growing involvement in the social organization experienced by newcomers which might lead to full participation with time (1991: 36-37). The idea of participation in social practice is further extended to engagement in communities of practice, described in the following way:

> Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell: Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. (Wenger, 2006)

As we can see from this quotation, language learners might be treated as a community of practice that share the same goal. The regular communication that occurs among the learners is highly beneficial. As online interaction is a form of communication, online chats and discussions might play an important role in language acquisition.

The idea that learning is a participation in a community of practice might be supported by L. Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky presented learning as a socially mediated process which is dependent on interaction, discussion and other shared processes. He claimed that any individual starts learning with collaborative activities until he/she finally becomes autonomous. The process of supportive dialogue, a form of collaboration mentioned above, is called scaffolding. The Zone of Proximal Development is the domain of knowledge where a learner can achieve the desired outcome with some help. According to Vygotsky, the process of scaffolding plays an important role in the process of learning since it performs such functions as simplifying the task, recruiting interest and demonstrating a model at the same time (Mitchell and Myles, 2004: 196-197).

Speaking about structuring resources for learning in practice, Lave and Wenger suggest the decentering strategy. To take a decentred view of master-learner relations is to understand that a master's task is to take part in the community of practice. Such a view moves the focus away from teaching (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 94). Therefore, language learning should be treated as talking within a practice rather than talking about it.

Both the Communicative Approach and Situated Learning presented above emphasize the importance of active communication as the basis of successful language acquisition. Therefore, the next part of the theoretical background touches upon different forms of online communication and the variety of possibilities it carries for language learning.

2.4 Computer-Mediated Communication

Many technologies, including a telegraph and telephone, were shaped by human needs for communication. Computer-Mediated Communication was introduced as early as the 1960s when the first electronic digital computer was invented. However, it is only since 1990s that CMC has become so popular.

In order to start the discussion of Computer-Mediated Communication, we should first introduce the definition of the term. According to John December, an experienced Internet trainer, teacher, software developer, and author of a number of works on the topic,

> Computer-Mediated Communication is a process of human communication via computers, involving people, situated in particular contexts, engaging in processes to shape media for a variety of purposes. (1997)

The nature of CMC has been well presented by the social identity model of deindividuation effects (the SIDE model), a theory developed in social psychology and communication studies. The SIDE model tries to explain CMC in terms of such notions as social identity and anonymity. It is based on the idea that human identity consists of personal and social identities. Human beings prioritize either of the two identities depending on the situation. What is interesting about our group identity is that we feel connected to other people even if we do not really know much about them. People often switch to their social identity on the basis of the minimal group phenomenon. What this means is that in order to activate our social identity, we do not need to actually behave in a group as much as just feel like we are in a group. By making comparison to other people, we place ourselves as being part of the 'ingroup' while everyone else is placed 'outgroup'. According to the theory, group interaction can be very strong in CMC as anonymity often motivates people to switch to their social identity (Thurlow, Lengel & Tomic, 2004: 30).

As nowadays the evolution of CMC has expanded opportunities for communication, naturally such notion as electronic discourse has been recently discussed. Therefore, the studies presented in the next section offer insights into new types of literacies involved in using computer-mediated communication.

2.5 New Literacies and Language Teaching

The rapid development of networked communication has altered everyday literacies, introducing new linguistic norms that call into question the standards taught in formal education. As some researchers in the field claim, today's educational practice provides inadequate preparation for communication outside the class. Such a problem occurs due to a difference between traditional and new digital literacies. An educational gap appears as a result of the fact that often digital literacies are not included in the language teaching syllabus (Lotherington, Neville-Verardi & Senitskaya, 2009: 13-14).

The term 'literacy' might be quite misleading as nowadays it means more than just the ability to read and write. In the changing realities, there is a need to extend the definition of the phenomenon. According to Kalantzis, Cope and Harvey, the new basic skills required of effective language learners and future workers are redefined by new communication technologies and include flexibility, collaboration and problem-solving skills to name but a few (2003: 23).Therefore, contemporary educators must pay special attention to new literacies if they want students to meet the criteria set by their future employers.

There are a number of differences between traditional and new literacies outlined by previous researchers. The very fact that text is printed and hypertext appears on a computer screen makes a great difference. Although the latter is usually treated as a typical text, we cannot omit the fact that the digital text might be looked at by many people at the same time. Another noticeable difference between text and hypertext is the organization of content. Whereas the printed text usually presupposes reading from left to right and top to bottom, hypertext can usually be read in any order as it is organized by zones or blocks (Williams, 2009: 46-48). Similarly, hypertext has no linearity as a result of having multiple points of entry. It also has been noticed that a hypertext is likely to have many authors rather than a single one as well as have a number of editors working at the same time (Williams, 2009: 51-55).

There are a number of ways language teachers can address language learners' literacy needs in a learning process. The New London Group (1996) presents a new approach to literacy pedagogy that is referred to as 'multiliteracies'. The New London Group consists of ten educators from Australia, the USA and the UK, who met in 1994 in New London, USA to discuss the state of literacy pedagogy and came up with some suggestions. The aim of this collaborative work is to ensure that all students benefit from learning and participate fully in their future public life. The authors engaged in the group claim that increasing cultural and linguistic diversity nowadays call for a much broader view of literacy than described by traditional language teaching approaches. Among the other issues, they argue that nowadays pedagogy must take into account the variety of text forms related to information and multimedia technologies and the fact that new communications media are reshaping the way we use language. The use of multiliteracies approaches, according to the authors, will create access to the evolving language of work, power, and community, and help them design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment. The authors propose four components of pedagogy to be implemented in language teaching process that include a situated practice (peripheral participation), transformed practice (re-shaping tasks in order to re-contextualize them), overt instruction (active interventions on behalf of language educators), and critical framing (denaturalizing what has already been mastered) (The New London Group, 1996).

Of the four components, situated practice and overt instruction are of a particular interest to us as they are related to online communication. The proponents of multiliteracies believe that learners do not learn anything unless they are motivated to learn and believe to be able to use their knowledge. Therefore, pedagogy should consider the sociolinguistic needs and identities of the learners and plan the education process accordingly. Thus, learning language via online communication and online group work activities might be treated as a good example of a situated practice. In its turn, overt instruction is described as the process of scaffolding that focuses the learner on the important issues and guides to further thought and action. This can also be done during online interaction as the experts can guide learners and encourage the successful language development.

The activities outlined above are by no means the only possibilities for promoting the new literacies. Different forms of computer-mediated communication as well as the ways to implement them in the language teaching syllabus are presented in the next section.

2.6 Computer-Mediated Communication Forms

As the heading indicates, this section focuses on different forms of online communication, their features and possible ways to use them as part of a language teaching syllabus. Although today Internet users have an opportunity to take part in a vast majority of Internet communication forms, this section will embrace the basic and most popular ones - chat, public discussion forums and blogs.

2.6.1 Chat

As instant messaging is becoming a widely spread form of computer-mediated communication, lately the primary focus has been on discourse produced by language learners in electronic environments. The analysis of linguistic variation has illustrated a radical difference between informal language varieties used online and very formal varieties presented in pedagogical environments. Although many linguists are quite skeptical about informal language use in language teaching, R. A. van Compernolle and I. Pierozak share the opinion that students have to be aware of stylistic differences (2009: 111-112). According to the same authors, non-traditional orthography and other informal sociolinguistic features of discourse are usually unfamiliar to learners and cause difficulties. As the variation of genres and registers is necessary for the development of communicative competence, the awareness of such variation is essential for both online and offline interaction. Such an idea leads us to some recommendations to be implemented by language educators that include role-play activities and online small group chat discussions organized to encourage the use of non-standard variants. The authors, however, do not imply that non-standard forms should become a central area of language learning. Rather, they argue that using chat in a foreign language classroom could help learners to contextualize language use (2009: 119-123).

