Telecollaboration in Foreign Language Curricula:
A Case Study on Intercultural Understanding in Video Communication Exchanges

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ABSTRACT

The development of intercultural communicative competence is increasingly important in this globalised and highly digitalised world. This implies the adequate understanding of otherness, which entails a myriad of complex cognitive competences, skills and behaviour. The TILA project aims to study how the use of digital communication means in foreign language education can contribute to the development of intercultural understanding when communicating with peers across borders. Understanding is the result of a collaborative construction of shared knowledge, which can be supported through the use of meta-communicative devices (MCDs) (Bahtina, 2013). This case study investigates how pupils used communication strategies during video communication sessions to achieve intercultural understanding. Results reveal that task-based telecollaboration sessions offer learners the opportunity to achieve mutual understanding by utilizing a variety of meta-communicative devices that help the learners to compare their cultures in relation to time, space and habits, verify meaning and clarify utterances.

Keywords: EXMARaLDA Software, Intercultural Communication, Interculturalism, Meta-Communicative Devices, Telecollaboration

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly digitalised and globalized society, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can be integrated into education in order to enrich language-learning processes. Furthermore, CMC can be adapted to the needs of students and their everyday use of digital media and help to develop their intercultural and digital identity. Being able to engage students in meaningful communication through the use of internet tools whilst carrying out tasks or projects with

students from other countries is known as Telecollaboration (see O'Dowd, 2006, 2007; Guth & Helm, 2010).

This paper explores telecollaboration and the ways it can be used in secondary education to support meaningful language-learning processes. Telecollaboration is becoming increasingly popular in foreign language education as social media has enormous potential to support new ways of learning whereby cooperation, communication and the learner are put in the centre of the learning process following social constructivist pedagogies (Vygotsky, 1978). However, research suggests that teachers and learners do not use telecollaboration extensively for peda-gogical purposes. Despite the efforts made by scholars to place digital literacy and intercultural and pedagogical innovation competences high on the educational agenda, the reality is that introducing digital innovation in traditional educational settings can be difficult (Howard, 2013; Eetmer & Otterbreit-Leftwich, 2010). This is particularly true for synchronous modes of telecol-laboration in secondary education.

To date, most research studies on telecollaboration published in peer-reviewed journals refer to tertiary education (Pol, 2013). Minimal information is known about the effect of telecollabo-ration on the language-learning processes of foreign language students at a younger age. Based on previous research results[1] conducted at tertiary education where the impact of synchronous communication was measured on the motivation (Jauregi, de Graaff, van den Bergh, & Kriz, 2012), intercultural competence, and interaction skills (Canto, Jauregi, & van den Bergh, 2013; Canto, de Graaff, & Jauregi, 2014) of students engaged in telecollaboration, we present the results of a case study carried out during October-December 2013 at the secondary education level within the TILA project[2].

The research study we report on in this paper addresses the development of intercultural un-derstanding of younger learners who participate in telecollaboration sessions. In addition, it aims to provide insight into the use of different communication strategies to promote the development of intercultural understanding. The study analyses the sequences of negotiation of intercultural meaning that arise during interactions carried out on a video communication platform.

On the basis of the obtained results, a pedagogical model has been developed about the optimal use of CMC in foreign language teaching curricula providing criteria for the creation of teaching materials and tasks that promote the development of intercultural understanding in telecollaboration projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our society today is largely characterized by the global economic, political and cultural integra-tion driven by technology and international commerce. Increasingly people view themselves as 'global' and 'cosmopolitan' citizens (Osler & Starkey, 2005). Borders are becoming less important while mobility across borders is increasing (Byram, 2012). As a result of these developments, traditional viewpoints in terms of national categories are experiencing a radical change and a more transnational perspective is often adopted, which underlines the importance of managing cross-cultural encounters with the 'other' (Wilson, 1993; Ten Thije & Maier, 2012).

In this societal setting the use of foreign languages for functional and social purposes and the associated development of intercultural competences become essential characteristics of the new world citizen. In fact, foreign language acquisition is possibly the most direct and com-mon strategy to broaden one's own perspective (Ehlich, 2010). The increased opportunities for intercultural contact whether it is in person or digitally mediated, emphasize the need to focus on the development of intercultural competences in order to guarantee mutual understanding in intercultural settings.

Intercultural Understanding

When learning a foreign language it is not sufficient to only acquire knowledge of grammar, but most importantly, attention must be paid to how a language is used in a socially and culturally appropriate way (Savignon, 2004). By adopting an intercultural dimension in language teaching, language learners learn to interact with speakers of other languages on equal terms, and to be aware of their own identities and those of their interlocutors. The ultimate objective becomes more than solely communicating information, but developing relationships with people from a different cultural background (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002).

There is a difference between being multilingual and being intercultural. An individual acts as an intercultural person when s/he is able to behave in a communication event adopting a new perspective: not from his/her own or from that of the target cultural background, but from a third perspective (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat, & Crozet, 1999). This third perspective includes the conversion of the previous two and creates a new point of view. In other words, the intercultural speaker does not only switch from one language to another without noticing the relationship between them, but is aware of both cultural worlds and acts from a third new stance (Byram, 2012). Byram (2012) states that being intercultural, or 'interculturalism', must be seen as one of the goals of foreign language teaching, which is corroborated by the European Commission and foreign language teacher associations (LACE, 2007).

According to Byram (2012), the purpose of including the intercultural dimension in language teaching is to contribute to the development of intercultural citizenship of the individual, which is defined by Stavenhagen (2008, p.176) as:

The idea of intercultural citizenship points to the building of political and social Institutions by which culturally diverse communities within a multiethnic and multilingual nation can solve their differences democratically by consensus without tearing apart the common structures and values or having to abandon their particular cultural identities, such as language, culture and ethnicity.

