Name: Haikal Mohd Ash'ari
Matric. No.: U1830879D

HG2052 Assignment 1: Analysis of a medium of communication

HelloTalk

Description of HelloTalk

HelloTalk is a "conversation-based mobile assisted language app that claims to make cultural immersion, language learning, and practice easy, engaging, and intuitive as it allows users to synchronously connect and chat with native speakers from all around the world." (Rivera, 2017) With over 12 million users from over 190 countries, supporting over 150 languages, HelloTalk is poised to become one of the most inclusive online language chat apps worldwide. (HelloTalk User Report, 2018)

Summary of literature

Online language learning and intercultural exchange have attracted the attention of people worldwide since the mid-nineties (Alsahil, 2016). It has been revealed that those who are more willing to learn language online are more likely to succeed at learning the language (Cinkara & Bagceci, 2013). However, there are some difficulties of online language learning that students face, one of which being the difficulty of interaction and collaboration (Sun, 2014). Such interaction and collaboration could be facilitated through social media and social networking interfaces, as posited by Alsahil (2016) who described the use of social networking sites like Facebook as a good method of promoting language learning, claiming that "the semiotic design and various semiotic resources of Facebook (e.g. multimodal posts, sharing, notification, friending, semi-automated features, etc.) afford students' engagement in intercultural discussion, students' collaboration, and students' interpersonal relationship building". Rivera (2017) then describes the HelloTalk app and its features, noting its similarities to social networking service (SNS) platforms, and evaluates its technological and pedagogical features, coming to the conclusion that "The navigable interface, variety of educational and social interactional mediums, learning tools, and customizability gives learners of different proficiency levels and learning styles the chance to meet and practice with conversational partners."

Name: Haikal Mohd Ash'ari
Matric. No.: U1830879D

Properties of medium

Speech	Text
Time-bound* video, calls, audio	Space-bound* private chat, public statuses
Spontaneous* video, calls	Contrived* private chat, public statuses, audio
Face-to-face* video	Visually decontextualized* private chat, public statuses
Loosely structured* video, calls	Elaborately structured* private chat, public statuses, audio
Socially interactive* video, calls, audio, comments	Factually communicative* private chat, public statuses
Immediately revisable* video, calls	Repeatedly revisable* private chat, public statuses, audio
Prosodically rich* video, calls, audio	Graphically rich* private chat, public statuses

Figure 1. Crystal's (2006) Seven Features in Distinguishing Communication Mediums Using David Crystal's Seven Features in Distinguishing Communication Mediums (2006), HelloTalk has elements of both speech and text. That is due to the availability of varying mediums, such as written text, speech-to-text, recorded audio messages and video chats Each medium has its corresponding distinguishing feature, some of which are indicated above in Figure 1. Some mediums are more speech-like, including video calls and voice calls, and some are more text-like, including audio messages, as well as text-based mediums like private chats and public status updates.
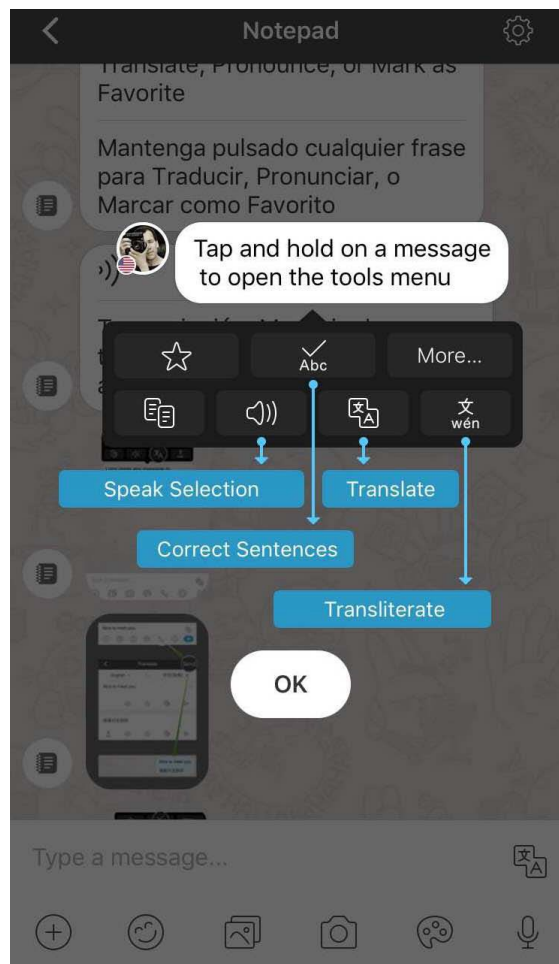
Figure 2. Features included in the HelloTalk mobile app. Taken from the HelloTalk app on Google Play.