Some research has been done in order to argue that task-based negotiation plays a powerful role in language acquisition. The previous investigation by S. M. Sotillo is based on the analysis of data from exchanges between ESL learners and their tutors in an instant messaging environment. The purpose of the study is to find out how learners notice linguistic forms during online negotiation work. Sotillo is particularly interested in whether L2 learners notice linguistic forms, what type of negative feedback is provided by tutors and whether there is any evidence of successful uptake. Participants completed 45-minute collaborative tasks from

the comfort of their own homes. 4 tutors were not given any special instructions from the researcher. However, they were asked to encourage learners to use the second language for interaction. Language-related episodes (LRE) are examined within the context of negotiation work between learners and tutors, each LRE being defined as consisting of a trigger (self-correction or nonunderstanding), feedback, and uptake. The results of the survey show that ESL learners initiated 54% of all the language-related episodes, and direct feedback (metalinguistic explanations, clarifying lexical confusion) accounted for 77% of all negative feedback, compared with 23% for indirect feedback (recasts, clarification requests, comprehension checks). Concerning learners' uptake, it should be noticed that successful uptake represents 75% of all uptake found in chat (Sotillo, 2009: 87-103).

The results of the study provided above prove that learners benefit from scaffolding that is used as a tutoring strategy and pay attention to linguistic forms while communicating via synchronous messages. The learners involved in the study were able to self-correct and often requested feedback from their tutors. Therefore, language educators might use synchronous messaging as a tool for collaborative language learning. It is important to be aware of learners' developmental errors and provide the feedback needed (Sotillo, 2009: 105-106).

2.6.2 Public Internet Discussion Forums

Public Internet discussion forums offer limitless opportunities for communication across geographical borders. Nowadays websites propose forums on a variety of topics and provide a possibility for authentic language practice. Although there is a great variety of public forums available nowadays, all the forums are characterized by asynchronous, threaded, publicly available discussion (Hanna & de Nooy, 2009: 3-4).

There are plenty of reasons why Internet discussion forums present considerable advantages for language learners. Firstly, interaction is usually driven by a desire to exchange opinions rather than to achieve language learning goals. The communication is not governed by the norms of classroom interaction, shifting away from a teacher-learner formula, which allows students to be more open (Hanna & de Nooy, 2009: 92). Moreover, public Internet discussion offers a great possibility to obtain individual feedback from people other than the teacher. This often happens in a form of reformulation in more colloquial terms, such as little wordplays or jokes (2009: 97-98). Secondly, personal relationships grow out of participation

in a joint activity, which also proves that public forums develop other kinds of exchanges. Therefore, public forums might be treated as an instance of a community of practice. Finally, it is important to note that interaction via public forums is a form of asynchronous online communication, which favours opportunities for preparation and facilitates interaction for those less active in classroom discussions (2009: 100).

The issue of identity is particularly interesting in the context of public discussion forums. A majority of participants in public Internet forums use pseudonyms. Students have an opportunity to play social roles different from those of their everyday life, and, most importantly, play roles other than that of a language learner (Hanna & de Nooy, 2009: 101). A study of four young students of French who participated in discussion forums presents quite interesting results. The data come from *Autressujets* forum that is open to contributors in both French and English, although all participants are supposed to read well in French. Taking into consideration a wide variety of topics, the forum is considered to be a good environment to practice French (2009:104-105). Four students of French (Fleurie, Eleanor, Laura, and David) participated in forum discussions from the UK and the US. Of those four, Fleurie and Eleanor intentionally looked for pen pals to improve their French, while Laura and David were more concerned by debates on racism and imperialism (2009: 104). It is important to note that Fleurie and Eleanor positioned themselves as French learners who would like to learn more from the very beginning, while David and Laura entered discussion by debating. As a result, Laura and David were far more successful in achieving their goal. They both got distracted from their French studies but ended up involved in discussions on French culture, whilst Fleurie and Eleanor were unable to improve their language skills. This leads us to the conclusion that if we get the genre right, there is a better chance to get the linguistic opportunities open (2009: 115-116). Therefore, if language learners get involved in interesting discussions and manage to move away from the idea that they are learning a language, the opportunities for learning will increase.

Successful teaching of forum debate involves attention on behalf of language educators. Teachers should take into account the kinds of forums recommended to students. A choice of forums with wide participation and an active moderator who would be able to give instant feedback is highly preferable. Moreover, if the general atmosphere of the forum is supportive, students are usually encouraged to take part in discussions. It is advisable to preface each student with some advice on what successful participation means for a particular forum as well as navigate students along the way (Hanna & de Nooy, 2009: 117-118).

2.6.3 Blogs

Another form of online communication to be discussed in this section is blogs. A definition of the genre is presented by K. Douglas, who notes that:

> A blog, also known as a weblog {…} is a website that consists of regularly updated journal-style entries that are usually displayed in reverse chronological order. These entries convey the personal opinion of the blogger on any number of issues and may contain images and/or links to relevant webpages, other blogs, or online audio or video files. Most blogs also include comments function, so that readers can post their reactions to the content of the entry, thus establishing an interaction between reader and writer and often between readers as well… (2009: 215)

There are two types of blogs, which are referred to as 'personal' and 'commercial' blogs. Personal blogs are those that are authored by an individual who chooses the topic, genre and establishes his own terms of participation or engagement. Such blogs come in a variety of genres, which proves that a personal blog contains text written in different styles. Therefore, keeping a blog might be an example of producing text genres that are not included in language education (van Compernolle & Abraham, 2009: 196). In contrast, commercial blogs are moderated by commercial sponsors. There is usually no genre variation within a blog, as commercial blog discourse tends to be stable in terms of topic, register and genre (van Compernolle & Abraham, 2009: 197).

R. A. van Compernolle and Lee B. Abraham view blog-writing as a social activity extended beyond the classroom. In their study they analyse a corpus of freely-accessible blogs of different genres in order to provide ESL teachers and learners with examples of blog discourse in communicative contexts (2009: 195). They find a range of differences between two types of blogs. In contrast to personal blogs, it is unusual to see author rejoinders to comments in commercial blogs. Not only do commercial blogs get a higher level of participation, the readers' comments are also lengthier than those published in personal blogs. Finally, 75% of the personal blog entries include creative writing postings (2009: 200).

The pedagogical recommendations provided by the authors of the study are focused on drawing learners' attention to the social features of blog interaction. Activities include compiling a corpus and classifying blogs in terms of participation structure, participant characteristics and purpose. In order to succeed in this task, students are recommended to keep in mind the audience, genre, theme, tone, etc. while writing or analyzing a blog. It is

strongly advised to view blog writing as a situated practice and goal-oriented activity rather than a simple exercise in writing. (van Compernolle & Abraham, 2009: 206-209).

2.7 Aspects of Knowing a Word

Since the aim of the essay is related to vocabulary and online communication, there is a need to discuss different aspects of learning words and how online communication might be beneficial in each case. Although many of us equate a word's meaning with its definition in a dictionary, learning a word entails much more than just learning its meaning. In fact, a distinction is made between a basic, fundamental meaning of a word and the personal background knowledge related to it. Such terms as core meaning and encyclopaedic knowledge are used by Schmitt in his work *Vocabulary in Language Teaching* and will be used in our discussion as well.