Despite the fact that minimal pedagogical material is available, the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* initiative (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default_en.asp) is an interesting attempt to design a model including the qualities and competencies that intercultural citizens need to develop. These competencies include attitudes, feelings, behaviour, knowledge, skills and actions. The last constituent, action, is crucial in the intercultural citizenship model (Byram, 2012). It emphasizes the adoption of active citizenship behaviours and motivates students to take action in an international network, without being restricted by the limitations of national borders.

As intercultural citizenship is defined by undertaking activities with people from other parts of the world whilst activating and developing the competences needed to share dialogue (Byram, 2012), CMC in conjunction with appropriate intercultural tasks appear to offer opportunities to enhance this intercultural understanding (Canto et al., 2014). However, according to O'Dowd (2011), being in contact with pupils from another country -- either in person or computer mediated -- is not sufficient for the successful development of intercultural competences.

Computer Mediated Communication

As result of the availability of user-friendly internet interaction tools and broadband internet connections at educational institutions, teachers are able to engage in interactive online exchanges,

providing the opportunity to participate and use the target language in a more spontaneous way (Smith, 2003).

However, most importantly, the modern technologies offer the opportunity to bring the cultural aspect of language teaching (Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1997) to the foreground and to expand the teaching context over the physical borders. Therefore, allowing students to carry out projects with peers abroad is a meaningful way to raise their awareness of the role that culture plays in communication and in building rapport (Möllering & Levy, 2012). In these cross-cultural encounters students share their view about their own culture with students from a different country, which means they experience and reflect on intercultural issues, thus obtaining a better understanding of their own and others' cultural visions. Consequently, students become more aware of themselves, their cultural identity and their worldview (Meei-Ling, 2006).

According to Jauregi and Bañados (2010), the online intercultural exchanges between native and non-native speakers, have a positive impact on their motivation, their academic performance, but mainly on the understanding of the cultural value of language exchanges.

During the implementation of collaborative exchanges, careful attention needs to be paid to the pedagogical contexts in which the telecollaboration is embedded. This is also relevant for the tools that will be used for the exchanges and the purpose of integrating telecollaboration practices in a blended approach to education. It requires a pedagogically driven technological approach that fully embraces the intercultural turn (Thorne, 2006). This process deserves recognition, time, and attention in order to be used at an optimal level. The pedagogical expectations, the awareness of intercultural issues by students and teachers, the characteristics of the tools, the way they are used alongside the tasks developed for the exchanges, and the way the exchanges are coached might influence the way participants interact: interlocutors may feel shy, they might limit their contributions to impersonal questions or they may feign understanding. In addition, the possible dysfunctions of technology may obstruct fluid interaction exchanges. These are all factors that can influence the way communication exchanges are carried out online and which need to be taken into consideration during the process.

Meta-Communicative Devices

Successful communication requires the alignment of interlocutors in terms of a shared understanding of reality (Bahtina, 2013). Explicit 'negotiation of meaning' is an effective way to achieve shared knowledge (Pinker, 2007), based on a shared frame of reference, also known in the literature as 'common ground' (e.g., Bahtina, 2013; Nance, 1995).

According to Bahtina (2013) it is generally recognized that understanding is achieved when common ground between interlocutors is established. Furthermore, this is defined as: "arguably automatic interactive alignments of necessary levels of mental representations" (Bahtina, 2013, p.74). By negotiating the meaning of an utterance, students create more common ground and mutual understanding. Bahtina (2013) suggests that this process becomes possible by the use of the so-called meta-communicative devices (MCDs). These are communication strategies that are used to structure knowledge and to optimize communication. When activating MCDs interlocutors reflect on their linguistic repertoire and attempt to match the level of and maintain communication with the interlocutor. MCDs are non-automatic interaction mechanisms used to achieve mutual understanding on different levels; the focus is more on the process rather than the final results (Bahtina, 2013). MCDs are based on the knowledge model by Ehlich and Rehbein (1986) within the functional pragmatic approach to discourse that explains the relationship between different aspects of how common understanding is realised: reality (P), the knowledge of it (speaker and listener π), and the linguistic realization (p).

To attain common understanding, speakers and listeners can use diverse MCDs at different levels. Bahtina (2013) systematically derives three MCDs from the knowledge model (Ehlich & Rehbein, 1986):

1. MCD1 focuses on the action constellation and development of understanding regarding an assumed set of actions that must be taken to achieve a shared social goal (P: 'What we need to do is X');
2. MCD2 focuses on achieving a shared cognitive system of shared orientations in time and space (π: 'If you read this card, it must be read from left to right');
3. MCD3 provides understanding in the field of linguistic realizations in the discourse and provides meanings to words (p: 'What does this word mean?' or 'That is called X and means Y').

In the empirical study by Bahtina (2013) an additional device, MCD4, is utilised: a mechanism that is used when partners do not understand each other ('You mean X?'), which may prevent or simply restore misunderstanding.

In short, speakers and listeners use MCDs in order to facilitate mutual understanding. This model is in accordance with other pragmatic models for effective communication (Rehbein & Kameyama, 2003).

Tasks in Intercultural Exchanges

Telecollaboration tasks that invite students to negotiate the meaning of relevant cultural issues may contribute to enhance their intercultural understanding.

Tasks need to be meaning-oriented and focused, promoting two-way communication exchange and enhancing relationships in a natural and authentic setting (Byram, 2012; Canto et al., 2014; Ellis, 2003). Furthermore, tasks have to connect to the interests of the students (Willis, 1996). Effective tasks require students to work together, exchange cultural information, discuss topics, elaborate, reflect on their identity and that of others and achieve the common goals of the task together in realistic situations (Lee, 2004; O'Dowd & Ware, 2009).

