

# TILA Research Results on Telecollaboration<sup>1</sup>

## Chapter 5

### INTERCULTURAL TANDEM COMMUNICATION IN CHAT AND VIDEO COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SECONDARY EDUCATION PUPILS

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#### 1 SUMMARY

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In this paper, we present the results of a case study where we analyse Secondary Education pupils' productions when performing intercultural tasks in chat and video communication tools within a tandem communication constellation. This data helps us to set up specific patterns characterising communication in each environment. While chat sessions generally show *a-straight-to-the-point* communication format, with little elaboration, few instances of meaning clarification, in video communication there is a less rigid scheme: topics are more elaborated and rich with lateral topics and interesting intercultural aspects emerging more frequently and with pupils engaging in clarifying meaning in order to reach mutual understanding. Native speakers in video communication sessions tend to show more often their willingness to help their online partner, which in turn has a very positive effect on the foreign language speaker who shows greater interest to take an active role in the conversation, trying hard to make himself/herself understood. However, silences, overlaps and misunderstandings arising from technical problems with sound, are quite often present in the video communication environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Summary of the final report for the Master's Degree on Spanish and Catalan as Second Languages, University of Girona, named "Analysis of Secondary Education pupils' discourses in chat and video communication format within the Telecollaboration for Intercultural Language Acquisition (TILA) framework".

## 2 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Within TILA Telecollaboration (TC) sessions have been organized using different tools. In this paper we carry out a qualitative analysis on Secondary Education pupils' discourse when communicating with BigBlueButton (BBB), a video communication environment, and chat tools. There are three main research objectives:

- a) To analyse written and oral production of pupils using video communication and chat tools. We look at how communicative exchanges start and end in both environments, how speaking turns are managed, how topics and subtopics are developed in interaction, how is meaning negotiated, how interlocutors collaborate in order to understand intercultural aspects and how interlocutors negotiate power relationships in interaction.
- b) To identify which patterns are the most usual ones in synchronous online communication comparing both formats.

We address three specific research questions (RQ) in this study:

(RQ1): Does interaction in the TL differ when using one tool or another?

(RQ2): Which are the interaction patterns characterising chat and video communication among Secondary Education pupils?

(RQ3): In which environment can communicative intercultural exchange be better achieved? Why?

## 3 RESEARCH PROJECT

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### 3.1 METHOD OF RESEARCH

Our method of research is qualitative and analyses the discourse produced by pupils at secondary schools engaging in TC activities using BBB and chat tools. We compare how they communicate in both environments and apply discourse analysis criteria.

### 3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Participants are 9 Spanish and 9 English pupils from secondary schools in the UK and Spain who carried out TC activities within the TILA project (see Table 1). Half of them undertook the tasks in chat and the other half in BBB. They interacted according to the Tandem language constellation, as they carried out tasks with native speakers in English and in Spanish. In this case study we analyse pupils' productions in Spanish.

Table 1: Participants in this research project

Pupils	Institution	Number of pupils (18)	Codes for pupils
English	Godolphin and Latymer School, London	9 (all female)	EN1, EN2, EN3, EN4, EN5, EN6, EN7, EN8, EN9
Spanish	Clot del Moro High School, Valencia (Spain)	9 (5 male and 4 female)	SP1, SP2, SP3, SP4, SP5, SP6, SP7, SP8, SP9

The task pupils carried out in both environments required them to exchange information about holidays and festivities. The task was carried out at school.

### 3.2.1 Corpus description

The research corpus consists of 6 sessions of chatlogs, lasting 88 minutes, and 6 sessions of BBB sessions, (81 minutes of recordings), (see Table 2). The oral sessions in BBB were all transcribed using the Val.Es.Co transcription system. In order to respect pupils' privacy, we use codes when referring to them, being EN for English pupils and SP for Spanish ones.

Table 2: Corpus description

Environment	Sessions and duration	Dates	Subjects interacting
Chat	6 (88 minutes)	February 24 <sup>th</sup> , 2014	Session 1: SP1-EN1    Session 4: SP4-EN4 Session 2: SP2-EN2    Session 5: SP5-EN5 Session 3: SP3-EN3    Session 6: SP6-EN6
BBB	6 (81 minutes)	January 27 <sup>th</sup> - March 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2014	Session 1: SP1-SP8-EN2    Session 4: EN1-SP1 Session 2: EN1-SP2        Session 5: EN2-SP2 Session 3: EN8-SP8        Session 6: EN9-SP9

### 3.2.2 Data analysis

Chat logs and BBB transcriptions were analysed applying criteria from discourse analysis. Table 3 shows the variables being investigated and the criteria been applied for their analysis. We looked at how conversational topics were developed in the discourse, how meaning was negotiated, how power relationships were managed and how politeness marks arose in the conversation when beginning or ending the conversation. The analysis of power-relationships is very relevant as Tandem communication constellations are impregnated by the presence of a native speaker in the interaction, who obviously has “more power” as s/he masters the language they are communicating in and knows the culture the conversation partner is trying to acquire and develop.

