

TILA Research Results on Telecollaboration¹

Chapter 6

COOPERATIVE LINGUA FRANCA CONVERSATIONS IN INTERCULTURAL TELECOLLABORATION EXCHANGES BETWEEN PUPILS IN SECONDARY FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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1 SUMMARY

This research study analyses written and spoken communicative interactions in eleven lingua franca conversations between pairs or small groups of pupils in different home-based telecollaboration environments: text chat, video communication and 3D virtual world exchanges. Special attention is given to topic development, comprehension and production problems, and aspects of interactional intercultural competence. In addition to the assigned conversation tasks, pupils tend to introduce their own personal topics, in particular in video communication encounters. This is an indicator of increased autonomous authenticity and a move beyond school towards real-life communication. Comprehension and production problems are addressed on the fly in highly cooperative and efficient ways. The pupils' attention is on ensuring successful communication: they want to be understood and convey their message. Any focus on form serves the communicative ambition. In particular in video conversations, pupils show a high degree of social presence by expressing empathy and rapport. The conversational interactions are thoroughly cooperative and supportive. Creating common ground and negotiating a shared line of argumentation seems to be more important than engaging in controversies.

2 OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

TILA telecollaboration exchanges engage pupils from different countries and lingua-cultural backgrounds in spoken and written conversational interactions using mainly four tool environments: 3D virtual worlds in OpenSim, video communication in BigBlueButton and Skype as well as text chat and forum in Moodle. The overall pedagogic objective is to offer pupils rich opportunities for authentic intercultural communication practice and competence development. Pupils are matched in pairs to talk about soft

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intercultural topics; the main intercultural focus is on interaction, not on content. Depending on teachers' pedagogic objectives and preference, pupils communicate in native speaker/non-native speaker tandems or with other non-native speakers under lingua franca conditions. Following an overall blended learning design, the main telecollaboration task is generally sandwiched between preparation and follow-up phases in the classroom supported by accompanying Moodle activities.

The present study takes a closer look at eleven lingua franca conversations between pairs of pupils in text chat, video communication or 3D virtual world exchanges (Table 1). Access to the telecollaboration environments is from pupils' homes. The main motivation for this decision is to ensure communicative privacy, to have more flexibility for making appointments, and to avoid sound problems due to network overload in the computer room.

Three written English lingua franca conversations in Moodle chat (A) and four spoken English lingua franca conversations in BigBlueButton (B) all belong to the same telecollaboration exchange between a German and a Spanish school class. The pupils talk about new technologies and social media. The chat or BigBlueButton environment is chosen depending on technological accessibility and/or preference. Two other spoken BigBlueButton conversations involve Dutch and French pupils (C). In this case, the pupils use German as lingua franca. For their conversations, they choose from a list of topics concerning issues around school, fashion, media etc. While the conversations in groups A, B and C are all embedded in a classroom context, the two English lingua franca conversations in group D are voluntary class-independent activities. The first conversation is between a male pupil from Turkey and a female pupil from Bulgaria. They meet in a cafe in OpenSim and talk about school-related topics and plans for the future. The second conversation takes place in Skype between a male pupil from Turkey, two female pupils from Bulgaria and one female pupil from Portugal. They address the pros and cons of using Facebook. In these two class-independent conversations, preparatory and follow-up tasks concerning technological, thematic and feedback issues are conducted online in BigBlueButton or Skype or via email.

Session code ²		Lingua Franca (LF) and native languages (NL)	Assigned topic(s)	Duration (min.) / no. of words
(A) English lingua franca conversations in Moodle chat				
EN11_Chat1_DE5_ES5	Chat	LF: English NL: German, Spanish	New technologies and social media	60/750
EN11_Chat2_DE6_ES6				70/760
EN11_Chat3_DE7_ES7				30/500
(B) English lingua franca conversations in BigBlueButton				
EN11_BBB1_DE1_ES1	BBB	LF: English NL: German, Spanish	New technologies and social media	25/2400
EN11_BBB2_DE2_ES2				50/6500
EN11_BBB3_DE3_ES3				45/5900
EN11_BBB4_DE4_ES4				40/6100
(C) German lingua franca conversations in BigBlueButton				

² Code explanation: "EN11" etc. = TILA course code, "DE1_ES5" etc. = native speaker code and number of the pupils involved in the conversation

GER2_BBB_NL1_FR1	BBB	LF: German	School, fashion, media etc. (10 topics to choose from)	35/3600
GER2_BBB_NL2_FR2		NL: Dutch, French		50/2900
<i>(D) Class-independent English lingua franca conversations in OpenSim and Skype</i>				
ENx_OS_ELF_BG1_TR1	OpenSim	LF: English NL: Bulgarian, Turkish	School, plans for the future	25/2900
ENx_Skype_ELF_TR1_BG2&3_P T1	Skype	LF English NL: Bulgarian, Portuguese, Turkish	Facebook	20/1900

Table 1: English and German lingua franca conversations in BigBlueButton, OpenSim and Moodle chat exchanges from home

The general research question across all eleven conversations is about how written and spoken lingua franca communication unfolds in chat, video communication and 3D virtual world exchanges, in particular under conditions of home access. Special attention is given to topic development, comprehension and production problems, and aspects of interactional intercultural competence. The analyses of the conversations are based on performance recordings.

3 TOPIC DEVELOPMENT IN WRITTEN AND SPOKEN TELECOLLABORATION FROM HOME

It is a common characteristic of natural conversations that speakers do not necessarily stick to a given topic; more often than not, they seamlessly move on to issues arising spontaneously and dynamically in the course of the interaction. In school contexts, pupils are faced with the task to discuss assigned topics. They are usually expected not to digress – at least not too much – so that the ensuing conversation will be about the topic(s) specified in the task. In telecollaboration exchanges from home, assigned tasks and topics are embedded in a private environment. It is assumed that this has an effect on the communicative interaction in particular on the nature of the topic development.