According to Canto and colleagues (2014) tasks must provide an opportunity for the students to develop themselves into 'intercultural learners'. This is done through interaction as students become aware of both their own and others' culture and learn to develop the third perspective (Lo Bianco et al., 1999). In their attempt to exchange information and opinions and create new cultural perspectives, participants carrying out telecollaboration projects engage in side-sequences of negotiation of meaning. As Canto and colleagues (2014) explain, students develop their intercultural competence particularly when they negotiate topics and sequences that are generated by intercultural misunderstandings, miscommunication or unexpected reactions that initiated their reflections with regard to the culture of the other and their own (c.f. "rich points" Agar, 1994) and when they manage to solve those misunderstandings together constructively.

CASE STUDY

Most research results on telecollaboration exchanges so far refer to university students (Pol, 2013). Little is known about the integration of telecollaboration in compulsory education at the secondary level and the effect on young learners who are studying languages in a very different setting compared to university students.

The present case study focuses on the way in which young learners negotiate meaning while interacting with peers abroad (Kroon, 2014), taking into consideration that understanding during the interaction is the result of collaborative construction of shared meanings that can be supported by the use of meta-communicative strategies (Bahtina 2013; Bahtina et al., 2013).

The main research questions addressed in the study are:

RQ1: How do teenagers use meta-communicative strategies during synchronous telecollaboration sessions through video communication to create intercultural understanding?

RQ2: Are there any differences according to the communication mode (lingua franca use among learners of the foreign language or NS-NNS interaction) being used and the task being carried out in the telecollaboration exchanges?

METHODOLOGY

The present case study is an exploratory study on the MCDs used by students between 14 and 16 years of age to create and clarify intercultural understanding during telecollaboration sessions. We used a mixed methods data collection strategy in which quantitative data is combined with qualitative analysis of three sources of data: recorded interactions, interviews, and surveys.

Subjects

A total of nineteen pupils from two secondary schools[3], one in the Netherlands and one in Spain, participated voluntarily in the telecollaboration sessions. All pupils were between 14 and 16 years old. Eleven of the pupils were female. Pupils carried out two telecollaboration tasks in small groups: one in English and one in Spanish. All sessions were carried out on a video communication platform.

Procedure

Learners at both schools were informed about the telecollaboration project and were asked to participate. Those willing to take part in the project received a tutorial about the use of the video communication platform Big Blue Button (BBB).

BBB is an open source application and video communication sessions can be carried out in pairs or small groups. Once participants have activated their webcam, they are able to talk to each other and share all kinds of documents on the same interface. All interactions are automatically recorded on the system.

Pupils were asked to complete questionnaires that included questions about their background and items addressing the telecollaboration experience.

Two telecollaboration sessions were carried out during this pilot study, one in English (lingua franca use) at B1 proficiency level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the other in Spanish (native/non-native speaker communication format) at A2 CEFR proficiency level for the Dutch pupils. The tasks were consistent with the course content and objectives:

Task 1: aimed at becoming acquainted with each other. Learners exchanged personal information about themselves: name, age, school, interests, hobbies, etc. This task was carried out in Spanish.

Task 2: Aimed at exchanging more specific information about daily routines depending on the specific period: term time, weekends or holidays. Pupils talked about many topics, but focused on their activities, eating habits, and important holidays in their country. This task was carried out in English as a lingua franca (ELF).

The tasks were carried out in three phases:

1. **Pre-task phase:** With the help of the teacher and specific materials, pupils prepared for the telecollaboration task;
2. **Task phase:** Pupils carried out the specific task interculturally through the video communication platform;
3. **Post-task phase:** Pupils shared the outcomes of the task, their experiences and reflections with the teacher and fellow classmates.

During the task-phase, pupils were asked to take notes about information concerning their interaction partner, as they would need it in order to be able to present the telecollaboration peer to the rest of the pupils in the classroom (post-task).

Pupils had an average of 45 minutes to carry out each of the tasks. Tasks were planned in two different weeks.

Data Collection

Three sources of data were collected for analysis: the recordings of conversations held during the telecollaboration sessions, the results of the questionnaires, and an interview that was held with one of the participating teachers.

The recordings used for analysis were selected depending on functionality and representativeness. These recordings were obtained from the database of the TILA project. Four recordings from each communication mode and tasks were selected for analysis. The total corpus comprised of eight recordings (see Table 1).

Pupils were asked to complete surveys in order to gain insight into their perceptions with reference to their participation during the telecollaboration sessions and the development of intercultural understanding. A sample of the results of these surveys is included in this study to document the case and to help determine the factors that are important for the development of intercultural understanding according to the pupils themselves.

To obtain an in-depth view of issues concerning the integration of technological innovations in education and to establish relevant factors related to intercultural meaning creation, an ethnographic interview was held (Devault & McCoy, 2001) with one of the teachers.

Table 1. Size and characteristics of corpus: Number of analysed interactions per mode/task

Mode	Number	Total Duration (Minutes)
ELF (Task 2)	4	152
NS/NNS (Task 1)	4	205

Data Analysis

A mixed method analysis approach was used in the present case study combining both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Recordings

Firstly, the recordings of the telecollaboration sessions were coded and transcribed and incorporated into EXMARaLDA software (www.exmaralda.org). Secondly, the amount of times the MCDs were used was measured. Finally, the recordings were analysed from a discourse analysis perspective with the objective of obtaining an accurate understanding of the use of MCDs and its impact on the intercultural understanding among interaction partners engaged in the telecollaboration sessions. According to Scollon and Scollon (2011) and Rehbein and Kameyama (2003, 2011), a discourse analysis is an adequate method to reveal differences between two different cultural groups and to determine where there is a breakdown in communication between the two groups and if it is difficult to adequately interpret the other. The analysis focuses on the application of the meta-communicative devices proposed by Bahtina (2013).