### 3.3 RESULTS

This section shows the results of the analysis of chat logs and video communication transcriptions. We divide this section in four subsections: (1) target language use in topic development, (2) conversation beginnings and endings, (3) power relationships and (4) intercultural meaning negotiation.

Table 3: Variables and criteria for analysis within the present research project

Analysed variable	Criteria for its analysis
Dealing with intercultural aspects	A general variable to be analysed through all the following criteria.
1. Target language use in topic development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Topic development (topic scheme including task topic, lateral topics &amp; negotiation of meaning) in both environments</li> <li>2. Utterances and interaction turns for a topic or subtopic</li> <li>3. Use of paralinguistic features (i.e. emoticons) in topic development</li> </ol>
2. Conversation beginnings / endings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Politeness and courtesy when starting and leaving the chat/ BBB room or when changing into another language</li> <li>2. Which student starts and ends the conversation (also related to power relationships)</li> </ol>
3. Power relationships in discourse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who introduces the topic</li> <li>2. Who makes the questions and asks for doubts</li> <li>3. Amount of production (written and oral) in terms of interaction turns</li> <li>4. How speaking turns are managed (conversation patterns)</li> <li>5. How decisions are made (e.g. changing language)</li> <li>6. Engagement in sequences of negotiation of meaning. How are pupils engaged in checking and clarifying meaning and overcoming communicative problems</li> <li>7. The role of the NS</li> </ol> <p>(A)symmetric relations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Discourse control, &amp;/or</li> <li>(b) Accommodation: Help to the non-native speaker</li> </ol>

#### 3.3.1 Target language use in topic development

Chat sessions generally show a *very straightforward* communication pattern with pupils engaging in a quite rigid discourse structure with short questions being followed by short answers mostly related to the task general topic (see example 1). There are very few instances of lateral topics (topics that emerge spontaneously in the discourse and which might not be directly related to the task topic) and instances of negotiation of meaning emerging in the discourse.

As for BBB the analysed interaction excerpts present, in general terms, a less rigid scheme in which interlocutors collaborate to contribute to richer topic elaboration. In BBB sessions more lateral (not task specific) topics emerge in which pupils actively negotiate intercultural meaning. However, silences, overlaps and misunderstandings arising from technical problems with sound are noticeable in this communication format. Yet, pupils try to solve these difficulties by repeating or rephrasing utterances, and showing a clear interest to perform well in the TC task.

Example 1: Chat session 6 & BBB session 1

<p>12:23: EN6: cuantos anos tienes? 12:24: EN6: tengo 14, mi cumpleaños es el 30 de abril 12:26: SP6: Que piensas hacer en vacaciones de verano?  12:28: EN6: que haces normalmente en tu tiempo libre? 12:29: SP6: Hago deporte por las noches y tu 12:31: EN6: me gusta montar a caballo, pero soy perezosa, normalmente veo la tele! me encanta salir con mis amigas todos los dias. eres deportista?<sup>3</sup> 12:32: SP6: Antes jugaba a baloncesto, pero ahora salgo a correr por las noches</p>	<p>Translation 12:23: EN6: how old are you? 12:24: EN6: I'm 14, my birthday is April the 30<sup>th</sup> 12:26: SP6: What are you going to do on summer holidays?  12:28: EN6: What do you normally do in your free time? 12:29: SP6: I play sports at night, and you? 12:31: EN6: I like horseback riding, but I am lazy, I normally watch tv! I love going out with my friends every day. Are you sporty? 12:32: SP6: I used to play basketball, but now I go running at nights</p>
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<sup>3</sup> High number of sentences in the foreign language in an only time.