The following analysis focuses on this issue. Evidence will be drawn from the English lingua franca conversations in Moodle chat (group A) and BigBlueButton (group B). In both environments, the pupils' assigned discussion topic "New technologies and social media" was further specified by three questions:

1. Which social media do you use and how? What do you like or dislike about them?
2. What would it mean to you to be without a computer or smartphone for a day/week/month or longer?
3. Are the new technologies (Smartphones, I-Pad) and social media and communication tools (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Skype, email) a blessing or a curse? Discuss problems and benefits of new technologies.

In addition to task-related topic(s), conversations are expected to also touch on topics introduced by the pupils themselves. Such topics are termed "personal". Four types of triggers are considered:

- **a lexical/propositional element in the preceding conversation about a task-related topic**, e.g. when talking about the use of social media, one pupil says "I only post my drawings". Leaving

the task-related topic “Use of media”, her partner shifts to a personal topic: “Wow you draw ... what do you draw?” (Figure 2 below);

- **a lexical/propositional element in the preceding conversation about a personal topic**, e.g. when one pupil asked the personal question “And about your English, did you learn everything you know at school?”, her partner’s reply (“I learned by watching too many series”) triggered a topic shift to "movies" (Figure 2);
- **a spontaneous question raised by one of the pupils**, e.g. “I know this doesn’t have to do with the topic but how excited is your class about this project?” (ES5);
- **an external stimulus**, e.g. sound problems, a ringing phone, or a person entering the room.

The distribution of task-related and personal topics throughout a conversation can be interpreted as an indicator of where the conversation is placed on a continuum from school-focused to private.

In two of the three written chat conversations, the pupils only address task-related topics (Figure 1) by more or less going through the different questions from the worksheet they received from their teachers.

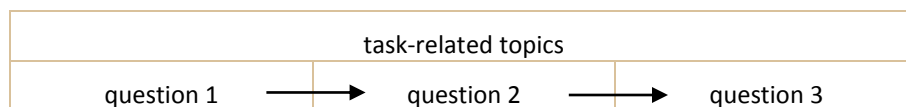


Figure 1: Task related topic development in two chat conversations (EN11_Chat2_DE6_ES6 and EN11_Chat3_DE7_ES7)

In chat conversation EN11_Chat2_DE6_ES6 between a German and a Spanish girl, the German girl takes the lead and makes sure that she and her partner work through the list of questions specified in the worksheet. Right at the beginning, she refers to their task (“Let’s discuss the questions”) and raises the first question:

15:10 DE6: Hello
 15:10 ES6: Hi
 15:11 DE6: Let’s discuss the questions
 15:11 DE6: Which media do you use?

Whenever she feels a question has been answered, she continues to the next question on the worksheet. When the last question has been dealt with, she closes the conversation:

16:15 DE6: I have to finish soon. I think we’ve discussed the important things
 16:18 DE6: Goodbye!
 16:18 ES6: Bye

Chat conversation EN11_Chat3_DE7_ES7 between a German and a Spanish boy is an example of a more balanced distribution of conversational responsibilities (Example 1) since both pupils introduce topic questions. Like the two girls, they cover all questions from the worksheet, but these questions develop more naturally as a response to what was said before.

Starting conversation	19:02 ES7: hy 19:02 DE7: Hello 19:02 DE7: Have you some media you use regular
Introducing the next topics/questions	19:03 ES7: and how many time do you use it?

	19:05 DE7: Do you think you could live a day/week/month without it?
	19:12 ES7: okay and do you think that the new technologies, social media and communication tools are blessing or curse?
Closing the conversation	19:29 DE7: Ok I think we have talked about all questions or not 19:30 ES7: yes

Example 1: Balanced initiation of topic questions in a chat conversation between two boys (EN11_Chat3_DE7_ES7)

In chat conversation EN11_Chat1_DE5_ES5 between a German and a Spanish girl, topics develop more spontaneously and often drift away from the questions specified in the assignment (Figure 2).

