

Skype を利用した Language Exchange パートナーを探すためのサイト Mixxer の
開発と日本語授業への利用例

**DEVELOPEMENT OF THE MIXXER: THE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE
FOR FINDING LANGUAGE EXCHANGE PARTNERS USING SKYPE
AND IT'S APPLICATION FOR THE JAPANESE CLASSROOM**

Akiko Meguro, 目黒秋子 Dickinson College

meguroa@dickinson.edu

Todd Bryant, Dickinson College

bryantt@dickinson.edu

Abstract: Having a computer connected with broadband has become commonplace. In addition, emergent technologies related to communication via the Internet have become prominent. We developed “The Mixxer”, a social networking website, in order to facilitate the language exchanges using voice chat software, Skype. The three main functions of the Mixxer are: (1) the ability to find individual language learners, (2) the ability to find another instructor for class to class exchanges, and (3) the ability to schedule a language exchange event by which instructors can advertise a time for individual language learners to contact their students. In this presentation, we will introduce the functions of the Mixxer and the applications of the language exchanges using Skype in the Japanese classrooms.

Keyword: language exchange, Skype, VOIP, voice chat, Japanese class

1. INTRODUCTION

For foreign language learners and educators overseas, lack of opportunities to communicate with native speakers had been an obstacle in learning and teaching the target languages. However, with the recent prevalence of broadband connections and the emergence of Internet related technologies, it is now possible and easy to have regular conversations with native speakers at school or even at home, inexpensively and easily. The authors developed the social networking site, the Mixxer, in order to connect individual learners and language teachers to the target language native speakers. There are great number of Japanese native speakers who are willing to talk with our students in Japanese in exchange of speaking English or another target language.

2. WHAT IS SKYPE

Skype is free telephony software using VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) technology. The quality and reliability of VoIP technology has increased remarkably over the past few years. Using this software, international conversation becomes free as long as both ends have access to the Internet, and a computer with Skype installed.

Calling is also available to any phone around the world for a fee, generally two cents per minute. Skype users can also text chat and send files between computers running Mac, Linux, and Windows. Since users can log in from any computer and still keep the same account, they're not tied to a single location. The combination of these capabilities in Skype make language exchanges between large groups of students or on an individual basis and according to their own schedules realistic.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIXXER

We developed the social networking site, the Mixxer, in order to facilitate the language exchanges using Skype technology. Foreign language learners create a profile when they sign up for the site specifying their own target language, native language, age, and interests. Once completed, they can then enter the site and search for an exchange partners that matches their own profile. Skype online status is also displayed allowing users in the Mixxer to contact each other directly and immediately from the site. A message function also allows users to send a perspective language partner who is offline on Skype an email via the Mixxer instead.

The Mixxer has basic three functions: finding partners for individual exchanges, class exchanges and the event function, in which, the instructor invites native speakers of the target language to their scheduled session, such as their class time.

1. Individual learner's exchanges

Students or language learners can find the language exchange partners on the Mixxer and engage in language exchanges with the partners on their own at the time and place of convenience.

2. Class to class exchanges

Language teachers can sign up on the Mixxer to look for a partner class or a partner instructor with information such as students' native language, target language, age group, number of students, date and time of exchanges they wish. Teachers can also search for a partner class on the Mixxer.

3. Language exchange event function

A language teacher can advertise a language exchange event on the date and the time they wish. They can schedule the time frame during their regular class time or the time the language lab is available. An invitation is sent out to all Mixxer users whose target and native language make them matches for the organizer's students. The language learners who received the invitation are instructed to sign up for the event on the Mixxer site. The organizing teacher can then view their information, including skype name and e-mail address, so that they can give out instruction or contact them on the language exchange event day. This provides a great deal of flexibility to teachers who have been unable to find a partner class and/or have had difficulties due to class size or scheduling issues.

4. APPLICATION FOR THE JAPANESE CLASSROOM

Here are some examples how the Mixxer is/was used for language exchanges in Japanese classroom at Dickinson College.

1. Individual learner exchanges:

Instructors can suggest individual language exchanges as conversational practice as bonus points or an assignment. Students can find a language exchange partner on the Mixxer and have conversation on their own at the time and place of their convenience. Skype conversation is easily recordable on recording software such as Audacity or Pamela and submit the recordings to the instructor. Interview project are another possible assignment for Intermediate or Advanced learners.

2. Class to Class exchanges: Finding partner class teachers

Example, in the Fall 2005 semester, Akiko Meguro's Japanese class (Elementary Japanese and Intermediate Japanese) had regular exchange sessions using Skype with English classes at Japanese Universities (Meguro, 2006). I signed up on Mixxer for the language exchanges with Japanese students, and the English teachers found me and contacted me through the Mixxer. We had exchanges for 8 weeks. At that time, because of the time differences, Japanese University student classes met in their language lab during their class time (9AM-10AM) and Dickinson students met in our lab outside of class time (7PM-8PM). It was great to have exchange sessions with the Japanese university students; however, meeting in the evening was a challenge, and we were never certain how many of their students would arrive and at what time.

3. Language exchange event function

Akiko Meguro wanted to have her language exchange sessions during her class time (8:30AM, 9:30AM, 10:30AM). However, no Japanese university classes were available at that time because of the time differences. First, Akiko Meguro used social networking site Mixi to invite Japanese learners of English (Meguro, 2005), but decided to use the Mixxer instead. The Mixxer had already become quite popular in Japan giving us a large pool of language learners to invite to the event. We were able to attract enough language partners for all of our students during the three sessions despite the late hour in Japan. In the Fall 2007 semester, both Intermediate and Elementary Japanese classes had Skype exchange sessions total of 7 times using this language exchange event function.

5. CONCLUSION

The Mixxer makes it possible for language learners and educators to have language exchanges with native speakers despite their geographical constraints. Obstacles that had been virtually insurmountable in the past can now be handled with relative ease through Skype and the Mixxer. Teachers will have to choose which method makes the most sense for their class. Now, the increased time students can

engage in conversational speaking along with the cultural interaction, motivation and energy brought to the classroom by regular language exchanges is within reach of any teacher with an Internet connection.

6. REFERENCES

目黒秋子 (2006) 「インターネットを利用した日本語教育 Skype を利用した Language Exchange セッションの試みー初級日本語授業の一環として」 『シリーズ言語学と言語教育第 10 巻 大学における日本語教育の構築と展開』, 345-359, ひつじ書房, 2006 年

Meguro, A. (2005), *Language Exchange Project on Internet in the Intermediate Japanese class using Social Networking site Mixi and SKYPE, The NEATJ 2005 proceedings*: Brown University.

Bryant, T. (2006). *Social Software in Academia. EDUCAUSE QUARTERLY*, No.2, 62-64. from <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/EQM0627.pdf>

7. RESOURCES

The Mixxer

<http://www.language-exchanges.org/searchInd.aspx>

Skype (voice chat software)

<http://www.skype.com/helloagain.html> (English site)

<http://www.skype.com/intl/ja/helloagain.html> (Japanese site)

Audacity(recording software)

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

Pamela (recording software)

<http://www.pamela-systems.com/>

AUTHORS

Akiko Meguro is an Instructor of Japanese in East Asian Studies department at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Skype name: akikomeguro

Todd Bryant is Language program administrator in Library and Information Services at Dickinson College, Skype name: bryantt