According to Schmitt, some meaning information is attached to a word and does not depend on context. Thus, for the word bachelor, the core features are +human, +male, +adult, - married. Encyclopaedic knowledge, on the other hand, varies from person to person as it is based on personal beliefs and experience. Therefore, encyclopaedic knowledge of a word bachelor might consist of such things as being young and dating women. Although this information is not essential, it is an important component of the meaning (2000: 27). A conclusion might be made that knowing a core meaning is not enough to make use of a word, while context might be of a great help for successful vocabulary learning. Online communication discussed previously in this work provides its users with context and might activate the full resources of word meaning.

Different language situations require different stylistic word variations. This implicit extra information that colours a word is referred to as register. A number of register variation have been presented until now. Temporal variation, for instance, is related to how old-fashioned words are and whether they still are in use. This is important as language is constantly changing and some words are falling out of use being replaced by the new ones. Geographical variation, as it might be guessed from its name, explains the fact that people from different countries speak different language varieties and dialects. This variation refers to the lexical choices people make to name the same things. Finally, social variation covers the issues of power between interlocutors of various social statuses. In comparison to the

previous variations, social role variation is controlled by people and might change according to the level of formality. Online communication users can take part in different kinds of conversations on a variety of topics. The fact that different language situations require different registers makes online communication a tool for stylistic language variation practicing in different contexts (Schmitt, 2000: 31-33).

2.8 Learner Strategies in Language Learning

Currently, there is a growing interest in considering learning tasks from the learner's point of view. Consequently, there is a shift of focus from the teacher-centered point of view to the learner-centered one. Foreign language educators become interested in defining how learners can take charge of the learning process (Rubin, 1987: 15). In order to find out in which ways computer-mediated communication helps in foreign language acquisition, we should start with the notion of learner strategies presented by J. Rubin as 'any set of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information, that is, what learners do to learn and do to regulate their learning' (1987: 19).

A number of classifications of learner strategies have been presented up to now. O'Malley and Chamot (1990), for instance, divide language learning strategies into three major types: metacognitive (strategies for planning and regulating the processes of language use and learning), cognitive (strategies which involve the manipulation of information in an immediate task to acquire or retain the information) and social/affective (strategies related to interpersonal relationships and controlling one's emotional constraints). Oxford (1990) has extended the classification and presented one of the most comprehensive classification systems up to date. It consists of six major strategy categories, including memory, compensation, cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

Speaking about vocabulary-specific strategies, N. Schmitt noticed that although Oxford's classification is generally applicable, there are some issues that are unsatisfactory, for instance, sometimes one strategy might fit into several groups (1997: 205). Basing his work on the Oxford (1990) system with some revisions, Schmitt compiled his own taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies. The author of the taxonomy divided all strategies into five categories: determination (using reference materials, guessing from structural knowledge, L1 cognate, or context), social (asking someone), memory (relating word to some previously

learned knowledge), cognitive (repetition or using mechanical means) and metacognitive (evaluation of the learning process) strategies. The taxonomy is also divided into two types according to what the aim of strategy use is (discovery of a new word's meaning or consolidating a word) (Schmitt, 1997: 199-228).

A large-scale study was undertaken by Schmitt (1997) to assess which vocabulary learning strategies learners actually use and how helpful they believe them to be. The survey was conducted in Japan, all respondents spoke Japanese as their first language. Firstly, respondents were asked to indicate whether they used that particular strategy or not, and secondly, whether they thought it was helpful. If a respondent did not use a strategy, they were asked to respond whether they thought it sounded helpful. Schmitt's taxonomy, divided into two sections (strategies for the discovery of a new word and consolidating a word after it has been encountered), as well as the results of the study are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1. A Taxonomy of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (Schmitt, 1997). Part I

Strategy Group	Strategy	Use %	Helpful %
Strategies for the Discovery of a New Word's Meaning			
DET Analyze part of speech		32	75
DET Analyze affixes and roots		15	69
DET Check for L1 cognate		11	40
DET Analyze any available pictures or gestures		47	84
DET Guess from textual context		74	73
DET Bilingual dictionary		85	95
DET Monolingual dictionary		35	77
DET Word lists		--	--
DET Flash cards		--	--
SOC Ask teacher for an L1 translation		45	61
SOC Ask teacher for paraphrase or synonym of new word		42	86
SOC Ask teacher for a sentence including the new word		24	78
SOC Ask classmates for meaning		73	65
SOC Discover new meaning through group work activity		35	65

The results show that the most used strategy for discovering the meaning is using a bilingual dictionary (85%), 74% of the respondents also guess meaning from context, and 73% ask classmates. The study also shows that students not only use bilingual dictionaries but find them the most helpful strategy (95%). In comparison, only 77% find monolingual dictionaries to be helpful, and 86% believe it is worth to ask a teacher for a paraphrase. It is important to

notice that sometimes a strategy is perceived to be very helpful but is hardly used at all. For instance, 78% find it beneficial to ask a teacher for a sentence including a new word, but only 24% of the respondents actually do this. In general, all social strategies presented in the table above (except for asking classmates for meaning) are not popular among the respondents although they are perceived to be highly helpful. Such high helpfulness ratings for social strategies which are used by less than half of the respondents suggest that learners can see value in strategies which they do not currently use. These results imply that learners might be willing to try new strategies if they are introduced to them and are supervised by language educators (Schmitt, 1997: 218).

Figure 2. A Taxonomy of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (Schmitt, 1997). Part II

Strategies for Consolidating a Word Once it has been Encountered

SOC Study and practice meaning in a group	30	51
SOC Teacher checks students' flash cards or word lists for accuracy	3	39
SOC Interact with native-speakers	--	--
MEM Study word with a pictorial representation of its meaning	--	--
MEM Image word's meaning	50	38
MEM Connect word to a personal experience	37	62
MEM Associate the word with its coordinates	13	54
MEM Connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms	41	88
MEM Use Semantic maps	9	47
MEM Use 'scales' for gradable adjectives	16	62
MEM Peg Method	--	--
MEM Loci Method	--	--
MEM Group words together to study them	--	--
MEM Group words together spatially on a page	--	--
MEM Use new word in sentences	18	82
MEM Group words together within a storyline	--	--
MEM Study the spelling of a word	74	87
MEM Study the sound of a word	60	81
MEM Say new word aloud when studying	69	91
MEM Image word form	32	22
MEM Underline initial letter of the word	--	--
MEM Configuration	--	--
MEM Use Keyword Method	13	31
MEM Affixes and Roots (remembering)	14	61

MEM Part of Speech (remembering)	30	73
MEM Paraphrase the words meaning	40	77
MEM Use cognates in study	10	34
MEM Learn the words of an idiom together	48	77
MEM Use Physical action when learning a word	13	49
MEM Use semantic feature grids	--	--
COG Verbal repetition	76	84
COG Written Repetition	76	91
COG Word Lists	54	67
COG Flash Cards	25	65
COG Take notes in class	64	84
COG Use the vocabulary section in your textbook	48	76
COG Listen to tape of word lists	--	--
COG Put English labels on physical objects	--	--
COG Keep a vocabulary notebook	--	--
MET Use English-language media (songs, movies, newscasts, etc.)	--	--
MET Testing oneself with word tests	--	--
MET Use spaced word practice	--	--
MET Skip or pass new word	41	16
MET Continue to study word over time	45	87

As for consolidation strategies, repetition of a word's verbal and written forms is at the top of the list (76%). Many students also study the spelling of the word (74%) and take notes in class (64%). 91 % claim verbal and written repetition to be helpful, while 88% think it is good to connect a word to its synonyms and antonyms (however, only 41% actually do this). Similar to the strategies presented in figure 1, sometimes the percentage in two columns is significantly different. Using new words in sentence, for example, is believed to be helpful by 82% of the respondents, while only 18% of them use it in class. Similarly, 25 % of the students take notes in class but 65% treat this strategy as helpful. In comparison, some popular strategies are scored as not helpful. For example, such metacognitive strategy as skipping or passing a new word is used by 41% of the respondents but is perceived to be beneficial only by 16% of the students.