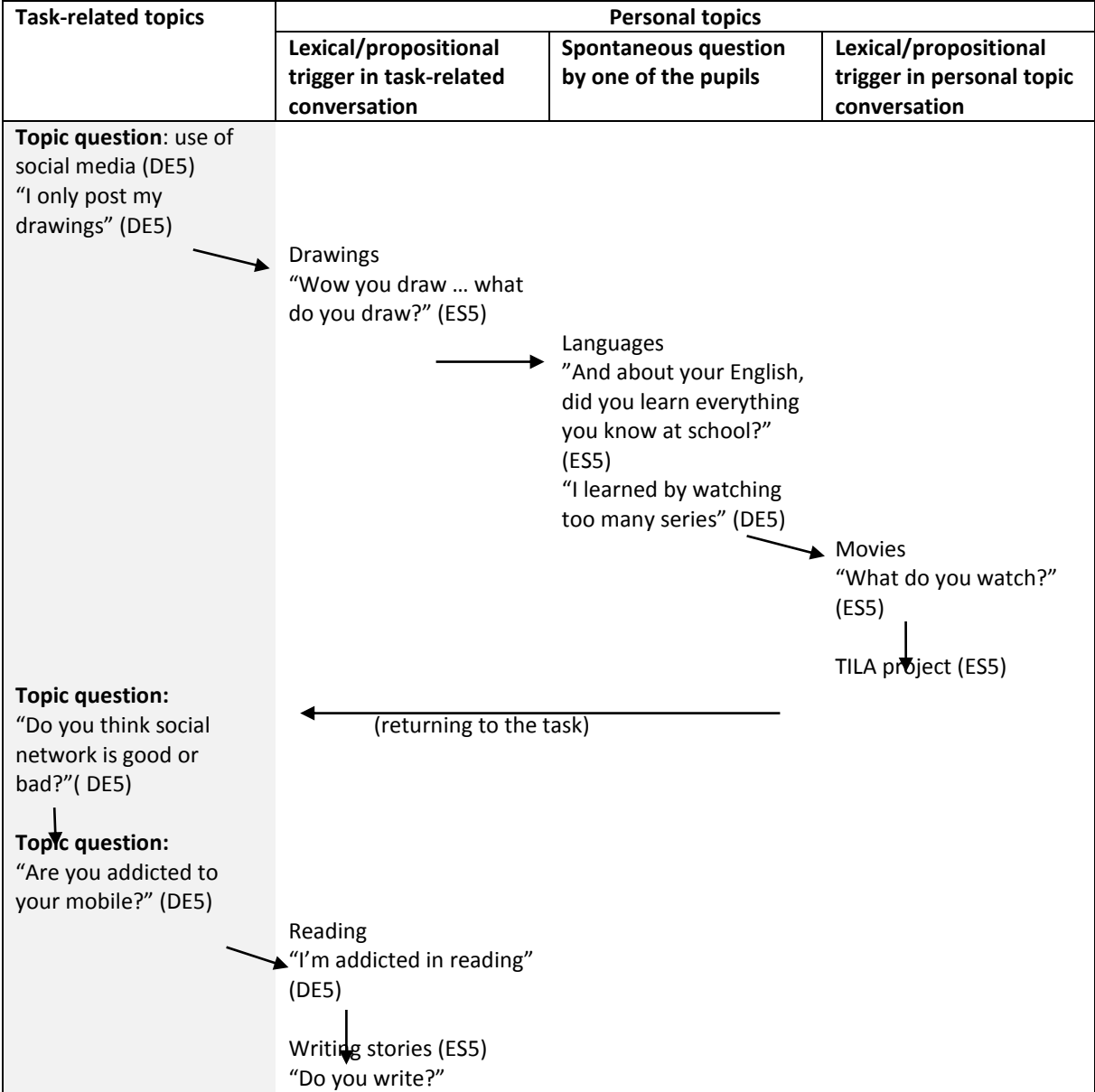


Figure 2: Topic development involving task-related and personal topics in a chat conversation (EN11_Chat1_DE5_ES5)

While the German girl (DE5) tries to cover the questions from the worksheet, the Spanish girl (ES5) spontaneously shifts the topic to issues beyond the task. They actually talk very little about the task-related questions. It seems they are more interested in TV series or in drawing, reading and writing than in new technologies and social media. After the spontaneous thematic excursion from “I only post my drawings” to “what do you draw” and “watching movies”, the German girl finally returns to the task by addressing the next question from the worksheet. Soon afterwards, they move again to a topic beyond the task, i.e. from “Are you addicted to your mobile?” to “I’m addicted in reading”. This conversation is an example of topic development that shifts from task-related questions to personal topics outside the task. The main triggers for topic development are lexical/propositional ones.

In the oral BigBlueButton conversations, all pupils spontaneously switch to personal topics beyond the actual task; this happened either before, after or during their discussion of task-related topics. The ease with which pupils introduce personal topics in BigBlueButton may be partly due to the fact that in oral conversation pupils can usually exchange a lot more information than in written chat. The chat exchanges last between 30 and 70 minutes and consist of 500 up to 750 words, while the oral conversations, lasting between 25 and 50 minutes, comprise 2400 up to 6500 words (Table 1 above). Even though a chat communication might last as long or longer as some of the oral exchanges, in the oral mode, communication is much faster. There is just more room for elaborations of the individual task-related topics including exchanges of information and opinions as well as for excursions beyond the questions specified in the original task.

Topic development and the relation between task-related and personal topics are different in each of the oral exchanges. The two girls in BigBlueButton conversation EN11_BBB_DE1_ES1 only talk for 25 minutes. They start with the assigned topic and go through the different topic questions in a similar way as the pupils in the strictly task-related chat conversations described above (Figure 1). Only after having covered all topic questions, do they shift to a personal topic beyond the task and start talking about their schools and the languages they learn. Not knowing what else they should talk about, they briefly return to the last question of the assignment until they finally decide “We answered all the questions and I think is good” (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Topic development in BigBlueButton session EN11_BBB1_DE1_ES1 between a German and a Spanish boy

The other three BigBlueButton exchanges are characterized by very long, lively and spontaneous conversations; the pupils did not seem to run out of personal topics. In BigBlueButton session EN11_BBB2_DE2_ES2 (Figure 4) between a German and a Spanish boy, the first 20 minutes of the conversation are about personal topics. They talk about their age and hobbies and how they spend their free time, about their siblings, and about travelling. The Spanish pupil (ES1) finally shifts the conversation to the assigned task (“I think the teacher wanted us to talk about some questions in special”) and after some clarifications, they start discussing the task-related questions. During this discussion some thematic excursions to personal topics are evoked by an external stimulus (a ringing phone), by lexical-conceptual triggers in the task-related conversation similar to ones in the chat example discussed above (Figure 2), or by unrelated questions spontaneously brought up by the German pupil DE2, e.g. a question about playing games (“Do you play Clans?”). The Spanish pupil ES2 always tries

to shift the conversational focus back to the assigned task (e.g. “So, well I think we could move to the second question”).

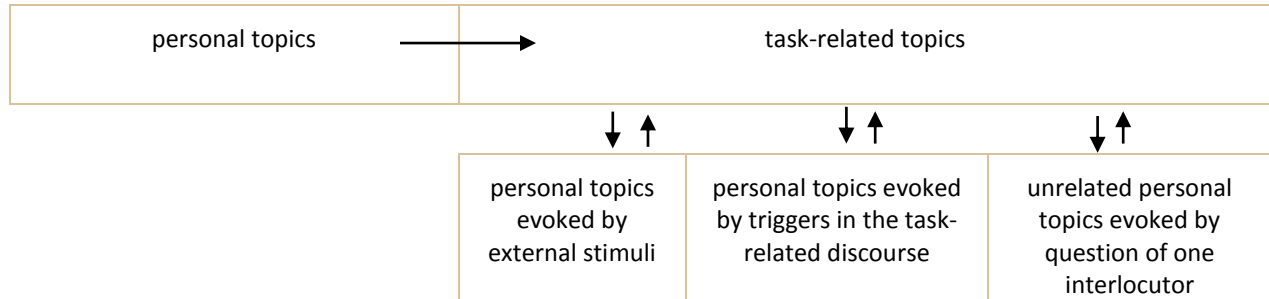


Figure 4: Topic development in BigBlueButton session EN11_BBB2_DE2_ES2 between a German and a Spanish boy