A pre-test was carried out in order to test the suitability of Bahtina's (2013) model to analyse our corpus. The inter-rater reliability test showed that it would be problematic if Bahtina's MCDs were applied in the context of this study. Therefore, the decision was made to maintain the operationalization of the MCDs as described below while adding a new category of meta-communicative devices. MCD0 was used in our model to address the vast amount of meta-communication instances triggered by technological issues and related misunderstandings that we encountered in our data. The other MCDs were expanded and consolidated on the basis of empirical evidence as follows:

MCD0: Focuses on restoring lack of comprehension and misunderstandings that arise from technical issues such as delays of image and problems with sound. These side-sequences are viewed as meta-communicative devices because of their great effect on the development of the conversation and the mutual understanding of the interlocutors. Considering Bahtina's (2013) model it was problematic to factor in technical issues as a cause of misunderstanding; therefore, MCD0 is viewed as a separate MCD. Examples are: 'I cannot hear you', 'Can you repeat that?'

MCD1: Focuses on the situation and the development of understanding relating to an assumed set of actions that should be taken into account in order to achieve a shared social purpose. This relates to the overall purpose of the interaction, defining the role of the speaker and listener and the management of interaction. Examples can be utterances that pinpoint the actions that are needed to achieve a certain goal: 'Wait, Lotte will now come to talk to you.'

MCD2: Focuses on a shared orientation system with respect to time and space. This involves aligning the perspective of both the speaker and the listener in relation to the classification of time and space. An example could be: 'We have lunch at half past two, and you?'

MCD3: Provides understanding in the field of linguistic realizations in the discourse and provides meanings to words. Additionally, it can be viewed as the explanation of an utterance. The speaker can alter the pace or volume of the language by speaking slower or louder. It also involves the use of metaphors, paraphrasing, and translation of a word or phrase, which involves the alignment of the meaning of a linguistic realization: 'How are your scores? Good? Todo bien?' Any utterances that literally repeat the same thing without any prosodic or substantive changes and not confirming an understanding question, (e.g., Student 1: 'A

room with white chairs.' Student 2: 'Yes, a room with white chairs.') are not considered as a MCD3 or any other MCD.

MCD4: Focuses on the prevention or recovery of misunderstandings, and controls the understanding of the interaction partner. This mechanism is used when the interlocutors do not understand each other: 'You mean whether I like to go to the cinema?'

Surveys

A survey was used to measure the perceptions of Dutch and Spanish pupils towards their telecollaboration experiences. The answers to eight items from this general survey related to comprehension issues and intercultural understanding.

Teacher Interview

An in-depth interview was carried out with one of the teachers, who performed a central role assisting the pupils during the online conversations. The interview consisted of twenty-two short open questions, which were divided into seven categories, namely: intercultural understanding, improvements in learning, student motivation, tasks and follow-up, differences between English and Spanish conversations, technical problems, and conditions of the learning environment. The answers to the questions were analysed qualitatively and relevant utterances were labelled and coded based on the transcripts. Categories were created by combining several codes to analyse teacher perspectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the quantitative analysis of the recordings as well as the discourse analysis of the interactions, interview, and questionnaire are presented.

Quantitative Analysis of the Use of MCDs

To be able to map the relationship between the use of MCDs and the communication mode and task, the coded transcriptions were processed in SPSS. As the number of cases was insufficient to perform a T-test, the decision was made not to include this statistical procedure in this study. However, the average number of MCDs used in different modes and functions was calculated. Since the duration of the recordings is an important factor for the amount of MCDS that were used, a table has been included to highlight the number of minutes the conversation lasted (Table 2).

Table 2 shows that the conversations in Spanish (NS/NNS) on average lasted longer than the interviews in English (ELF): (205/4=) 51.25 minutes in Spanish and (152/4=) 38 minutes in English. However, when calculating the amount of MCDs used on average per minute, it appears that more MCDs are used in the English conversations (Table 3):

ELF: 95.5/152=0.63 MCD per minute
NS/NNS: 101/205=0.49 MCD per minute

Although this difference is minimal it is important to consider this when reviewing the number of MCDs in Table 2.

The quantitative analysis shows that MCD0 was the most frequently used MCD, followed by MCD4, MCD3 and MCD1. The MCD that was used least frequently was MCD2. In the next

Table 2. Duration of recordings: Rounded to nearest whole number

Mode/Task	Dialogue	Duration	Total
ELF – Task 2	Room 1 –Jan 30th	42	152
	Room 4 –Jan 30th	46	
	Room 6 –Jan 30th	18*	
	Room 2 –Feb 6th	46	
NS/NNS – Task 1	Room 1 –Jan 9th	55	205
	Room 2 –Jan 9th	51	
	Room 4 – Jan 9th	53	
	Room 4 – Jan16th	46	

*Dialogue Room 6 – The interaction session on January 30th is shorter in duration due to the extreme technical issues encountered.

Table 3. Average number of MCDs within the different modes and tasks, rounded numbers (average number of MCD per minute)

MCD	ELF (Task 2)	NS/NNS (Task 1)	Total
0	28.5 (0.20)	32.0 (0.15)	**60.5**
1	18.0 (0.10)	21.0 (0.10)	**39**
2	6.5 (0.05)	6.5 (0.05)	**13**
3	20.5 (0.15)	19.5 (0.10)	**40**
4	22.0 (0.15)	22.0 (0.10)	**44**
Total	**95.5 (0.65)**	**101 (0.5)**	**196.5**

section, the results of the discourse analysis will expand on the way MCDs were used to promote the development of intercultural understanding.