The study conducted by Schmitt shows that although a great deal of agreement is found between two scoring columns, there are also some differences. This point is essential as according to the author, one of the most important factors for success is learner acceptance.

Although most of the students claim bilingual dictionaries to be the most helpful, we cannot omit that the relatively high helpfulness rating for monolingual dictionaries (77%) which shows that learners might accept their use (perhaps alongside a bilingual dictionary) in class.

If we are to look at the results of the strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning, the same might be noticed about analysing a part of speech, asking a teacher for a paraphrase, discovering a new meaning through group work activity and asking a teacher for a sentence including a new word. Speaking about the strategies for consolidating a new word, such strategies as connecting a word to its synonyms and antonyms, using a new word in a sentence and taking notes in class might become more popular among students in future.

2.9 Implications for Language Educators and Learners

Compiling questionnaires and analysing the strategies language learners use is a huge step towards a learner-centred education. However, knowing which vocabulary learning strategies are the most popular is not enough. Language teachers as well as their students need to be well informed and prepared in order to make use of the strategies that are new to them. O'Malley and Chamot introduce the incorporation of strategic teaching that consists of five phases (1990: 158):

1. Preparation: develop student awareness of different strategies
2. Presentation: develop student knowledge about strategies
3. Practice: develop student skills in using strategies for academic learning
4. Evaluation: develop student ability to evaluate their own strategy use
5. Expansion: develop transfer of strategies to new tasks

As we can see, not only teachers, but also students have to participate and evaluate the learning process. Since online communication is quite a complex issue, in order to start using it as a language learning activity, some points should be taken into account that have already been mentioned in the previous subsections. As a general rule, it might be noted that teachers have to raise students' awareness of different language registers and introduce different forms of online communication with the possibilities they provide.

In conclusion, as we have discussed earlier in this section, Computer-Mediated Communication might be a tool for successful foreign language learning. The theories of Communicative Language Teaching and Natural Approach present communication as the main activity to be implemented in foreign language teaching. CMC provides learners with an opportunity to move away from a traditional teacher-learner form of language learning, which has a positive influence on a second language identity formation. Learning is believed

to be a social practice that happens in a community of practice, therefore communication online on a variety of topics is an example of such practice. Finally, a number of researches have been done on vocabulary learning strategies but no studies were conducted on the use of the strategies in online communication. A study of the strategies used by learners during online communication and a proper introduction of the topic both to language educators and learners might give positive results in future.

3. Analysis and Discussion

This section consists of both analysis and discussion and is divided into five subsections. The first one deals with general information concerning the survey participants and online communication they use. The discussion is based on the data extracted both from the questionnaire and interview items that is depicted in the diagrams below. The next two subsections discuss the vocabulary learning strategies either used (subsection 5.2) or perceived to be helpful (subsection 5.3) by online communication users. Next, a detailed comparison is made between which strategies are actually used and which strategies are perceived to be helpful (subsection 5.4). Finally, there is an overall discussion presented at the very end of the section.

3.1 General Information about the Survey Respondents and Online Communication

In order to start the analysis section, we have to present the general information concerning the survey respondents. General questions are included in the questionnaire and are located at the very beginning (items 1-8). The data is highly important as it allows us to have a general understanding of who we are going to explore and what role online communication plays in their lives.

Although it is not depicted in the diagrams, we still have to mention that all the participants are females who are 23-28 years old and share the same native tongue (Lithuanian). Moreover, they learn English as a second language and have a Bachelor's degree in English. Although the level of English of each participant has not been investigated, we might assume that former students of the same Lithuanian university, who have the same degree in English, share more or less the same language knowledge.

We start with the question whether the respondents communicate online intentionally to improve their English vocabulary. As we can see in figure 3, only 30% of all the respondents answered positively, while 70% answered negatively. This means that the majority of the language learners who participated in the survey use online communication not as a tool for learning but rather as a means of interaction and exchange of information.

Figure 3 (item 5 in the questionnaire): Do you communicate online intentionally to improve your vocabulary?

■ Yes (30%)
■ No (70%)

This leads us to the question of what kind of online communication is the most popular among the language learners. It is important to notice that only 2 out of 20 respondents chose just one kind of online communication, while all the others claimed to use a variety of online communication forms. This is a sign that Lithuanian young people are experienced users of online communication and are not restricted to any of its particular kinds.

Figure 4 (item 4 in the questionnaire): What kind of non-verbal online communication in English do you use at least twice per week?
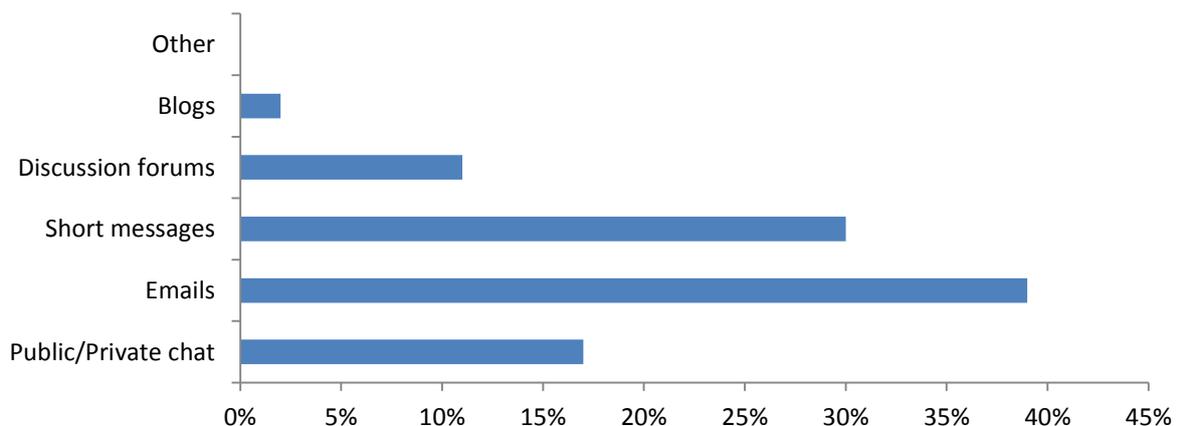

As we can see in figure 4, writing emails is the most popular way to interact online with short messages coming next. This might be explained by the fact that both emails and short

messages are examples of asynchronous online interaction, with no waiting time limit and no time pressure. A question (item 13) concerning the preference of either synchronous or asynchronous online communication was also included in the email interview which was filled in by two respondents. Both of them answered in favour of asynchronous communication as it gives you some extra time to edit the written text or formulate an idea. However, one of the respondents also noted that, in the case of informal communication, she prefers chatting with friends as she can get more information in a short time and does not have to put ideas in complete sentences. Public and private chat, as we see in the same diagram, comes right after communication via short messages. In contrast, keeping a blog and participating in discussion forums are not that popular.

It is now natural to find out what issues online communication usually refers to, since different forms of communication work better for different goals and audiences. The figures presented in figure 5 show that leisure topics (41%) and work issues (32%) are well ahead of academic issues and the other possible topics. Again, it must be noticed that 14 out of 20 people chose more than one option, which is a sign that online communication is used to fulfill a number of aims. Among other topics, the respondents also put entertainment, hobbies and friendship, which technically add more percentage to leisure topics as they cannot be referred to work or academic subjects.