In the very animated BigBlueButton conversation EN11_BBB3_DE3_ES3 (Figure 5), the two girls involved discuss only two of the three task-related questions. The German girl (DE3) expresses that she does not know how to continue the conversation because they both are of the same opinion. She thus seems to assume that the discussion should be more controversial (“Yeah, well, that’s pretty much my opinion too. I don’t know how we should discuss this.”). Her Spanish partner (ES3) then spontaneously introduces a personal topic (“Where do you live in Germany?”). The German pupil answers the question and immediately introduces “movies” as the next personal topic (“Do you like watching movies?”). This question triggers a lively and animated exchange about movies, TV series they watch, or books they read. The fact that the Spanish pupil read a book in French leads to questions about the French school in Spain she attends and about the languages they both learn. They continue with a rich variety of other personal topics concerning family background, travelling, sports, and school days in Spain and Germany. Before saying goodbye, the two girls befriend each other in Facebook.

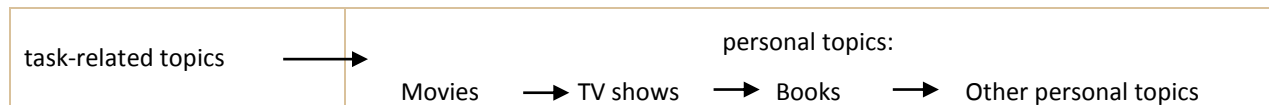


Figure 5: Topic development in BigBlueButton session EN11_BBB3_DE3_ES3 between a German and a Spanish girl

Finally, in BigBlueButton session EN11_BBB4_DE4_ES4 (Figure 6) between a German girl and a Spanish boy, the two pupils first address and solve some technical problems. They then start with the task-related questions. This stretch is briefly interrupted when the German girl out of the blue brings up a personal topic: “I’ve got a question. Is your school a French speaking school ...?” She then returns to the assigned task: “Okay. Back to the questions.” After having discussed all task-related questions, the German girl initiates a small talk phase (“Okay, now a little time for small talk”) during which they talk about their common hobby (taekwondo) and other areas of interests.

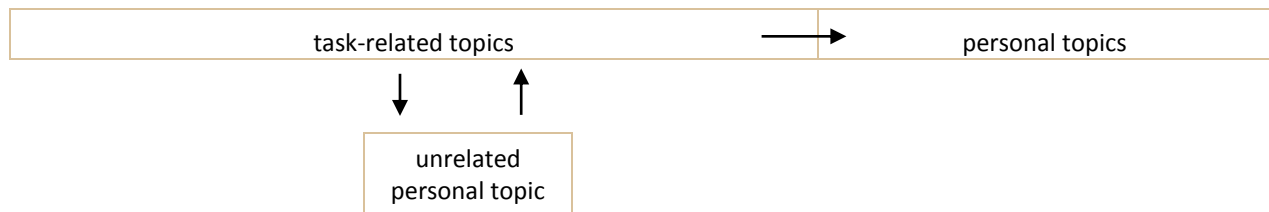


Figure 6: Topic development in BigBlueButton session EN11_BBB4_DE4_ES4 between a German girl and a Spanish boy

Two conclusions can be drawn from the analyses. First, in intercultural telecollaboration exchanges from home, pupils tend to go beyond the topics specified in the assigned task. Just like they would do in ordinary communication, they bring up topics they are personally interested in. This shift towards thematic issues outside the actual conversational assignment bridges over from school to real life. Very much in line with a call for more learner autonomy and Widdowson's (2003, p. 115) argument for authentication, the pupils manage to make the conversation authentic for themselves. Second, thematic excursions to personal topics outside the assigned task occur in both spoken BigBlueButton and written chat exchanges. But there is a striking difference regarding frequencies. While in chat conversations personal thematic extensions occur sporadically as in chat EN11_Chat1_DE5_ES5 above, they are an all-pervasive feature of conversations in BigBlueButton. Pupils' readiness to venture beyond assigned topics is thus, arguably, the same for chat and BigBlueButton. The opportunities for open and flexible topic development are, however, considerably richer under conditions of spoken communication.

4 DEALING WITH COMPREHENSION AND PRODUCTION PROBLEMS

Being involved in intercultural telecollaborative conversations from home and talking about various dynamically arising topics outside the assigned task, pupils did of course encounter many comprehension and production problems. In this chapter, some examples will be analysed that throw some light into how pupils interact when trying to solve such problems.

In their conversations, pupils were faced with different kinds of comprehension problems; the following causes were particularly noticeable:

- acoustic comprehension problems
- label-related comprehension problems
- lexical comprehension problems
- propositional (= content-related) comprehension problems

Acoustic comprehension problems occur in all video communication conversations in BigBlueButton or Skype as well as in the 3D virtual world exchanges in OpenSim. These are some of the indicators pupils used to refer to acoustic comprehension problems:

"What? My – the connection is- I don't know, it is really bad." (DE2)

"What? Sorry, I didn't understand". (ES4)

"Sorry?" (Moves closer to the screen) (DE1)

"Again please." (Moves closer to the screen) "I didn't understand you, because I didn't hear you." (Points to her ear) (DE1)

As a reaction, partners usually repeat what they said before, sometimes they speak louder or move closer to their microphone.

In the following passage from a chat conversation (Example 2), one interlocutor (DE6) has a label-related comprehension problem; she does not know what “Viber” refers to. She signals her problem with a request for an explanation (“What is Viber?”). Her partner (ES6) provides the explanation (“It’s a social media like whatsapp but you can call people”), and DE6 confirms having understood (“Okay. I didn’t know this.”).