<p>37:39: EN2: Ahm (2"), ahm, c / con quién pasaste pa / ↓</p> <p>37:51: SP8: Eh, repi /¿Puedes repetir, por favor?</p> <p>37:54: EN2: Ahm, / con quién pasaste la Navidad ↓</p> <p>37:59: SP8: Yo la pasé // la Navidad la pasé con mi ( ( )</p> <p>38:07: EN2: ¿Tus amigos?</p> <p>38:09: SP8: Sí // Mis ( ( )). Yo soy de / de un pueblo de V</p> <p>38:15: EN2: Ah, sí.</p> <p>38:18: SP8: - Y // estuve con mis amigos en mi pueblo.</p> <p>38:23: EN2: Sí.</p> <p>38:25: SP8: Y después estuve el día de Navidad...</p> <p>38:26: [EN2: Bien.]</p> <p>38:27: SP8: = con mi familia.</p> <p>38:29: EN2: Sí...</p> <p>38:33: SP8: Ehm, el día de antes de Navidad (3") me fui de fiesta / con mis amigas.</p> <p>38:41: EN2: Ah, sí, sí. Vale. (LAUGHS) (2") ¿Y, y tú / (SP1b's name)?</p> <p>38:52: SP1: ¿Dime, dime?</p> <p>38:55: EN2: Ahm, con quién pasaste la Navidad ↓</p> <p>39:00: SP1: Ah, yo // estuve mis navidades / las navidades con mis amigos...</p> <p>39:04: [EN2: Sí, sí.]</p> <p>39:04: SP1: = y con mi, y con familia.</p> <p>39:07: EN2: Y mi, ahm, (3")...</p> <p>39:13: SP8: ¿Tú?</p> <p>39:15: EN2: Ah / a todos la familia / de mi padre // hm, vino a mi ca sa, ahm, mi tía, mi tío, mi abuela, mi primo mi prima y // su novio... Muchas personas (LAUGHS)</p> <p>39:33: SP1: Mucha gente.</p>	<p>37:39:EN2: Who did you spend Christmas with?</p> <p>37:51: SP8: Can you repeat please?</p> <p>37:54: EN2: Who did you spend Christmas with?</p> <p>37:59: SP8: I spent it, // Christmas I was with...( ( )</p> <p>38:07: EN2: Your friends?</p> <p>38:09: SP8: Yes // my,( ( ) ) I'm from a town in Valencia...</p> <p>38:15: EN2: Ah, yes</p> <p>38:18: SP8: And // I was with my friends in my town</p> <p>38:23: EN2: Yes</p> <p>38:25: SP8: And then on Christmas Day I was...</p> <p>38:26: [EN2: Ok]</p> <p>38:27: SP8: = With my family</p> <p>38:29: EN2: Yes...</p> <p>38:33: SP8: The day before Christmas, I had a good time with my friends</p> <p>38:41: EN2: Ah, yes, ok. (LAUGHS) (2") And you...?</p> <p>38:52: SP1: Sorry, sorry?</p> <p>38:55: EN2: Who did you spend Christmas with?</p> <p>39:00: SP1: I // spent my Christmas with my friends...</p> <p>39:04: [EN2: Yes, yes]</p> <p>39:04: SP1: = And with my family</p> <p>39:07: EN2: Me, ahm (3")...</p> <p>39:13: SP8: And you?</p> <p>39:15: EN2: Ah, all my family, from my father, ahm, came to my house, ahm, my aunt, my uncle, my grandma, my cousins, my cousin's boyfriend... A lot of people (LAUGHS)</p> <p>39:33: SP1: Yes, a lot of people</p>
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Table 4 specifies for each environment (chat and BBB) the task topic for the session, the quantity of lateral topics that emerged during the interaction and who (SP or EN) engages more frequently in checking and clarifying meaning. The table also shows in which environment utterances and interaction turns for the same topic or subtopic are higher, as indication of topic elaboration.

As we can see interaction in BBB elicited a more dynamic discourse structure with more lateral topics being generated across interaction dyads (excepting dyad 4) and pupils being more engaged in negotiating meaning. In four of the 6 dyads the native speaker was the one more frequently engaging in checking understanding and clarifying meaning.



19:05: SP2: ¡Eehh! ¡Ya está!	Oh! Now it works!
19:18: SP2: ¿Hola?	Hello
19:22: EN1: ¡Hola! ¿Qué tal?	Hi, how are you?
19:34: EN1: ¿Qué tal?	how are you?
19:40: SP2: ¡Buenas! ¿Va?	Hi! Does it work?

The chat sessions in Spanish ended up with pupils requesting to change languages mostly introduced by SP (*can we change to english now?*), while pupils in the BBB sessions often indicated that they had to go to another class and said goodbye among laughter (see example 4).