Other than the various mediums present on HelloTalk, there are also other features present within the app that make it such a great tool for language learning, such as partner correction, translation and transliteration in written samples, as well as text-to-voice for those needing help with pronunciation.

Additionally, the app has additional features that are common to SNSs. For example, learners are able to send emojis, stickers, and cards within the chats themselves, as well as publish status updates with text and pictures, referred to as moments in the app. This information appears on the feeds of other users who can like or comment on the moment. (Rivera, 2017)

Name: Haikal Mohd Ash'ari
Matric. No.: U1830879D

Comparison to normal SNS

Figure 3. A user receiving a correction on his moment from another user. Taken from the HelloTalk app on Google Play.

The use of the correction feature encourages more standard language use, especially at beginner stages of learning the language. It is easy for people to post status updates and send private chat messages, and even easier to edit them for correctness. Looking at Figure 1, the user 'Seorin' is having their English corrected by another user, 'nampluskorea'. This is as simple as clicking on the post in particular and editing the post. All corrections will then automatically appear separately below the original post. This means that most posts written in the target language (TL) of the speaker will eventually be written in its standard form with few errors. Normal SNS platforms lack this feature and hence misspellings, grammar errors, truncated and abbreviated words, and other forms of word salad run amok.

Figure 4. A user posting a moment with generally correct standard English and colloquial language use. Taken from the HelloTalk app on Google Play.

At later stages of language learning, where basics are successfully mastered, more colloquial, non-standard language is generally used. As seen in Figure 4, the use of the word 'kinda' in the context of the surrounding sentence feels completely natural, albeit more speech-like. This is a natural progression when it comes to foreign language learning (Concordia University, 2018) and it is what marks it as different from normal SNS. In normal SNS colloquial language is used for the sake of convenience but in HelloTalk colloquial language in the TL of the speaker can be taken as a sign of mastery of the basics, especially when used properly together with standard language.

Name: Haikal Mohd Ash'ari
Matric. No.: U1830879D

New kinds of communications enabled

There are no new types of communications enabled in particular. The features used in HelloTalk are very similar to other SNS or social media apps out there, and hence most methods of communication featured in those apps will be present in HelloTalk as well.

General effect on language and society

Despite having no new kinds of communication, language chat apps like HelloTalk increase the confidence of people to communicate in their desired TL. Being able to use a language is what strengthens one's knowledge of the language (Lomba, 2015), and HelloTalk provides a platform with many mediums to do so.

Such apps also decentralise language learning from the classroom and put it in the hands of individuals. There is no subscription needed to use most features like chat or status updates, making language learning more affordable and accessible.

However, the premium version allows the user to learn multiple languages at once, disables ads, provides better search and translation results, and provides exclusive stickers and cards. (Rivera, 2017)

Conclusion

HelloTalk has affected online language learning and communication in many ways. Speaking to people online and learning about their language and culture has never been more accessible, and in an age where the norm is to shorten and mold words and messages to fit into a certain character limit or to convey conveniently, HelloTalk promotes the use of standard forms of various languages, but allows the user to still use colloquial forms if they see fit. This allows users to learn a language more effectively as they learn how to use language in different contexts and modalities.

Name: Haikal Mohd Ash'ari
Matric. No.: U1830879D

References

5 Stages of Second Language Acquisition. (2018, December 24). Retrieved from

https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/five-stages-of-second-language-acquisition/

Alsahil, A. (2016). Social Networking Mediated Intercultural Communicative Competence: Affordances and Constraints (dissertation). ProQuest LLC, Ann Arbor, MI.

Cinkara, E., & Bagceci, B. (2013). Learners' attitudes towards online language learning; and corresponding success rates. Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education, 14(2), 118–130.

Lomba, A. (2015, April 13). The "Silent Period" in Language Acquisition: Truth or Myth? Retrieved from

https://www.analomba.com/anas-blog/the-silent-period-in-language-acquisition-truth-or-myth/

Rivera, A. V. (2017). HelloTalk. CALICO Journal, 34(3), 384–392. doi: 10.1558/cj.32432

Sun, S. Y. H. (2014). Learner perspectives on fully online language learning. Distance Education, 35(1), 18–42. doi: 10.1080/01587919.2014.891428

Who is on HelloTalk? Get the Data! (2019, January 23). Retrieved from https://blog.hellotalk.com/hellotalk-user-report/

HelloTalk, Inc. (2018). HelloTalk (Version 3.7.0) [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from http://play.google.com/