15:14 ES6: Well I’m practically everywhere: I have Facebook, I have whatsapp, I have **Viber**, Instagram and so on

15:15 DE6: **What is Viber?**

15:15 ES6: **it’s a social media like whatsapp but you can call people**

15:17 DE6: **Okay. I didn’t know this.** I know Instagram and Facebook but I don’t use them. Some of my friends use them.

Example 2: Label-related comprehension problem in a chat conversation (EN11_Chat2_DE6_ES6)

In the next example from a BigBlueButton conversation (Example 3), pupil ES2 asks a question, which his partner DE2 does not fully understand because of a lexical problem with the word “curse”. DE2 signals his problem by repeating the part of the utterance immediately before the unknown word with a raising intonation (“Blessing or?”). In his response, ES2 repeats the word “curse” along with a description of its conceptual meaning: “like if it is good for us, or if it is bad”. DE2 confirms understanding (“Ok.”) and replies to the original question.

ES2: Are the new technologies, smartphones or iPads and social media communication tools such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Skype, Email are a blessing or a **curse**? Discuss problems and benefits of new technologies.

DE2: **Blessing or?**

ES2: **A curse, like if it is good for us, or if it is bad?**

DE2: **Ok.** Erm, I think it is good for us because we could communicate better and so this wouldn’t be able without it so, yeah.

Example 3: Lexical comprehension problem in a BigBlueButton conversation (EN11_BBB2_DE2_ES2)

Example 4, which is taken from a chat conversation, illustrates an interesting interaction between a lexical production and a propositional comprehension problem. The Spanish pupil (ES6) is not sure whether her lexical choice “comprimise” is suitable for getting the propositional content (message) of her utterance across. She checks for comprehension (“if you know what i mean”), and her German conversation partner (DE6) indeed confirms that she was unable to understand the message (“What do you want to say? I don’t understand it.”). The lexical production problem thus results in a propositional comprehension problem. Pupil ES6 rephrases and elaborates her message. DE6 signals understanding of the rephrased propositional content and immediately agrees with ES6’s argument.

15:58 ES6: yes and like then when you want to work for exemple in the big companie there are people who are payed to search different information which is **comprimise** on you **if you know what i mean**

15:59 DE6: **What do you want to say? I don’t understand it)**

16:02 ES6: In the big companies there are people who are payed to dig some dirt up on you like some old photos which you posted on facebook or whatever when you were 8

16:05 DE6: **Yes, now I understand.** This isn’t right because it shouldn’t be important for your job what you posted

when you were a teenager.

Example 4: Lexical production and propositional comprehension problem in a chat conversation
(EN11_chat2_DE6_a_ES6)

In Example 5 from a German lingua franca conversation in BigBlueButton, lexical, pronunciation/spelling and propositional comprehension problems interact in interesting ways and are eventually solved in a complex collaborative effort of meaning negotiation.

A French (FR1) and a Dutch girl (NL1) are talking about homework, and the French girl tries to convey that homework is usually quite boring and that in her opinion homework should be more interesting and fun. She uses the German word “lustig” [= fun]. As an example of homework she considers “lustig”, she mentions theatre projects or telecollaboration exchanges like the one they are currently engaged in (“mit anderen Personen sprechen, wie wir jetzt” [= speaking with other people, like we do right now]). The Dutch girl (NL1) indicates that she does not understand her (“Entschuldigung, ich verstehe du nicht.”), and they start a longer negotiation process. The two girls identify the word “lustig” as the trigger of a lexical comprehension problem, which is further complicated by a misunderstanding regarding pronunciation/spelling: the Dutch girl mishears “lustig” as “lüstig” (with “Umlaut”). Once the pronunciation/spelling problem is clarified, she looks up the word (“lustig”) in a dictionary and is able to solve the lexical comprehension problem.

When continuing the conversation, however, it becomes clear that communication is also hindered by a propositional comprehension problem. Applying her newly acquired lexical knowledge for “lustig”, NL1 misinterprets the entire utterance; she thinks the French girl argues that homework is fun: “Warte! Du findest Hausaufgabe Spaß? Toll?” [= Wait! You think homework is fun? Great?]. FR1 manages to clarify this issue, confirms that she finds homework boring (“Ich denke, dass Hausaufgaben langweilig sind.”), and explains that she would like homework to be different and more fun (“Und es sollte lustiger Hausaufgaben *sein.*”). The Dutch pupil now finally understands what her French partner wanted to say at the very beginning, and she confirms agreement: “*Oh,* ja und um die Hausaufgabe lüstiger zu machen, sollte es Projekten *geben. Okay, ich verstehe dich. [= Oh, yes, and to make homework more fun, there should be projects. Okay, I understand what you mean”].

FR1: [...] Also ich denke, keine Hausaufgaben nicht eine gute Idee ist, aber Hausaufgabe zu machen <break> Non!
<break> Hausaufgab <break> lustige Hausaufgaben, **wie zum Beispiel so dieses** <break> also es kö <break> wie
<break> **oder Projekte?** *Einverstanden?*

[...]

FR1: Es sollte <break> Nein! (looks something up) <break> es sollte <break> es sollte mehr **lustige** Hausaufgaben
wie, also Theater lernen, oder wie wie diese <break> wie die wir wir jetzt machen, sie <break> mit anderen
Personen sprechen, wie wie jetzt.

NL1: Entschuldigung, ich verstehe du nicht.

FR1: Es ist wie <break> Ich denke, dass es mehr lustige **lustig** *also*

NL1: ***lüstig**,* ja (looks the word up)

FR1: **L-u-s-t-i-g**

NL1: Ja, mit einer Umlaut?

FR1: Nein.

NL1: Oh, lus (pause) <break> Oh, fröhlich? Sp (pause) wie Spaß-Hausaufgabe?