Example 4: BBB session 1

46:52: SP1: Que //Tenemos que cambiar de clase y ya nos veremos, ¿vale?	46:52: SP1: We have to switch class; see you soon, ok?
46:58: EN2: Sí, ahm, (( )). <i>You have, you have to go? // You have to go?</i>	46:58: EN2: Sí, ahm, (( )). <i>You have, you have to go? // You have to go?</i>
47:07: SP8: (( ))	47:07: SP8: (( ))
47:09: EN2: Ah, sí, sí. (LAUGHS) ¡Hasta luego! ('Bye!')	47:09: EN2: Ah, sí, sí. (LAUGHS) See you! ('Bye!')

As to who takes initiative in beginning and ending a session or in changing languages, we notice that the native speaker (SP) is more active in the chat tool than in the BBB environment.

### 3.3.3 Power relationships in discourse

This section is devoted to present the results of power relationships in both communication environments, BBB and chat sessions, and how these affect the general discourse development. We look at who introduces the topics, who makes the questions, who engages in clarifying meaning, who makes decisions and presents a higher amount of production (see Table 5).

Table 4: Who initiates, ends or changes languages in sessions

		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7 (chat)
Chat	Beginnings	EN	SP	EN	SP	SP	SP	SP
	Language change	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	EN	SP
BBB	Beginnings	EN	SP	EN	BOTH	EN	EN	∅
	Endings/language ch.	SPs*	SP	SP	SP	EN	SP	∅

**\*Note1:** SP = Spanish student (SPs = Spanish students, in BBB S1), EN = English student.

Although one might expect power relations in discourse in a tandem constellation to be asymmetrical, as result of the native speaker controlling discourse processes, the results in Table 5 show this not to be



the case particularly for communication carried out through BBB. In BBB video communication sessions the non-native speaker (EN) seems to take more initiative in discourse elaboration by introducing most topics, asking most questions, being actively involved in clarifying meaning and by producing more talk. In contrast, in chats, the native speaker (SP) seems to take more the lead in discourse construction.

Table 5: Power relationships in discourse

	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	*S7 (chat)
Who...							
Introduces the topic	Chat: EN BBB: EN	Chat: SP BBB: EN	Chat: SP BBB: EN	Chat: EN BBB: EN	Chat: SP BBB: EN	Chat: SP BBB: EN	EN
Makes the questions and asks for doubts	Chat: SP BBB: BOTH	Chat: SP BBB: BOTH	Chat: BOTH BBB: BOTH	Chat: EN BBB: EN	Chat: SP BBB: EN	Chat: BOTH BBB: BOTH	BOTH
Engages in clarifying meaning	Chat: SP BBB: BOTH	Chat: Ø * BBB: BOTH	Chat: Ø BBB: SP	Chat: SP BBB: SP	Chat: SP BBB: SP	Chat: Ø BBB: SP	SP
Makes decisions (e.g. changing lang. & leaving)	Chat: SP BBB: SPs	Chat: SP BBB: SP	Chat: SP BBB: SP	Chat: SP BBB: SP	Chat: SP BBB: EN	Chat: EN BBB: SP	SP
Presents a higher amount of production	Chat: EN BBB: SPs*	Chat: SP BBB: EN	Chat: EN BBB: EN	Chat: EN BBB: EN	Chat: SP BBB: EN	Chat: SP BBB: EN	SP

\*Note1: No important misunderstandings arising in sessions with the symbol Ø.

\*Note2: Total SP in BBB S1: 72; however, SP8 participates more than SP1 (SP8: 47, SP1: 25). EN2, at his/her turn, communicates well and produces a lot (n = 70).

The following examples show who initiates topic change and the way it happens in both chat and video communication environments. In the excerpts corresponding to chat session 3, we can see that after the initial chitchat, that functions as rapport building, the native speaker (SP3) is the one introducing the task topic asking her speech partner, whether she is going on holidays to Spain.