Figure 5 (item 6 in the questionnaire): Online communication you take part in is mostly related to (you can choose several options):
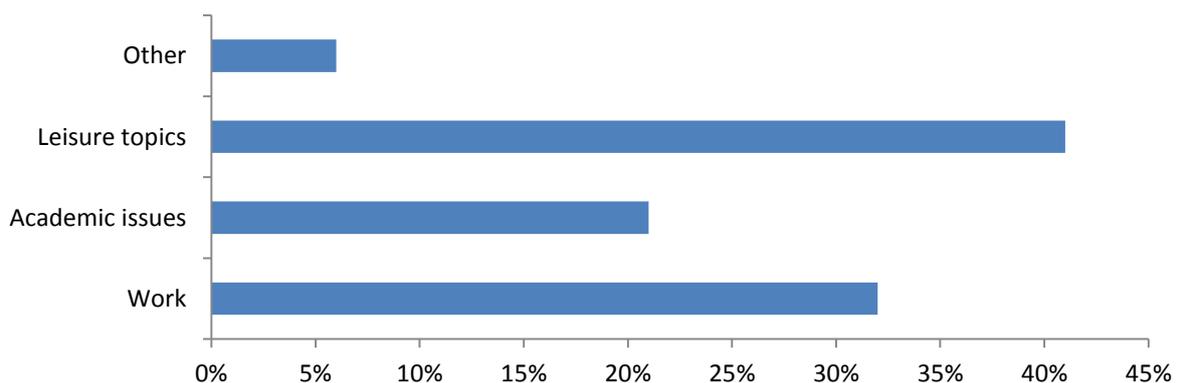
It might be assumed that young people who communicate online mostly use informal language forms, which is often treated as not beneficial for language learning. However, as we can see in figure 6, 70% of the participants use both formal and informal language forms, while 20% prefer using formal language and only 10% answered in favour of informal

language. These figures might be explained by the previous diagram and the fact that an overwhelming majority of the respondents use online communication for more than one purpose, therefore, they change the style of language accordingly.

In fact, while asked whether they think learning informal language forms is beneficial (item 9 in the interview), both interviewed respondents answered 'yes'. One of them claimed that switching to informal language makes a conversation go easily, which contributes to a relaxed atmosphere and positively influences the process of learning. The idea of socially appropriate speech proposed by Littlewood was discussed earlier in the theoretical section. According to the author of *Communicative Language Teaching*, informal spontaneous speech might develop positive relationships between language learners and is highly beneficial (1981: 30-32). Another respondent also noticed that learning informal language is absolutely a must and it takes more time to learn as it is changing over time. A conclusion might be made that online communication expands both formal and informal vocabulary forms as well as influences the learners' flexibility, the latter being highly needed in the changing realities, since it has been noted that nowadays new skills are required of effective language learners and workers. Therefore, online communication reduces the educational gap between traditional and new digital literacies (Kalatzis, Cope and Harvey, 2003: 23).

Figure 6 (item 7 in the questionnaire): What kind of English do you usually use while communicating online?

- Formal (20%)
- Informal (10%)
- Both (depends on situation)(70%)

The last diagram of this section presents the figures extracted from item 8 of the questionnaire. As we see, 95% of the respondents think their English vocabulary is expanding via online communication (figure 7). In fact, only 1 person out of 20 claimed online communication not to be helpful for vocabulary expansion. The results mean that online

communication helps to expand English vocabulary without intentionally focusing on learning.

Figure 7 (item 8 in the questionnaire): Do you think your English vocabulary is expanding via online communication?

■ Yes (95%)
■ No (5%)

Finally, we now move to the last three questions of the interview which relate to online communication as a tool for vocabulary learning used in class. Both respondents answered that online communication was not included in the English language learning syllabus at university. Such a response was expected by the researcher as it is known that in Lithuania language educators are most likely to use more traditional language teaching methods. The respondents were also asked if they believe online communication would be beneficial for language learners if it is a supplement to face-to-face communication. Both of the respondents were positive. The first one stated that online communication increases learners' motivation to learn new words as they become involved in interesting discussions. The other person claimed that as long as the online communication activities are chosen properly by the educators, it might be highly helpful. According to the same person, a variety of learning activities might improve the quality of teaching.

It is also interesting that both respondents claim they would feel more open to participate in online discussion than talk in class. Firstly, it is mentioned that online communication provides an opportunity to be on the same level, while in-class discussions are usually led by the most active students. Thus, online communication provides a great opportunity of a new identity formation. Taking into account the results of the study taken by Hanna and de Nooy, a conclusion can be made that sometimes acquiring a new identity in the teaching process might give positive results (2009: 115-116). Secondly, online reality gives you an advantage of time, which is usually needed for non-native speakers to express themselves and facilitates interaction for less active students.

We now move to the strategies that are used and perceived to be helpful by online communication users. These strategies are presented in the next two subsections.

3.2 The Strategies Used by Online Communication Users

There are all in all eight strategies discussed in this section. We start with determination strategies (DET) and then move on to the social ones (SOC). DET are presented by Schmitt as 'the strategies used by an individual when faced with discovering a new word's meaning without recourse to another person's expertise', while SOC is using interaction with other people to improve language learning (Schmitt, 2000: 135). All the results depicted in the diagrams in this section are taken from the questionnaire data (section 2: items 9-16). The very first question concerning the use of vocabulary learning strategies during online communication is related to analysing the part of speech of a word with unknown meaning. The results are presented in figure 8.

Figure 8 (item 9 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you analyse a part of speech

■ Yes (85 %)
■ No (15%)

As we can see 85% out of the respondents answered positively, while only 15% answered negatively to this question. Such an imbalance might be caused by the fact that all the participants have a high level of English and have no difficulty in analysing sentence structure even without understanding some words. We might expect to see quite a similar figure in the next question. However, as we can see from figure 9, only 40% of the same people analyse affixes and roots. Such a difference might be a result of being aware of the fact that analysing the structure of an unknown word might take much time, while online communication often happens synchronously and other strategies might be chosen as a quicker option.

Figure 9 (item 10 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you analyse affixes and roots

- Yes (40%)
- No (60%)

The next two strategies included in the questionnaire are the use of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. As we can see from figure 10 and 11, bilingual dictionaries are a very popular tool of discovering a new word's meaning as 100% of the respondents use it. The fact that 55% of those respondents use both bilingual and monolingual dictionaries is still very positive and might be explained by the fact that students are highly encouraged to use monolingual dictionaries in class by English language educators in Lithuania.

Figure 10 (item 11 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you use a monolingual dictionary

- Yes (55%)
- No (45%)

Figure 11 (item 12 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you use a bilingual dictionary

■ Yes (100%)

■ No (0%)

Guessing from textual context is another strategy among the most popular ways to find out an unknown word's meaning. This is done by 90% of all the respondents. Such a figure probably indicates that online communication has some similarities with face-to-face interaction and guessing from context here might be treated as a substitute for gaining information from body language and intonation (figure 12).

Figure 12 (item 13 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you guess from textual context

■ Yes (90%)

■ No (10%)

It is not surprising that cognates are hardly used by the respondents at all (80% answered no – figure 13). All the respondents speak Lithuanian as their native tongue. The Lithuanian language belongs to the Balto-Slavic branch of the Indo-European language family and is quite different from English and all West Germanic languages. Although there are some words that are pronounced or spelled in a similar way, this is usually a case of borrowing and often the meaning changes with time. An example of such case is a word 'aktual-us' (Lith.) that is usually misinterpreted as 'actual' (Eng.). As different forms of the same word exist in many European languages, it might be guessed that it was inherited from the same old language but has changed its meaning. In order to see the difference, it is helpful to refer to a

dictionary. By definition, actual means existing in fact or real, which is usually used to emphasize the important aspect of something (Oxford Dictionaries Online). However, if we are to see what 'aktual-us' (Lith.) means in English, we will come up with a translation such as 'urgent.' (Alkonas-Anglonas Lithuanian to English Online Dictionary).