Discourse Analysis Results

The discourse analysis highlights that the principle use of MCDs by pupils was to align their reference frames and to achieve mutual understanding.

MCD0

There were often instances of comprehension difficulties in the telecollaboration sessions due to technical issues. These were indicated in different ways during the course of the conversation (Table 4).

The most frequently used form of MCD0 was the second category, i.e., asking for confirmation. The observation was made that certain interactional sequences only consisted of a succession of this MCD in the form of 'Hello? Hello? Hello?', which was mostly uttered by both interlocutors consecutively.

In many cases, MCD0 was recognized by simultaneous speech, long silences and words that could not be transcribed because they could not be understood (partially) due to noise or bad

Table 4. Summary of the different uses of MCD0 with their examples

Use	Example
1. Asking for repetition	I'm sorry, what?
2. Asking for confirmation	Could you hear that?
3. Confirmation of reception	I hear you.
4. Repetition of utterance	Your favourite food. YOUR FAVOURITE FOOD.
5. Thematise technical difficulties	Sorry, I can't hear you.

connection. In certain cases, a MCD0 was used when it would have been more appropriate for the speaker to use a MCD1 or MCD4, in order to verify the meaning of the utterance (MCD4) or to ask the speaker to change the pace (MCD1). In Figure 1, the Dutch student does not admit to not understanding the Spanish words, but used the technique (MCD0) as an excuse even though the Spaniard can be heard clearly.

The results prove that MCD0 is often used combined with other MCDs. However, the most commonly found combination is that with MCD1, when interaction partners align the situation and their reference frames again after the initial confusion caused by technical problems. Instead of promoting the development of intercultural understanding, the use of MCD0 caused many feelings of distraction and frustration: 'Hello? Hello? What did you say? I didn't say anything.'

MCD1

MCD1 was mainly used to attune the different acting constellations of pupils, in order to determine the situation, and the actions needed to achieve the common goal. Table 5 shows the different MCD1 pupils used to clarify meaning during the interaction sessions.

The analysis of our corpus illustrates that the function of MCD0 and MCD1 are extremely similar. However, the difference lies in the trigger of misunderstanding the sequence: technical problems (MCD0) or linguistic or cultural reasoning (MCD1).

The analysis shows that the way in which MCD1 is used differs between the two different communication modes ELF and NS/NNS. The interactions that were held in English (ELF)

Figure 1. Excerpt from dialogue Room 2 - January 9th. Recovery from incomprehension due to technical failure: a MCD0 is used when a MCD1 or 4 would be more appropriate.

Table 5. Summary of the different uses of MCD1 with their examples

Use	Example
1. Describing the situation	Are we still talking about basketball?
2. Aligning interaction rules	Could you please repeat that?

promoted many MCDs that were mainly used to determine the roles of speaker and listener and to determine the turn of the speaker (e.g., 'Wait, please.'). However, in Spanish, the majority of the MCD1s were used to determine the rules for interaction and for aligning the necessary set of actions to achieve a common goal (e.g., 'Please, talk more slowly?' or 'Can you repeat that?'). Another observation highlights the vast difference between the uses of MCD1 in the different tasks. During Task 2 (Talking About Daily Routines) students had more of an opportunity to create their own questions. In these sessions pupils frequently engaged in negotiations, which provided direction to their conversations and avoided misunderstandings. The following example shows how a student uses a MCD1 to indicate that he is going to ask a question spontaneously (Figure 2).

It is possible that this has indirectly led to intercultural understanding, by providing the students with an opportunity to gain insight in taking turns, directness and the way the other organises their speech and performs the task.

However, the students did not communicate explicitly about these insights. Therefore, these speculations are not valid within the context of this study. Future research could provide more information into the developments that were promoted by MCD1.

MCD2

Undoubtedly, the MCD that was used the least was MCD2, in both English (ELF) and Spanish (NS/NNS) conversations and for both tasks. The cases in which MCD2 was used were situations where ambiguities or misunderstandings arose with respect to time and space, or when interaction partners tried to recover their understanding by providing examples and explained characteristics of their area or country. Here, the relation between partners was established by explaining cultural concepts and unknown words. The most common themes that promoted the use of MCD2 were schools, cities, countries, seasons, and daily schedules. In those cases, the MCD was directly related to the development of intercultural understanding. It was remarkable

Figure 2. Fragment from dialogue of Room 2 – February 6th. A MCD1 was used to give direction to the conversation and to determine the roles of the interaction partners.

that MCD2 was used by many pupils that opted to ask more profound questions, would answer in more detail, and were motivated to start a real dialogue. The results of the different uses of MCD2 are shown in Table 6.

Most misunderstandings that were resolved through the use of MCD2 were about establishing the concepts of time and situation, such as how countries look during different seasons: e.g., 'Yes, we have parties like that in the summer'. The concept of time and especially the daily schedule, proved to be very different for students from different countries. For example, there were doubts about the time for lunch and dinner. Often, the students' sense of time was clarified by adding utterances like 'now' and 'normally' to the interaction. When the pupils did not understand each other they often had short discussions, which meant that meaning was provided for cultural concepts and for words, such as 'late', 'early', 'lunch' and 'dinner'. Therefore, interaction partners adjusted their relationship and orientation frameworks to each other and thus created mutual understanding. This becomes clear from the following excerpt wherein the learners were debating about the time and place where they have lunch. When the Dutch pupil asks the Spanish student about the time of lunch, first, the pair discusses whether this means returning home for lunch. Following this in Figure 3, the discussion continues about the time lunch occurs and both students make the decision whether this is early or late.