FR1: Ja. Also ich weiß nicht ob es

NL1: Warte! **Du findest Hausaufgabe Spaß? Toll?**

FR1: Nein.

NL1: Nein, okay. (they laugh)

FR1: **Ich denke, dass Hausaufgaben langweilig sind.**

NL1: Ja, ich bin damit einverstanden.

FR1: **Und es sollte lustiger Hausaufgaben *sein.***

NL1: *Oh,* ja und um die Hausaufgabe lustiger zu machen, sollte es Projekten *geben* geben. Okay, ich verstehe dich. (pause)

Example 5: Meaning negotiation in a German lingua franca exchange in BigBlueButton between a French and a Dutch girl (GER2_BBB_NL1_FR1)

The same cooperative attitude and behaviour can be observed in connection with (mainly) lexical production problems.

When communicating with his Spanish partner in an English lingua franca conversation in BigBlueButton (EN11_BBB2_DE2_ES2), a German pupil notices an echo effect that is disturbing the communication. When trying to convey this to his partner, he encounters a lexical production problem. He uses the German word “Echo” and also offers a paraphrase in English (“something repeats and the audio”):

DE2: Ok. There is a little “Echo” (uses German pronunciation: [ˈɛçɔ]). I don’t know how you call it in English but it did something repeats and the audio.

Confirming understanding, his Spanish partner provides a solution by telling him that he thinks the word “Echo” is also used in English:

ES2: Yeah, I understand. I understand. Yeah I understand. Echo (uses English pronunciation: [ˈɛkəʊ]). I think it is the same way in English.

In another example of successful co-construction of meaning, the same German pupil talks about his sister. He wants to express that little sisters are sometimes a bit annoying, but he doesn’t have a word for “annoying”. He explicitly states the lexical gap (“I don’t know how you call it in English you know.”) and unsuccessfully struggles to close it (“how little sisters of ours are most of the time, yeah. She is -”):

*DE2: Sometimes my sister wants to play with me and free evening: “Would you like to play Minecraft with me” (in a high pitch). “No!” But (unclear) always do something like *(unclear).* [...] and sometimes she is a little <break> I don’t know how you call it in English you know. How little sisters of ours are most of the time, yeah. She is <break>.*

His partner offers a lexical option, requesting confirmation of his suggestion by using a rising intonation (“Annoying?”). When his partner does not understand what he says, he repeats the word in a full sentence (“they are annoying”) and also offers a descriptive clarification:

ES2: Annoying? (Laughs)

DE2: What?

ES2: (?) Really (?) they are annoying *you mean like* erh they are always everywhere you want to like play in your corner and no <break> nobody who is here.

DE2 confirms that this was what he meant:

DE2: *Yeah, annoying.* Of cour <break> ja, genau <break>.

Later in the conversation (Example 6), the German pupil DE2 is again struggling with a lexical gap: “100 Watt Whatt Vatt”. His partner understands what he wants to say and offers a reformulation (“Just the like a unity of a measure like you measure with it”). The German boy unsuccessfully tries again to get his message across. He explicitly addresses his production problem (“I can’t talk about it in English, because I don’t know the words”). He keeps trying to overcome the problem and his partner shows social presence by expressing sympathy and rapport: “Just don’t care about it”, “Doesn’t matter”, “I know like we are beginners (laughs) of English, we haven’t got such a level to speak about everything we want”. Finally the DE2 abandons the topic he originally wanted to talk about. He responds to his partner’s comment regarding languages learners’ production problems instead: “Yeah, small talks is ok but if it got little bit more and some topics are little bit different”.

<p>DE2: Yeah. I hear that in (unclear) they are really cool because I don’t know because erm climatic (?) engines (?) are really <break> yeah, they are not so environmentally friendly and friend told, for example, it is a (unclear). There are erm lights over 1000 Watt Whatt Vatt, I don’t know how do you call it in English. Erm, it is a really -.</p>	<p>Struggling for closing a lexical gap; Explicit statement of the problem</p>
<p>ES2: Just the like a unity of a measure like you measure with it</p>	<p>Provides a reformulation of the problematic item</p>
<p>DE2: Erm, I mean yeah and this fuel stations <break> the lights were really <break> it needs really hard <break> ohh Gott. I can’t talk about it in English because I don’t know so words (laughs)</p>	<p>Confirmation; Struggling for a suitable expression; DE2 explicitly states the difficulty of closing a lexical gap</p>
<p>ES2: Just don’t care about it. (laughs)</p>	<p>Social presence: sympathy and rapport (face management)</p>
<p>DE2: Little bit <break> yeah (pause) yeah it need a lot of power from the <break> yeah <break> (pause) no I can’t talk about it in English.</p>	<p>Attempts to reformulate and overcome the problem, but he gives up and emphasizes his struggle</p>
<p>ES2: Doesn’t matter. (laughs)</p>	<p>Social presence: sympathy and rapport (face management)</p>
<p>DE2: (unclear) I can’t <break> it is a little bit stupid, erm.</p>	<p>Reflects on his struggle to express himself in English</p>
<p>ES2: I know like we are beginners (laughs) of English, we haven’t got such a level to speak about everything we want.</p>	<p>Tries to comfort DE2 by making a generalizing comment about learners’ limitations</p>
<p>DE2: Yeah, small talks is ok but if it got little bit more and some topics are little bit different *(unclear).*</p>	<p>Agrees</p>

Example 6: Production problems in English lingua franca conversation in BBB (EN11_BBB2_DE2_ES2)

Some students solve their lexical production problems by looking up words in a dictionary:

"I did (pause) like a (pause) <break> wait wait a minute please. I'm I'm searching the translation. (types; looks something up) I did a a a conce compe <break> I did a competition of maths" (ES4)

The dictionary strategy is extensively used in one of the German lingua franca exchanges in BigBlueButton (GER2_BBB_NL1_FR1). Both the Dutch and the French girl look up words several times to make the conversation work. The pupils' visual presence in a video communication makes it possible for them to keep the conversational contact while consulting a dictionary. In a chat conversation, explicit signals might be necessary.

