

CHATGPT AS A LANGUAGE TRAINER FOR ENHANCING THE INTERACTION SKILLS OF GERMAN LEARNERS IN JAPAN

Axel Harting

Institute of Foreign Language Research and Education, Hiroshima University (Japan)

Abstract

This study explores the usefulness of ChatGPT for improving L2 German learners' communicative skills and for raising awareness of the evolving literacy demands associated with AI use. Participants were B1-level students at a Japanese university who completed six communicative tasks with ChatGPT based on scenarios from their textbook, including a shopping conversation, a private dinner invitation, and a job interview. The tasks were designed to allow learners to apply expressions introduced in the textbook. To support task completion, students received step-by-step instructions as well as prompts specifying the situation and for resolving linguistic difficulties and obtaining feedback on their output. The tasks were completed as homework. Data consisted of transcripts of student–ChatGPT interactions and a post-task survey including Likert-scale and open-ended items. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, and qualitative content analysis was applied to open-ended responses. The study addressed three research questions: what difficulties students encounter when completing communicative ChatGPT tasks as homework, how useful they perceive such tasks for learning German, and how the tasks could be improved to complement textbook-based instruction. Results indicate that students generally enjoyed using AI and valued the opportunity to practice interactions and review information at their own pace. They perceived the tasks as helpful for receiving feedback, improving reading and writing skills, and reinforcing vocabulary and grammar. However, the study also revealed misunderstandings and uncertainty about the accuracy of AI-generated information. These findings highlight the importance of providing learners with adequate linguistic and technical support when integrating AI into homework assignments.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, German, computer mediated communication, task-based learning.*

1. Introduction

Since the launch of *ChatGPT* in late 2022, its integration into formal L2 instruction has been examined in numerous studies. For example, it has been found that using ChatGPT may facilitate the implementation of learner-centred, practice-oriented teaching approaches, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (Kim et al., 2023). By providing corrective feedback on learners' L2 output, the tool may help improve learners' L2 skills. Thanks to its versatile affordances, using this tool in formal L2 instruction may inspire students to engage in beyond-class L2 practice (Liu, 2023) and foster their autonomy for L2 learning (Agustini, 2023).

Previous studies on the use of AI in the field of L2 German have primarily focused on its application in completing academic assignments and developing writing skills (Grein, 2025), as well as on the integration of AI-generated texts into L2 German instruction (Hartmann, 2024). The exploratory case study presented here examines how AI can be integrated into German as a Foreign Language instruction in international contexts, with particular emphasis on fostering target-language interaction skills outside the L2 classroom.

To this end, a teaching concept was developed in which textbook-based instruction is supplemented by interactive tasks to be completed by using ChatGPT. This study investigates the potential of ChatGPT to enhance L2 German learners' communicative skills and to raise awareness of the evolving literacy demands associated with AI use. It addresses the following three research questions:

- (1) What difficulties do learners encounter when performing communicative ChatGPT-based tasks as homework?
- (2) How useful are such tasks for L2 German learning?
- (3) How can AI-based tasks meaningfully complement textbook-based German instruction?

2. Participants and procedures

This study was conducted in an L2 German class with three participants (CEFR level B1) in their third year of study at Hiroshima University. Participants completed six communicative tasks with ChatGPT based on scenarios from their textbook, including (1) *describing a person*, (2) *talking about work experience*, (3) *expressing ideas about the future*, (4) *expressing career wishes*, (5) *holding a conversation during a private dinner invitation*, and (6) *conducting a sales dialogue in a specialty store*. The tasks were designed to enable the application of previously introduced textbook expressions. As the tasks were assigned as homework, initial in-class instruction was provided, including explanations and model examples of task completion. For the six tasks under investigation, participants received step-by-step instructions via the Moodle platform, along with L2 prompts that specified the task scenarios and supported both the resolution of linguistic difficulties and feedback on learners' output.

The data analysed in this study consists of transcripts of student–ChatGPT interactions and a post-task survey. The chat transcripts were analysed qualitatively. An initial review was conducted to examine learner responses to ChatGPT's prompts, the degree of conversational naturalness, instances and sources of misunderstandings, and the extent to which the prompts supported successful task completion. The post-task survey captured the language (German/Japanese) and modality (spoken/written) of learners' input, the time required for task completion, the perceived suitability of prompts, and reported comprehension difficulties. Participants also evaluated task difficulty, the usefulness for specific language skills, as well as their willingness to use AI tools for L2 learning in the future. Responses were collected using five-point Likert scales ranging from +2 to –2, supplemented by open-ended comments. The data were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively and integrated with the analysis of the chat transcripts.

3. Results

As the analysis of the chat transcripts revealed, learners were generally able to complete the tasks successfully. Since ChatGPT adapted to their L2 proficiency level, they had no major difficulties understanding questions posed in the target language; however, they sometimes struggled to formulate their responses. When learners hesitated in providing an answer, ChatGPT first prompted them again to respond. If they still did not reply, it provided answer options or useful sentence starters.

Another function of the task was to raise learners' awareness of errors in their language use. This was initially intended to be facilitated by a predefined prompt, which learners were to use at the end of the interaction. However, ChatGPT appeared to recognise that the interaction constituted a language-learning task and therefore provided immediate correction of linguistic errors along with corresponding explanations during the interaction. This, however, made the dialogues appear rather artificial, as the conversation was repeatedly interrupted by linguistic digressions. As a result, direct responses to learners' utterances were relatively rare. Overall, ChatGPT reliably identified learners' errors and provided appropriate corrections and explanations. The corrections also indicated that ChatGPT not only addressed formal linguistic errors but also attended to aspects of naturalness.