MCD2 did not only promote the development of intercultural understanding with regard to space and time, but also showed an understanding of cultural habits. Intercultural understanding includes the understanding of how your own culture differentiates from the other's culture. This awareness of difference is a precondition for comparing the two cultures and for accepting the perspective of the other person's culture, which not only concerns ethical issues of life and death, but also everyday issues, such as the time when meals are served.

A relatively common way to use MCD2 was to compare both situations in one's own country, in order to provide meaning to the concept of space. For example, several students compared

Table 6. Summary of the different uses of MCD2 with their examples, S=Speaker L=Listener

Use	Example
1. Synchronising	The name of my school is the NSG of Nijmegen, that's a city.
2. Contextualising	S: What do you want to become? H: I work in a supermarket. S: Do you work now?
3. Comparing	In my city we also have a party like that.

Figure 3. Excerpt from dialogue Room 1 – January 30th. An MCD2 is used to adjust the orientation system with respect to time and space.

typical subjects from Spain and the Netherlands by making a comparison between 'I' and 'you'. The analysis showed that this was the most common use of MCD2. Fortunately, due to the use of the MCD the students were able to compare their own culture with that of the other, which has led in many cases to mutual intercultural understanding. In certain cases this was achieved without any direct link to the other country, but through explaining the different situations (time and space) in their own country, e.g., 'Do you celebrate Easter? The people in this country do.'

There does not appear to be a difference between the use of MCD2 in ELF and NS/NNS-conversations. In communication modes, the use and the form of MCD2 seems to be the same. However, there is a difference between the two tasks. The use of MCD2 in Task 1 is notably promoted by questions about the four seasons and cities. Task 2 focuses more on the cultural habits of the other and MCD2 was used to discuss the Dutch and Spanish habits. Task 2 thus revealed the cultural differences and similarities between the students and, when confirmed, promoted the development of intercultural understanding.

Although MCD2 is not used very often, it seems that this MCD could be the most interesting one for developing intercultural citizenship. By drawing comparisons between the countries and the cultural habits of the students, MCD2 provided insight into the culture of the other and also in their own culture. The students discussed their own life and country and learned about that of others, thereby creating shared knowledge.

MCD3

MCD3 was used when there was a misunderstanding about the meaning of a word or cultural concept. By discussing or negotiating the meaning, mutual understanding arose. The analysis proves there is a difference between the several uses of MCD3 (Table 7).

MCD3 was frequently used in combination with another MCD. This way, it could provide more insight into words or cultural concepts that were not understood properly. An effective example of the use of MCD3 is presented in Figure 4, where it is combined with MCD2 to explain to the Spanish student the Dutch way of playing hockey.

There is a difference in the use of MCD3 between Task 1 and Task 2 and this difference is promoted by the nature of the questions that were asked. Task 2 required fewer known concepts than Task 1. Therefore, the need was greater to negotiate the meaning and to align in order to understand each other. However, this assumption is not reflected in the quantitative analysis,

Table 7. Summary of different uses of MCD3 and their examples, S=Speaker L=Listener

Use	Example
1. Adapting speech	I'm studying German. I'm, I'M STUDYING GERMAN.
2. Rephrasing	My name is Aloma, just like Paloma, but without a P.
3. Translating	(In Dutch:) How are your grades? Your grades? (In English:) ALL GOOD?
4. Providing examples	Are you staying at home or are you going somewhere else? For example, are you going to parties?
5. Including categories	Soccer, the sport, yes.
6. Completing the phrase of the other	S: I like Spanish, German and English, the eh… H: The languages.
7. Adding new information	The girl also plays basketball? The girl next to you also plays basketball?

Figure 4. Excerpt from dialogue Room 2 – February 6th. The Dutch student explains what hockey looks like in the Netherlands by comparing it to American hockey (MCD2). To clarify, an MCD3 is added by rephrasing the word "field".

which does not show any differences in the amount of MCD3s between the two tasks. This may relate to the fact that Task 2 was carried out in English and Task 1 in Spanish. Indeed it is plausible that within the ELF mode the use of MCD3 is less necessary than within the NS/NNS mode, since there is a greater shared vocabulary between the interaction partners in the first mode. The difference is that in the ELF mode MCD3 was mainly used to formulate lexically and grammatically correct sentences and to improve their speech by, for example, using a different verb, even before a lack of understanding was detected. This way, the use of MCD3 in ELF conversations promoted more linguistic than intercultural understanding, as opposed to the use of MCD3 in Spanish conversations wherein it particularly promoted the development of intercultural understanding, especially when it was combined with MCD4. In these cases the speaker used a MCD3 to clarify the message in response to the listener confirming understanding (MCD4), for example when a Dutch student explains what a Wii is after the Spanish student has misunderstood her: 'Yeah, the Wii. Not a sport or anything, but just for fun'. Consequently, the meaning of the linguistic realisation was easier to understand.

MCD4

The fourth MCD was used to monitor and verify the meaning of a word or cultural concept, which mainly was used due to misunderstandings that arose from not knowing or understanding a word, phrase, or cultural concept. The analysis shows that there were different uses of MCD4 (see Table 8).

The most frequently used MCD4 were the first and third types: asking for repetition or repeating (part of) the sentence. By responding affirmatively to a MCD4, pupils attempted to align their reference frames and be more confident about the exact meaning of the utterance. When the meaning that was questioned proved to be incorrect, the speaker could restore the lack of understanding by using a MCD3 for example, which occurred in the majority of cases. In particular, the combination with MCD3 contributed to the promotion of the development of intercultural understanding.