Figure 13 (item 14 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you check for L1 cognate

- Yes (20%)
- No (80%)

We now move on to the social strategies, which are related to communication as a means to find out a new word's meaning. Figure 14 and 15 show exactly the same percentage: 45% of the respondents ask an online interlocutor for a paraphrase or synonym, and 45% discover new meaning through online group work activity. Although some people gave similar answers to both of the questions, there are several cases of inconsistency. This shows that more than half of the respondents in general use social strategies and are open to using communication for learning.

Figure 14 (item 15 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you ask whoever you are communicating to for a paraphrase or synonym

- Yes (45%)
- No (55%)

Figure 15 (item 16 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you discover new meaning through online group work activity

■ Yes (45%)
■ No (55%)

It might be noticed that the most popular vocabulary learning strategies among the respondents are using a bilingual dictionary, guessing from context and analysing a part of speech. The respondents prefer using non-communicational ways to discover new meanings even in a communicative situation. A conclusion might be made that traditional tools (using dictionaries, analysing sentence structure) are still more used and therefore English language learners of an advanced level in Lithuania rarely benefit from communication as a tool for discovering new meanings.

The next section of the analysis is devoted to the vocabulary learning strategies perceived to be helpful by online communication users. This section is very important as while studying learning strategies, it should be kept in mind that the study is for the benefit of the learner and we must consider the learner's feelings (Schmitt, 1997: 216). In order to find out the attitudes towards various vocabulary learning strategies, we now move to the data extracted from the questionnaire answers and summarized in the diagrams provided below. The analysis is also enriched with the email interview answers provided by two randomly chosen participants of the survey.

3.3 The Strategies Perceived to be Helpful by Online Communication Users

In order to find out which strategies are perceived to be helpful the respondents were asked if they think certain vocabulary learning strategies might be helpful when they come across a new word or expression during online communication. The diagrams presented in this section are based on the third section of the questionnaire (items 17-24). The strategies are the same as they were in the previous section and are listed in the same order.

We first start with determination strategies, and find out that as much as 80% of all the respondents find it helpful to analyse a part of speech in order to discover a new word's meaning, while 20% think it is not (figure 16). The reason of such an imbalance might be partially explained by the interview answers provided by two people selected out of all the respondents. One of the interviewed respondents claims that in English the same word can be used as a noun, verb or adverb, and analysing a part of speech sometimes helps us guess the meaning without looking the word up in a dictionary. Another interviewed person answers that knowing a part of speech is essential as it can add a lot to the meaning.

Figure 16 (item 17 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you think it might be helpful to analyse a part of speech

■ Yes (80%)
■ No (20%)

In comparison to figure 17, much fewer people find it helpful to analyse affixes and roots. 55% answered positively, while 45% answered negatively. We are lucky to have both negative and positive choices explained in the interview. One respondent claims that by analysing affixes and roots we can get an idea of what a word means as they usually carry some meaning. An example given by the same person is a negative affix un- from which we can get an idea that the word is 'not something'. In contrast to this answer, another respondent claims that even the words with similar roots might have completely different meaning and analysing affixes and roots might be misleading. Both the questionnaire data and the interview answers provided above show that there is no clear distinction whether analysing affixes and roots is a helpful strategy or not. This might be explained by the fact that although English is an open system language and a great number of words appear through word-formation, a certain percent of English vocabulary is borrowed from other languages, which makes word structure analysis a complex issue.

Figure 17 (item 18 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you think it might be helpful to analyse affixes and roots

■ Yes (55%)

■ No (45%)

Speaking about monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, a clear difference might be seen between the data pictured in figure 18 and 19. 100% of the respondents perceive monolingual dictionaries to be helpful, while only half of them answered the same way about bilingual dictionaries. The visible preference of a monolingual dictionary as a tool to discover a new word's meaning over a bilingual one is explained by the fact that a monolingual dictionary allows us to comprehend a broad meaning, which is not restricted to a translation counterpart as it is noted by one of the respondent. As in many other European languages, there are a number of translation gaps in English; therefore, monolingual dictionaries are treated as a better choice. For instance, such thing as afternoon tea might be translated into Lithuanian but the translation would consist of 3-5 words and a translator would need to add some context in order to be precise as in Lithuania there is no such tradition as afternoon tea. Therefore, if a language learner uses a monolingual dictionary, he might find that an English definition is more useful.

Figure 18 (item 19 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you think it might be helpful to use a monolingual dictionary

■ Yes (100%)

■ No (0%)

Although using a bilingual dictionary takes less time and effort, one of the participants notices that it is easy to forget the translation, which makes us use the dictionary for the second and even third time. Moreover, as mentioned above, the translation may not have exactly the same meaning and be inappropriate in a certain context.

Figure 19 (item 20 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you think it might be helpful to use a bilingual dictionary

- Yes (50%)
- No (50%)

Guessing from textual context is perceived as quite a helpful strategy. As we can see in figure 20, 75% think that it is so, while 25% do not. The respondent, who answered positively, explained her preference by the fact that sometimes context gives a better clue of a word's meaning than a dictionary. Moreover, according to the same person, guessing positively influences the memorization process. In contrast, another respondent, who perceives the strategy to be not helpful, claims that sometimes textual context might be ambiguous and mislead the reader. Thus, although most of the respondents find guessing from textual context to be helpful, a fourth of all the participants do not share this opinion.

Figure 20 (item 21 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you think it might be helpful to guess from textual context

- Yes (75%)
- No (25%)

As mentioned in the previous section, the Lithuanian language does not belong to the same branch of the Indo-European language family as English. It is common that the words that

sound similar but have different meanings are addressed in the English language classes in Lithuania and students are aware of 'false friends'. Probably, that is why most of the respondents (85%) do not perceive checking for the first language cognate as a helpful strategy (figure 21).

Figure 21 (item 22 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you think it might be helpful to check for L1 cognate (night-naktis)

- Yes (15%)
- No (85%)

Finally, we now move to the items that ask the respondents whether they perceive social strategies to be helpful in discovering new meanings. As we can see in figure 22 and 23, 100% think it is helpful to ask an online interlocutor for a paraphrase or synonym, and almost the same number of people (95%) feel that discovering a new meaning through online group work activity is beneficial. Therefore, social strategies are believed to be highly useful by an overwhelming majority of the respondents. While explaining their choice, the interview participants state that asking for a meaning is more beneficial than looking a word up in a dictionary as it takes less time and does not restrict you to the narrow meaning provided by a translation. The idea of collaboration in learning, which is positively perceived by the respondents, might be explained by the theory of a supportive dialogue presented by L. Vygotsky. According to him, scaffolding plays a big role in the process of learning and helps learners achieve a desired outcome (Mitchell and Myles, 2004: 196-197).

Figure 22 (item 23 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you think it might be helpful to ask whoever you are communicating to for a paraphrase or synonym of a new word

■ Yes (100%)
■ No (0%)

Speaking about participation in online group work activity, one of the interviewed participants notices that while being involved in something interesting together you can learn new words without even noticing. As we have already discussed in the theoretical part (page 7), learning that is situated in practice can give very positive results as engaging in the same activity brings people together and shifts the focus away from teaching. Thus, according to the same authors, language learning should be treated as talking within a practice.