The way pupils try to activate their linguistic knowledge – including their native language knowledge and dictionary look-ups – and to use it in creative and patient ways to come to grips with their comprehension and production problems, clearly shows that successful communication is in the foreground of their attention and ambition. In both types of telecollaboration environments, chat and video communication, the pupils want to be understood and convey their message. For them, a focus on form is not an end in itself. Attention to form becomes important, however, to the extent that it helps them to solve a communication problem. Quite obviously, the pedagogic lingua franca condition creates a communicative challenge that pushes pupils to engage in collaborative “linguaging” interactions (Swain, 2006) and to extend their “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978). Their struggle for natural and relevant (i.e. authenticated) communication offers the potential for them to “experience themselves as speakers of their target language, not merely as learners, with a right to their own criteria of success” (Hoffstaedter & Kohn, 2015, p. 342; also see Kohn, 2015).

5 TOWARDS INTERACTIONAL INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Speakers engage in collaborative dialogues in order to solve problems and build knowledge; they use “language as a cognitive tool to mediate their own thinking and that of others” (Swain & Watanabe, 2013, p. 3219). This is what pupils in telecollaboration exchanges do when they express and discuss their opinions concerning a certain topic. In some English lingua franca sessions they are, for instance, required to discuss whether new technologies and social media are a blessing or a curse. It is most noticeable that in all chat and video conversations this question is discussed in a highly cooperative manner (Examples 7).

ES3: Yeah. (pause) Are the new technologies, social media and communication, feels blessing or a cu <break> or a curse? (reading question)	Raises the issue: blessing or curse
DE3: I'm not sure, because I see a lot of kids in first grade or so with their iPhone and it's bigger than their own head and (ES3 laughs) I think that's pretty crazy!	Argues for curse
ES3: Yeah, yeah. Like I see <break> Yeah, like children they are like eleven years old and they have an iPhone, they have an iPad, they have a computer, I mean at that age I I didn't even know how that worked, so	Agrees and elaborates the argument

DE3: Yes! And that's <break> Well, or six years old, I know a six year old pors person, a kid and he asked me if I have Clash of Clans and WhatsApp and I was, whoa, in your age I didn't even know that those things existed ** so that's <break> I think that's a bit a curse, because they don't play outside, or do anything but twittering and sending messages and well, yeah.	Agrees and elaborates the argument
ES3: Yeah	Agrees
ES3: I I think it's great to have like (?)the(?) phone, computer to	Starts arguing for blessing
DE3: What?	Checks
ES3: What? (moves toward screen) No, I I think that it's great, but it's also that I think that nowadays everybody is al always with the phone and like too much like you <break> like you can lose like <break> I think you can <break> you have to sometimes be with your friends, not always be with the phone and talking via WhatsApp or Facebook or whatever.	Argues for a balanced view: both positive and negative
DE3: Yeah, well DE3: Yeah. Well, that's pretty much my opinion, too (laughs).	Agrees

Example 7: Collaborative dialoguing in an English lingua franca BigBlueButton conversation (EN11_BBB3_DE3_ES3)

Rather than engaging in controversial arguments, the pupils focus on creating a common ground and a friendly, cooperative and supportive atmosphere. They try to find out what their partners think and tend to develop an argument collaboratively. Both partners contribute their opinions; they usually agree and at the same time enrich the discussion with additional aspects.

The extract from an English lingua franca chat discussion (Example 8) provides more insights into how pupils collaborate in negotiating a common ground of views and arguments: they state and substantiate their opinion ("In my opinion it's blessing because ..."), ask for their partner's opinion ("What do you think?"), show agreement (e.g. "Yes, I have exactly the same opinion"), acknowledge the partner's view and simultaneously add a new aspect ("It's very useful but ...").

15:42 DE6: Do you think nwe technologies and social media are a blessing or a curse?	Raises the issue
15:45 ES6: In my opinion it's blessing because you can communicate with the people all over the world but it's also a curse because you can be addict	Gives a balanced argument: both blessing and curse
15:46 ES6: What do you think?	Asks for opinion
15:47 DE6: Yes, I have exactly the same opinion. It's very useful but you can use it too often and became addicted. 15:48 DE6: And on the internet and with these media, there's sometimes no privacy.	Agrees and elaborates on negative aspects
15:50 ES6: Yes and if you post a picture of something it belongs to the internet and you're not the owner of this picture anymore	Agrees and elaborates on negative aspects
15:51 DE6: Yes	Agrees

15:52 ES6: Yes there is no more privacy because there are other person like the owners of social media who can see all the things you are writing that's why I think that if you write something on the internet it's not really private	Agrees and elaborates on negative aspects
15:54 DE6: Yes and so many infortmation about the people are safed on the internet and are sometimes sold to companies.	Agrees and elaborates on negative aspects
15:56 DE6: I meant saved	Corrects her spelling
15:58 ES6: YEs and like then when you want to work for exemple in the big companie there are people who are payed to search different information which is comprimise on you if you know what i mean	Agrees and elaborates on negative aspects
15:59 DE6: What do you want to say? I don't understand it	Signals non-understanding and asks for clarification
16:02 ES6: In the big companies there are people who are payed to dig some dirt up on you like some old photos which you posted on facebook or whatever when you were 8	Rephrases
16:05 DE6: Yes, now I understand. This isn't right because it shouldn't be important for your job what you posted when you were a teenager.	Confirms understanding and signals agreement
16:08 DE6: I also think that some people use the new technologies too often. For example, 3 years ago almost nobody in my class had a good smartphone. Now on my school there are many younger people who already have iPhones and in the breaks they don't play like we did, they use their smartphones and if they talk, they talk about things on their phones.	Elaborates on negative aspects
16:12 ES6: I understand you because I had my first phone when I was like 8 or something and it was a very small phone without even bluetooth and know I see kids which are 6 years old and they already have Iphone	Agrees and elaborates
16:14 DE6: I also had a very simple phone when I was younger	Agrees and elaborates

Example 8: Collaborative dialoguing in an English lingua franca chat conversation
(EN11_Chat1_DE5_ES5)

Here are some of the phrases pupils used throughout the lingua franca conversations for confirming and agreeing or for adding their own opinion or view, e.g.