The other prompts provided in the task description also proved to be useful. When learners found ChatGPT's responses too long, they requested shorter versions; when something was unclear, they asked for further explanations; and when they were overwhelmed by overly difficult L2 output, they requested translations. Towards the end of the interaction, ChatGPT frequently asked whether it should continue the practice, provide further grammar explanations or exercises, or generate a corrected version of the entire conversation.

As the survey results indicate, students generally enjoyed using AI and valued the opportunity to practice interaction and review information at their own pace. Participants required on average 20 to 30 minutes to complete the tasks, with completion times ranging from under five minutes to up to 45 minutes. The computer appeared to be the preferred device for task completion. Prompts were entered exclusively via keyboard, and ChatGPT's output was presented almost entirely in written form. To resolve language difficulties, learners frequently used dictionaries, textbooks, and ChatGPT itself.

With regard to perceived benefits for L2 learning, participants rated the six tasks on a five-point scale (–2, –1, 0, +1, +2). The values presented in Table 1 represent the mean scores derived from these ratings, where +2 indicates 'very helpful' and –2 indicates 'not helpful at all'. As shown in Table 1, students perceived the tasks as particularly helpful for receiving corrective feedback, as well as for improving reading and writing skills and reinforcing grammatical structures. To some extent, they also reported benefits in terms of vocabulary expansion and reading comprehension. However, the tasks were not considered particularly helpful for practicing oral L2 production or listening comprehension. This is likely because learners used only the keyboard for L2 input and were exposed exclusively to ChatGPT's written output.

Table 1. Benefits for L2 Learning.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Ø
Feedback on L2 errors	1,7	2,0	1,3	2	2	1,7	1,8
Development of interaction skills	1,3	1,7	1,7	2	1,7	1,7	1,7
Grammar acquisition	1,7	1,7	2,0	1,3	1,7	1,7	1,7
Improvement of writing skills	1,7	1,7	1,7	1,7	1,3	1,7	1,6
Vocabulary expansion	1,3	1,0	1,3	1,3	1,3	1,3	1,3
Practicing reading comprehension	1,0	0,3	1,7	1,7	1,7	1,0	1,2
Practicing language production	-0,3	-0,3	0,3	0,3	0,7	0,3	0,2
Practicing listening comprehension	-1,0	-1,0	-1,0	-1,5	-0,3	-1,7	-1,1

4. Summary and discussion

This study investigated the use of ChatGPT as a language training tool for enhancing L2 German interaction skills in a task-based homework setting. With regard to the three research questions posed at the outset, the following results were obtained.

Regarding the difficulties learners encountered when performing communicative ChatGPT-based tasks as homework, the results indicate that participants were generally able to complete the tasks successfully. While ChatGPT adapted well to learners' proficiency level, learners sometimes experienced difficulties in formulating responses in German. In addition, interaction was at times disrupted by ChatGPT's immediate corrective feedback, which shifted the focus from meaning-oriented communication to form-focused commentary. Another challenge concerned learners' uncertainty about the reliability of AI-generated content, suggesting the need for stronger development of critical evaluation skills in AI-mediated learning.

Regarding the perceived usefulness of the tasks for L2 German learning, the results suggest that participants viewed the ChatGPT-supported activities positively overall. In particular, learners valued corrective feedback, which they associated with improvements in grammar, writing, and vocabulary acquisition. The tasks also supported reading comprehension and allowed learners to engage with target structures at their own pace. However, perceived benefits were limited for oral production and listening comprehension, which can be attributed to the exclusively written mode of interaction.

Regarding the potential of AI-based tasks to complement textbook-based instruction, the findings suggest that ChatGPT activities can effectively extend classroom learning into out-of-class practice. By embedding tasks in familiar textbook scenarios, learners were able to recycle and apply previously introduced language in meaningful communicative contexts. The results also highlight the importance of structured pedagogical scaffolding, including guidance on prompt formulation and managing communication breakdowns. Task design should balance fluency-oriented interaction with accuracy-focused feedback to avoid disruption of communicative flow.

Overall, the results indicate that participants viewed the integration of AI into language learning positively and valued the opportunity to engage in interaction with AI systems. However, they also highlighted the need for structured linguistic and technical support to ensure effective use. Harnessing the benefits of AI technologies for L2 learning therefore depends on careful pedagogical framing and learner preparation.

References

- Agustini, N. P. O. (2023). Examining the role of ChatGPT as a learning tool in promoting students' English language learning autonomy relevant to Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. *EDUKASIA: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 4(2), 921–934.
- Grein, M. (2025). Nutzung von KI beim Verfassen wissenschaftlicher Arbeiten in DaF/DaZ. In G. Günay & L. Baum. *Künstliche Intelligenz in DaF/DaZ* (pp. 19–35). Berlin, Frank & Timme.
- Hartmann, D. (2024). Künstliche Intelligenz im DaF-Unterricht. Mediation mit KI-Anwendungen fördern, *Revista Lengua y Culutra*, 5(10), 50–55.
- Kim, S., Shim, J., & Shim, J. (2023). A study on the utilization of OpenAI ChatGPT as a second language learning tool. *Journal of Multimedia Information System*, 10(1), 79–88.
- Liu, B. (2023). Chinese university students' attitudes and perceptions in learning English using ChatGPT. *International Journal of Education and Humanities (IJEH)*, 3(2), 132–140.