Figure 23 (item 24 in the questionnaire): When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, you think it might be helpful to discover new meaning through online group work activity

■ Yes (95%)
■ No (5%)

The next subsection of the analysis consists of a detailed comparison of the most used vocabulary learning strategies and the strategies perceived to be the most helpful. Such a comparison is necessary in order to draw some conclusions about whether learners might be willing to use the strategies they are not using. This information is essential both for language educators and learners as it helps to organize the learning process.

3.4 Used Strategies vs. Helpful Strategies

The analysis provided below is based on the figures presented in table 1. We compare the strategies that are the most used by language learners and the strategies that are believed to be the most helpful. 8 kinds of strategies are put into the same table. They are ranked according to how many people answered 'yes' in the questionnaire. The number of people is provided in a column next to the strategy name.

Table 1. A comparison of the most used and the most helpful vocabulary learning strategies

Rank	Most Used Strategies	Number of People	Most Helpful Strategies	Number of People
1.	Using a bilingual dictionary	20	Using a monolingual dictionary	20
2.	Guessing from textual context	18	Asking for a paraphrase/synonym	20
3.	Analysing a part of speech	17	Discovering new meaning through online group work	19
4.	Using a monolingual dictionary	11	Analysing a part of speech	16
5.	Asking for a paraphrase/synonym	9	Guessing from textual context	15
6.	Discovering new meaning through online group work	9	Analysing affixes and roots	11
7.	Analysing affixes and roots	8	Using a bilingual dictionary	10
8.	Checking for L1 cognate	4	Checking for L1 cognate	3

From the figures in table 1, we can see that the most used and the most helpful strategies ranked at the top are not the same. First of all, 100% of the respondents use a bilingual dictionary but only 50% of those people believe it to be helpful. However, although 100% think using a monolingual dictionary is helpful, only 55% actually use it. This is quite interesting to know as it indicates that using a dictionary is still a very popular vocabulary learning strategy. It is important to notice that the language learners who participated in the

survey have a positive attitude towards monolingual dictionaries and might be ready to replace a bilingual dictionary by a monolingual one.

We can also notice that, apart from using a bilingual dictionary, the most used strategies are individual determination strategies that include guessing from textual context (90%) and analysing a part of speech (85%). In contrast, the top ranked helpful strategies are social strategies: 100% think it is helpful to ask for a paraphrase or synonym and 95% believe it is beneficial to participate in an online group work activity. In comparison, only 45% of all the respondents actually use communication as a vocabulary learning tool. This distinction is very important for the study as it means that although the respondents prefer to discover new meanings individually, they are open to social strategies and perceive them to be beneficial. Such results might also mean that the language learners might be willing to try social strategies if they are introduced to them by the educators.

From the comparison of the strategies provided above, we also can see that analysing a part of speech is not only quite popular (85%) but is perceived to be quite helpful as well (80%). In fact, the difference between the figures is very small.

Finally, analysing affixes and roots is not widely used and is not perceived to be helpful, while checking for a Lithuanian cognate is the least used and the least helpful strategy.

3.5 Overall Discussion

Taking into account all the information presented in the previous analysis subsections, certain conclusions might be made.

Firstly, we have to note that the majority of the respondents communicate online without any intentions to improve their English vocabulary. The participants also tend to use more than one kind of online communication, of which writing emails and short messages are the most popular ones. Both emails and short messages are asynchronous forms of communication which have time advantage over synchronous types of online interaction. Of all the topics, the respondents mostly chose leisure and work. There is no clear imbalance between formal and informal style of language used online as the majority claimed to use both depending on the situation. An overwhelming majority claimed that their English vocabulary is expanding via online communication, which is very important for the study. Finally, the interview answers

show the respondents' positive attitudes towards online communication as a part of the English language syllabus.

Speaking about the most used and the most helpful vocabulary learning strategies, a clear imbalance might be noticed. The most used strategy among the respondents is the use of a bilingual dictionary, while it is far from being the most helpful. Briefly, the three most used strategies (the use of a bilingual dictionary, guessing from textual context and analysing a part of speech) are all the determination strategies, while the three most helpful strategies are both determination (the use of a monolingual dictionary) and social (asking for a synonym/paraphrase and participating in online group work) strategies. The figures presented in the analysis indicate that although the respondents prefer to discover new meanings individually, they perceive social strategies to be beneficial and might be open to use them in future.

The results of the study might be helpful for language educators. The high ratings of the social strategies helpfulness and the respondents' willingness to use online communication as a vocabulary learning activity might help to organize the teaching syllabus in the most beneficial way. However, the teachers should not forget that online communication as well as any learning activity should be supervised. First, the strategies should be introduced to the learners and practiced under supervision. Second, a constant feedback should be given to the students. Finally, both students and teachers should be active in evaluating and developing the strategy use.

4. Summary and Conclusion

This essay has investigated vocabulary learning strategies both used and perceived to be helpful by English learners during online communication. The method chosen for the research is a questionnaire with a follow-up email interview. The participants of the study are 20 young female Lithuanian English learners who use online communication at least twice per week.

The results of the research show that in general, most of the respondents improve their English vocabulary via online communication unintentionally. A great majority of the participants are experienced users of different kinds of online interaction and use Internet to talk about leisure and work issues. It is important to notice that the most used and the most

helpful vocabulary learning strategies are not the same. Although it is popular to discover a new word's meaning individually, all the respondents claimed that asking an online interlocutor for a paraphrase or synonym is beneficial. The results are important both for language educators and learners as they might help to improve the traditional language teaching and learning methods.

The study has some limitations as the sample is not representative of a wider population. It would be interesting to see whether the same study with a larger sample of Lithuanian English learners would give similar results. Also, future research could compare vocabulary learning strategies used by online communication users of different countries and make some suggestions for the language education systems of those areas.

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Appendix I

Learning English via Online Communication

We would like to ask you to help us by answering the following questions concerning learning English as a second language via online communication. This survey is conducted by a student of Kristianstad University, Sweden. This is not a test so there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. The questionnaire consists of three sections, in which we will ask you for some general background information, your vocabulary learning strategies and your attitudes towards learning strategies. Please give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. Thank you very much for your help.

Section 1. In the following section we would like you to answer some questions concerning general background information.

Name: _____

Age: _____

1. Is Lithuanian your first language?
   A Yes   B No
2. Is English your second (non-native) language?
   A Yes   B No
3. Formal education in English
   A Bachelor Degree   B Master Degree
4. What kind of non-verbal online communication in English do you use at least twice per week (you can choose several options)?
   A Participation in public/private chat (a fast paced exchange)
   B Writing emails
   C Communication via short messages (no need for quick response)
   D Participating in discussion forums*
   E Keeping a blog**
   F Other _____
5. Do you communicate online intentionally to improve your vocabulary?
   A Yes   B No
6. Online communication you take part in is mostly related to (you can choose several options):
   A Work
   B Academic issues
   C Leisure topics
   D Other _____
7. What kind of English do you usually use while communicating online?
   A Formal   B Informal   C Both (depends on situation)
8. Do you think your English vocabulary is expanding via online communication?
   A Yes   B No

* Discussion forum is a web-based bulletin board with discussion threads organised by themes or topics. People do not have to be connected to the Internet at the same time to read the messages.

** Blogs are websites that consist of regularly updated journal-style entries that are usually displayed in reverse chronological order. Blogs might be commercial or personal, and usually have comments function.

Section 2. In the following section we would like you to answer (yes/no) according to what you do to discover a new word's meaning during online communication.

