Ch@t @lign – Language learning via text messaging

Text chat (e.g., whatsapp) is a pervasive means of 21st century communication. In a superdiverse world, many people write these digitally mediated messages in another language than their mother tongue. To date, little is known, how text chat might support second language (L2) learning. In this presentation, I will elaborate on my recent work into text chat as a site for second language acquisition (SLA).

First, I will show in what ways the specific characteristics of text chat (e.g., visual salience and permanence) create an ideal context for L2 learning. In the following, I will present my own research on socio-cognitive processes underlying alignment during L2 text chat. Linguistic alignment, that is, our tendency to adopt the morphosyntactic and lexical structures of a conversational partner, has received growing attention in SLA, for example, tackling the question whether alignment in an L2 draws on largely implicit or explicit processes (cf., Costa, Pickering & Sorace, 2008).

I will showcase my research into digitally mediated L2 alignment investigating various source and target languages (e.g., German in the UK, Spanish in Germany) by triangulating different methodologies such as corpus techniques and eye-tracking, and examined alignment in classroom-based interaction in high-schools as well as during lab-based experiments with university students. In the discussion, I will highlight how alignment differs according to morphosyntactic/lexical structure, contextual factors (e.g., interactional partner), proficiency and target language.