A difference also emerged between the communication modes. In the ELF mode, MCD4 was often used to express feelings of astonishment (e.g., 'You've got a flat?'), while in the NS/NNS mode it was specifically used to verify the understood meaning of unfamiliar words and cultural concepts (e.g., 'Snowboarding, is that Spanish too?'). MCD4 was also used frequently to verify words that were translated into English, which only occurred in the NS/NNS mode. In addition, a difference became apparent between the tasks. Task 2 encouraged the use of unknown words and cultural concepts more. Moreover, it consisted partly of spontaneous questions, which meant there was a greater need to check whether the understood meaning was correct.

Table 8. Summary of different uses of MCD4 and their examples, S=Speaker L=Listener

Use	Example
1. Asking for repetition	The what…?
2. Asking for the correctness of the understood message	You live in Valencia, right?
3. Repeating the sentence/part of the sentence	S: What do you want to study when you're older? H: When I'm older?
4. Rephrasing	S: What do you do in the summer? H: What? During summer?
5. Completing the phrase of the other	S: My classmates are very… H: Intelligent?
6. Adding new information	S: That's not normal for us. H: What? Why? It's for older people?
7. Thematising understanding	You know? What it is?
8. Considering several options	What I study? Or what I like?
9. Estimating knowledge of other	I think you know it.
10. Asking teacher or other pupil	Is that Spanish?

Negotiation of Meaning

According to the teacher that was interviewed, learners often engaged in instances that involved negotiation of meaning during the telecollaboration sessions. Even though certain students felt limited because of technical issues, the teacher was satisfied with the communication that learners succeeded to co-create in the telecollaboration exchanges. In reference to the results of the survey learners completed, the importance of understanding each other during exchanges was expressed, and also to learn about the culture and country of the other. The teacher highlighted that pupils were extremely motivated, they were eager to learn more, and felt that they had gained insight into the other culture, which was one of the goals of the TILA project. However, the students were disappointed in the technology and bad internet connections, which had a great impact on the interaction sessions. When the teacher was asked about the conditions needed for a project like TILA to be implemented successfully, the following conditions were listed:

- To have good hardware and internet connections;
- To prepare the pupils for the telecollaboration exchanges;
- To connect tasks to the pupils' interests;
- To facilitate it practically; and
- As a teacher to coach the process.

Learners found the tasks carried out during the exchanges were very good and were very positive about the opportunity to communicate with pupils from other countries. The most negative results were related to the quality of the sound technology.

Model of Communication Strategies for the Development of Intercultural Understanding

It is important for foreign language learners to acquire the means to prevent and restore misunderstandings during communication events. In foreign language education, students can be trained to improve their abilities in negotiating meaning. By applying Bahtina's (2013) MCD model and combining this with the data from this study, insight has been provided into the development of intercultural understanding through CMC. First, a number of preconditions were determined. Secondly, based on the results of the quantitative analysis of the fragments, discourse analysis, and interviews/surveys, a method has been developed that would allow students to communicate as effectively as possible within a CMC environment with pupils from a different cultural background. This method was further developed into an inductive model that connects the support of CMC to other extra-lingual conditions to ensure mutual understanding (see Figure 5).

The model shows that there are four factors that determine the success of the use of communication strategies and the development of intercultural understanding in telecollaboration exchanges: the technical and social environment, the individual, and the type of interaction developed (see Table 9).

LIMITATIONS

Despite the interesting results and insights of this study, there is no doubt that there are a number of limitations.

Unfortunately, technical problems[4] disturbed the natural development of conversations. These failures may have had a considerable impact on the results. In many cases it was not clear whether students did not understand each other due to a lack of either linguistic or cultural

Figure 5. Model for the effective use of communication strategies (MCDs) and the development of intercultural understanding within a CMC environment
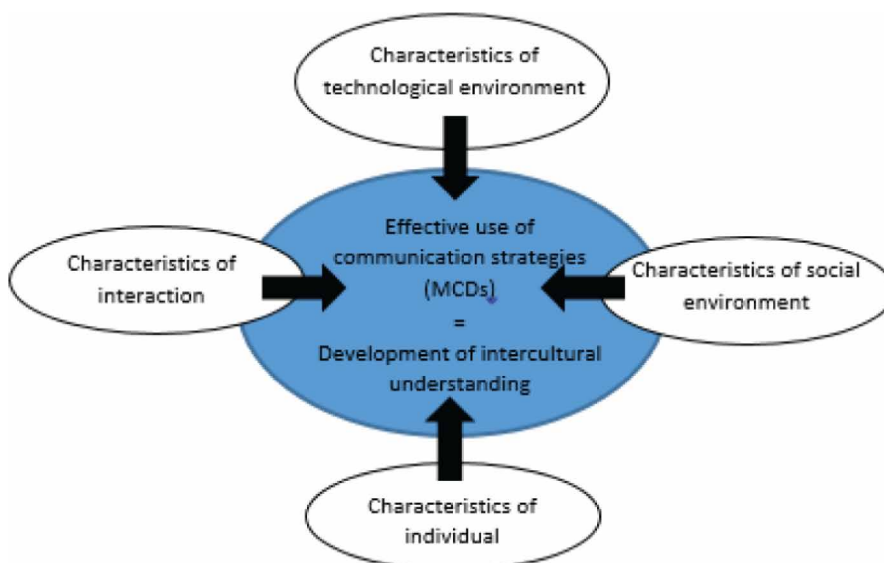
Table 9. Pedagogical model for enhancing intercultural understanding in telecollaborative exchanges