When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online:

9. You analyse a part of speech Yes/No
10. You analyse affixes and roots Yes/No
11. You use a monolingual dictionary Yes/No
12. You use a bilingual dictionary Yes/No
13. You guess from textual context Yes/No
14. You check for L1 cognate (night-naktis) Yes/No
15. You ask whoever you are communicating to for a paraphrase or synonym of a new word Yes/No
16. You discover new meaning through online group work activity Yes/No

Section 3. In this section we would like you to answer (yes/no) according to what you find to be helpful when you need to discover a new word's meaning during online communication. Notice that the following section concerns your attitudes, not the strategies you use.

When you come across a new word/expression while communicating online, what you think might be helpful:

17. To analyse part of speech Yes/No
18. To analyse affixes and roots Yes/No
19. To use a monolingual dictionary Yes/No
20. To use a bilingual dictionary Yes/No
21. To guess from textual context Yes/No
22. To check for L1 cognate (night-naktis) Yes/No
23. To ask whoever you are communicating to for a paraphrase or synonym of a new word Yes/No
24. To discover new meaning through online group work activity Yes/No

Would you like to participate in the follow-up online interview? Yes/No

Thank you for your time!

Appendix II

Interview

Please answer the questions provided below in 2-3 sentences. Please give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. Thank you very much for your help.

1. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning analysing part of speech?
2. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning analysing affixes and roots?
3. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning using a monolingual dictionary?
4. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning using a bilingual dictionary?
5. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to guess from textual context?
6. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to check for a Lithuanian cognate (night-naktis)?
7. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to ask your online interlocutor for a paraphrase or synonym?
8. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning through online group work activity?
9. Do you think learning informal language forms is beneficial? Why?
10. Was online communication a part of your English language learning syllabus at university/college?
11. Do you think using online communication as a vocabulary expansion in-class exercise might be beneficial for foreign language learners? Why? (Taking into account that in will not replace face-to-face communication)
12. Would you feel more open while participating in online discussions than talking in class? Why?
13. Do you prefer using synchronous or asynchronous online communication? Why?

Appendix III

Interview answers Nr 1.

Please answer the questions provided below in 2-3 sentences. Please give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. Thank you very much for your help.

1. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning analysing part of speech? *It is helpful analysing a new word's part of speech because the same word can be used as a noun, a verb or an adverb: analysing a part of speech sometimes makes you guess the word's meaning without consulting a dictionary.*
2. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning analysing affixes and roots? *I think it is not helpful to analyse affixes and roots when discovering a new word's meaning: as a rule they do not carry the meaning. Even words with similar roots might have completely different meaning.*
3. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning using a monolingual dictionary? *It is helpful to discover a new word's meaning using a monolingual language as it allows you to comprehend a broad meaning, not restricting this meaning to a narrow meaning provided by its translation counterpart.*
4. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning using a bilingual dictionary? *To some extent it is helpful to discover a new word's meaning using a bilingual dictionary as it provides a word's counterpart in one's native language. On the other hand, this counterpart may not have exactly the same meaning and may be even inappropriate when applied in one's native language in certain context.*
5. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to guess from textual context? *It is helpful to guess from textual context as sometimes context might give you a better clue to the word's meaning than a dictionary. Moreover, when occurring in certain context, the words are easier to get memorised.*
6. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to check for a Lithuanian cognate (night-naktis)? *Checking for a Lithuanian cognate might totally confuse the meaning as similar cognate might stand for different meaning in different languages.*
7. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to ask your online interlocutor for a paraphrase or synonym? *It is helpful to ask your online interlocutor for a paraphrase or synonym as it gives you a clue to the meaning but does not restrict you to only one narrow meaning which happens if the word is translated to one's native language.*
8. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning through online group work activity? *It is helpful as you get involved in interesting activity and it motivates you to learn new words, they get memorised quicker*
9. Do you think learning informal language forms is beneficial? *Why? Yes, it is beneficial. When you switch to informal language it makes a conversation go easier and contributes to quicker language learning. Informal language forms create informal context in which it is psychologically easier to relax.*

10. Was online communication a part of your English language learning syllabus at university/college? *No.*
11. Do you think using online communication as a vocabulary expansion in-class exercise might be beneficial for foreign language learners? Why? (Taking into account that in will not replace face-to-face communication) *Yes, it might be beneficial for foreign language learners. It allows learners to learn new words from the textual context plus online communication increases learners' motivation to learn new words as they become involved in interesting themes and strive to learn the meaning of the unknown words.*
12. Would you feel more open while participating in online discussions than talking in class? Why? *Yes, I would feel more open and confident in online discussions as it is not face-to-face conversation, you can take your time to think and to express yourself correctly.*
13. Do you prefer using synchronous or asynchronous online communication? Why? *I prefer to use asynchronous online communication as it gives an opportunity to take your time and to formulate your idea, synchronous online communication can make you nervous as it encourages you to answer quickly.*

Appendix IV

Interview answers Nr 2

Please answer the questions provided below in 2-3 sentences. Please give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. Thank you very much for your help.

1. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning analysing part of speech? *I think it is very helpful. Sometimes knowing part of speech adds a lot to the meaning.*

2. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning analysing affixes and roots? *It is helpful. Usually affixes and roots carry some meaning, so by analysing them we can get an idea what a word means. For example, an affix un- carries a negative meaning, and we can guess that it is 'not' something.*

3. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning using a monolingual dictionary? *Monolingual dictionaries take a lot of time, but are totally worth it. Apart from learning a new meaning, we can also see it in context and probably learn how to say the same thing in different words.*

4. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning using a bilingual dictionary? *I guess using a bilingual dictionary is an easy way. It takes just a second and then usually it takes exactly the same time to forget the meaning and look for it for the second and third time. So, no, not helpful.*

5. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to guess from textual context? *Not helpful. Often, the context is ambiguous and might mislead us.*

6. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to check for a Lithuanian cognate (night-naktis)? *Not helpful. Maybe it is in some languages, but not Lithuanian. I used to think that 'aktualus' is 'actual' in English, but it has a different meaning. It is not the only case.*

7. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to ask your online interlocutor for a paraphrase or synonym? *It is helpful. Asking for a meaning might be remembered better than searching through a dictionary, and takes less time. Communication is often the best way to learn new things.*

8. Why do you think it is/is not helpful to discover a new word's meaning through online group work activity? *As I mentioned asking somebody is absolutely helpful. It gets even better if it is a group of people involved into a discussion or any other activity. You can learn new words without noticing by actually doing something.*

9. Do you think learning informal language forms is beneficial? Why? *I think informal language takes more time to learn as it is changing over time and is absolutely a must. This is an authentic part of any language and there is no reason to avoid learning or using it.*

10. Was online communication a part of your English language learning syllabus at university/college? *No, just face-to-face interaction.*

11. Do you think using online communication as a vocabulary expansion in-class exercise might be beneficial for foreign language learners? Why? (Taking into account that in

will not replace face-to-face communication) *The activities should be chosen properly (I guess exchanging emoticons would not help a lot) but in general it is a communication, it helps to learn language. A variety of activities is always better than monotony.*

12. Would you feel more open while participating in online discussions than talking in class? Why? *I would. There are usually a couple of students leading discussions in class. I sometimes feel my English is not good enough, or my ideas are not bright enough. Chatting online makes me a brave person sometimes!*

13. Do you prefer using synchronous or asynchronous online communication? Why? *I prefer using asynchronous communication when it touches upon serious issues (work) and I need some time to edit the written text and even check a dictionary. When I chat with my friends, I prefer using synchronous interaction, you get more information in a short time, and sentences are not complete, just the way the sound in a dialogue.*