Example 5: Excerpts of chat and BBB sessions regarding topic introduction

Chat session 3	
12:22 SP3: que tal? 12:23 EN3: bien, pero un poco cansada porque es el primero dia de colegio 12: 23 : EN3: y tu? 12:24: SP3: bien, tambien estoy un poco cansado 12:25: SP3: vas a viajar estas vacaciones a españa? [main topic]	12:22 SP3: how are you? 12:23: EN3: fine, but a bit tired because it is the first day of school' 12:23: EN3: and you? 12:24: SP3: fine, I'm also a bit tired 12:25: SP3: are you going to travel these holidays to Spain? [main topic]
1 BBB session 5	
09:12: EN2: Em, ¿empezamos? 09:16: SP2: Sí, eh / ¿quieres que empecemos en español o en inglés? 09:19: EN2: Eh, no sé. Ok, ¿en español? 09:26: SP2: (( )) 09:27: EN2: ¿Sí, ok? (3'') Ahm, hm (3''), ¿qué tal fallas? [main topic]	09:12: EN2: shall we start? 09:16: SP2: Yes, eh, do you want to start in Spanish or in English? 09:19: EN2: Eh, I don't know. Ok, in Spanish? 09:26: SP2: (( )) 09:27: EN2: Yes, ok? Ahm, how were <i>Fallas</i> ? [main topic]

As to the BBB session the foreign language learner is the one introducing the main topic by asking the speech partner about Las Fallas, a well-known regional festivity in Valencia.

Generally speaking chat conversations turned to be very straightforward. There were fewer instances of collaboration and negotiation of meaning than in BBB interactions. Native speakers in BBB clearly showed their willingness to help their online partner, which in turn, motivated the non-native speaker to be more engaged in the conversation by showing interest, by producing more discourse and by making more efforts for being understood.

### 3.3.4 Dealing with intercultural aspects

Intercultural aspects are essential elements in the analysed conversations both in chat and in VC interactions. However, intercultural issues (festivities like Christmas, San Fermín, Fallas, Saint name, food, presents, etc.) are more frequently negotiated in BBB conversations than in chats. It is interesting to notice that these intercultural elements seem to attract pupils' attention and interest as they become engaged in describing or clarifying those intercultural aspects which are not known by the peer. This is illustrated in Table 4 where we can observe the behaviour of the non-native speaker and his/her interest on the native-speaker's explanations on intercultural aspects related to festivities, food, music, free time, sports etc. These conversations contribute to make pupils aware of the intercultural dimension of communication and help them develop Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997). They show curiosity and openness towards the other culture, share and develop knowledge of both cultures, try to interpret the information they get and relate it to their own cultural framework and start developing a critical cultural awareness.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

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After presenting the previous results, we are able to answer our research questions.

(RQ1): Does interaction in the TL differ when using one tool or another?

(RQ2): Which are the patterns characterising chat and VC communication among Secondary Education pupils?

Interaction seems to differ according to the tool being used to communicate:

- *Chat tools.* Chat sessions generally show *a-straight-to-the-point* communication following the scheme *question-answer* (one student asks a question(s), the other student answers it) and without serious problems and silences hindering communication. Furthermore, courtesy and politeness in starting conversations and changing into another language are remarkable. In general terms the conversations in chat are quite shallow; topics take very few turns, there is no in depth topic development but a dynamic topic exchange structure. Meaning is developed quite superficially and if misunderstandings arise these are dealt with in a quite simple manner.
- *BBB sessions.* The analysed BBB excerpts present, in general terms, a less rigid scheme in which lateral topics and interesting intercultural aspects are introduced. Besides, there are normally more interaction turns for a (sub)topic with repetitions, reformulations and rich sequences of

negotiation of meaning emerging. Native speakers in BBB clearly show their willingness to help their online partner, which in turn, motivates the non-native speaker to be more engaged in the conversation by showing interest, producing more discourse (in terms of interaction turns) and to make efforts for being understood. Nevertheless, silences, overlaps and misunderstandings arising from technical problems with sound are remarkable in this communication format. However, students try to solve these difficulties by repeating or rephrasing things, showing interest in performing well. Finally, politeness and courtesy strategies are widely used.

As to the third research question:

(RQ3): In which environment can communicative intercultural exchange be more easily achieved? Why?

Each environment presents strengths and limitations. If we look at the conversations from a discourse analysis point of view, the video communication environment seems to promote greater discourse engagement among participants: topics are more elaborated, there is more negotiation of meaning, intercultural issues are better shared, clarified and developed, pupils present an engaged and positive attitude. So this VC environment seems to be better to promote rich interactions.

However, we consider essential to work on technological matters (sound, webcam, Internet connection and tools) to avoid problems and enrich this kind of projects; as we can see in the transcripts, remarked with symbols [((...))], [(( ))] and [((word))], communication in BBB presents many technical problems, generally related to sound, which makes mutual understanding difficult to achieve.

The results of this case study are interesting for the research field but the limitations are obvious. The sample data analysed is quite small and we need additional studies focusing on the discourse patterns of chats and video communication environments with a larger groups of pupils, carrying out more than one task and see how discourse patterns develop across sessions.