Characteristics of technical environment	- Optimal internet connections and updated hard- & software - To facilitate contact between students from other countries - To enhance multimodal communication
Characteristics of social environment	- Adequate pedagogical focus enhancing task and project-based intercultural communicative competence - Alignment of telecollaborative teachers' pedagogical and intercultural perspectives - Promote learner autonomy - Teacher as a coach of telecollaboration processes - Facilitate the practicability of telecollaborative exchanges
Characteristics of individual:	- To go across the threshold of embarrassment - To develop empathy - To show feelings - To reckon different modes of communication - To interpret and relate - To be autonomous

Characteristics of interaction	- Communication mode
	ELF
	o To have a similar language level
	o To promote cultural exchange
	NS/NNS
	o To attune to the shared goal and roles of the interaction partners
	o To promote cultural exchange
	Tasks
	o To promote interaction
	o To orientate on negotiation of meaning
	o To gain a cultural focus
	o To gain a three phase structure:
	  - Preparatory stage
	  - Realization stage
	  - Consolidation and evaluation stage

knowledge or due to technical failures. This study proves that it is very important for educational institutions willing to integrate telecollaboration projects to meet technical preconditions with regard to internet connections and updated hardware and software.

Another limitation of this study relates to the co-occurrence of communication modes in tasks. Task 1 was conducted in Spanish, while Task 2 was carried out in ELF. When analysing the data it was not always clear whether certain strategies were triggered by the nature of the task or by the communication mode. Future research studies should test several conditions wherein both tasks should be practised within both communication modes.

The focus of the present pilot analysis was more on oral communication and less on the written communication like the chat and video images. For future research it could be interesting to focus on these multimodal aspects of telecollaboration as well.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results show that pupils did use a high amount of discourse strategies to understand the other, to clarify one's meaning and thus achieve mutual intercultural understanding. On the basis of Bahtina (2013) it was possible to systemise these various discourse strategies within

the inductive model regarding the four different MCDs. These devices were used to recover the understanding of meaning when misunderstanding arose due to technical problems (MCD0), to help develop understanding with respect to the shared target of the interaction (MCD1), to attune to the orientation systems with respect to time and space (MCD2) or the meaning of a linguistic realisation (MCD3), and to check the correctness of the understood meaning (MCD4).

MCD0 was the most frequently used strategy, followed by MCD4, MCD3 and MCD1. MCD2 was the device that was used the least. However, of all MCDs, MCD2 appears to promote the development of intercultural understanding most. The use of this device causes a cultural exchange by comparing time, space, and habits of students from different countries. Additionally, the combination of MCD3 and MCD4 encourages a vast amount of intercultural understanding: when a speaker or listener indicates uncertainty regarding the understood meaning (MCD4), the other student can clarify by using a metaphor, adjusting their speech or translating the words (MCD3). Therefore, students created a shared reference and mutual understanding. It was also shown that the students and teacher involved in the study were satisfied about the development of intercultural understanding.

The different communication modes and tasks implicitly elicited the use of MCDs to guarantee understanding. The technologically mediated pedagogical tasks have indeed brought pupils' intercultural consciousness to a higher level, as stated by Canto et al. (2014).

Due to the fact that it is increasingly important in today's globalised society to function as an intercultural speaker (Byram, 2012), pedagogical initiatives in foreign language education have to contribute to strengthen the development of intercultural competences of pupils during the early stages of education by integrating telecollaboration projects. A project like TILA can help to promote intercultural citizenship by creating an authentic environment wherein students in multilingual and multicultural spaces can have the opportunity to discover cultural differences and similarities. They are able to align their reference frames, without losing their own identity (Stavenhagen, 2008) by learning to adopt a third perspective (Lo Bianco et al., 1999).

Interaction with the means of incidental telecollaboration might be less intense than the long lasting cooperation and mutual understanding one can achieve within the framework of a community of practice (Corder & Meyerhoff, 2007). Nevertheless, this study exemplifies that intercultural understanding can originate from authentic communication between pupils from other countries that relate, share and reflect upon the same institutional educational constellation.

This study contributes to at least one of the goals of the TILA project, that of investigating the possible added value that telecollaboration in foreign language education at the secondary level of education might have for enhancing intercultural understanding in younger learners (www.tilaproject.eu). Even though this study is based on a pilot, the results are promising.

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ENDNOTES

[1]   This research was conducted within an extensive European project: NIFLAR (Networked Interaction in Foreign Language Acquisition and Research, www.niflar.eu)

[2]   The European project TILA, (Telecollaboration for Intercultural Language Acquisition), tilaproject. eu, accessed on 17 November 2014) has been funded by the European Commission for 2013-2015. The project aims to promote intercultural awareness and communicative competence in foreign languages of younger learners by integrating telecollaboration projects in foreign language courses at secondary schools. Learners are brought into contact with other young learners from different European countries to cooperate by carrying out specific interaction tasks in the target language. It is possible to use different means of communication on the Internet for this: synchronous (virtual worlds, video communication or chat) and/or asynchronous (blogs, wikis, discussion forum) applications. With the integration of telecollaboration in foreign language teaching curricula at secondary schools, TILA seeks to make foreign language learning more effective, meaningful and motivating whilst enhancing younger learners' intercultural awareness. In addition, the study of the potential added value of telecollaboration in foreign language education is addressed.

[3]   High school NSG in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, and IES La Garrigosa in Meliana, Spain.

[4]   Prior to the telecollaboration sessions, hardware, software and internet connections were extensively tested at schools. However, internet networks proved not to be robust and stable enough to guarantee qualitative video communication sessions.

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