(examples from English lingua franca conversations)

"Yes, I think so too" (DE3)

"Yeah. Well, that's pretty much my opinion as well" (DE3)

"Well, I agree with you" (DE2)

"Yeah, but I don't think ..." (DE2)

"Yeah, but scientists have found." (ES2)

(examples from German lingua franca conversations)

*"*Ja.* Ja. Ja, ich auch. Ich denke, also," (FR1) [=*

„Ja, ich verstehe dich.“ (NL1)

„...also ja ich bin mit dich einverstanden“ (FR1)

„Ja. Ja, ich *verstehe.* Ja, ich bin einverstanden und ja.“ (FR2)

„Ich versteh das, aber findest du, dass ...“ (NL1)

In all these lingua franca telecollaboration exchanges, the atmosphere is open, friendly, and supportive. As was shown above, pupils want to find out what their partners like, dislike or think and helped each other with comprehension or production problems.

Openness and curiosity are particularly reflected in **personal topics** beyond the assigned task. Pupils ask questions aiming to start an exchange of interpersonal information and to get to know each other. The questions they raise usually address topics around school, hobbies and interests or family, e.g.

“How old are you?” (ES2), “What do you do in the holidays or vacation?” (DE2), “What do you do in your free time?” (DE2), “Do you have brothers and sisters?” (DE2), “Have you been to America?” (DE2), “So where do you live in Germany?” (ES3), “Do you like watching movies?” (DE3), “What is your favourite movie” (ES3), “When do you have to go to school?” (DE3), “Do you do any sports or something?” (DE3), etc.

Because of a rather low level of conflict potential, these questions provide the conversation partners with the opportunity to talk about themselves, their own experiences, preferences and opinions in a friendly, open and uncompetitive atmosphere. Any touch of disagreement is generally embedded in a broader perspective that makes it possible for both pupils to find themselves understood and acknowledged. Focus is thus very much on trying to establish an intercultural “third space” (Kramsch, 2009), in which views and arguments from different cultural “camps” are integrated and balanced out rather than placed against each other. In this respect, telecollaboration exchanges in TILA emphasize the interactional quality of pupils’ intercultural competence.

The generally relaxed and supportive atmosphere is also manifest in pupils’ expression of empathy, compliment and encouragement as essential ingredients of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). In the following English lingua franca conversation in BigBlueButton (EN11_BBB2_DE2_ES2), the German pupil DE2 talks about a competition he is involved in concerning the development of a robot for soccer. The Spanish pupil ES2 reacts on the social level by wishing him luck and ensuring him that he will be successful:

*ES2: I mean, I haven’t idea for this but the only thing I can say is <break> **I wish you a luck <break> to be lucky (laughs). I hope you win.***

[. . .]

DE2: But I don’t I don’t think so because the robot works since week so.

*ES2: Well, **don’t don’t think that you are going to lose. It is a bad way to win to lose sorry.***

DE2: (unclear).

*ES2: **Just think maybe we are not the best but trying to do our best. This is what you must be thinking.***

*DE2: *Yeah.**

A similar interactional quality can be observed in an English lingua franca conversation in OpenSim between a boy from Turkey and a girl from Bulgaria (ENx_OpenSim_ETF_BG1_TR1). The Turkish boy is very anxious about an exam he is going to take and the girl expresses that she sympathises with him and encourages him (“I think you’re going to do great.”). He accepts the encouragement, thanks her (“I hope, thank you.”) and confesses that it is very hard for him (“it’s so hard for me especially”):

*TR1: Ja I'm I'm going to.. have exams on November next year[overlap BG1: uff], and as I said I'm **so nervous** about IB and we have another exam about our national education system*

*BG1: **I think you're going to do great.***

*TR1: **I hope, thank you.** And in fact it's the first year for me about economics, we have economic lesson too, and **it's so hard for me especially.***

In a passage from an English lingua franca conversation in BigBlueButton (EN11_BBB4_DE4_ES4), the German pupil enthusiastically expresses her compliments on her Spanish partner’s achievement in a math competition:

*ES4: I did a competition of maths like a an exam to like 7,000 of people *(unclear)* I was into the two 205th from 7,000.*

*DE4: ***Whoa!* That's awesome.***

The following example from an English lingua franca chat conversation (EN11_Chat1_DE5_ES5) shows a Spanish pupil expressing her admiration for her German partner’s ability to draw:

DE5: I don't use facebook. But I have instagram

DE5: I only post my drawings.

*ES5: **Wow you draw! i envy you** because im the worst..like really and what do you draw?*

This chat example is an exception. Generally, the chat conversations analyzed in this study tended to be quite “unemotional” compared to the BigBlueButton conversations. Sometimes messages might even come across a bit “rude” like in the opening phase of the English lingua franca chat session EN11_Chat1_DE5_ES5, in which the Spanish pupil ES5 was two minutes late and the German pupil DE5 rather dryly comments with “finally”.

19:14 DE5: hello?

19:16 ES5: hi!

19:17 DE5: finally!

19:17 ES5: yes sorry!

In this connection, it should be noted, however, that in chat conversations it is usually more difficult than in oral or video communication to add appropriate nuances of e.g. politeness to the meaning one wants to convey. Even though young people are used to instant messaging in everyday life (mostly in their native language), the example above shows that pupils need to be made aware of how they might

be perceived in the target language and which means of expressions they could use to make sure not to offend their partner. In the case of chat communication, an appropriate use of emoticons is certainly part of the answer. Pupils familiarity with the more powerful emoticon/emoji support in WhatsApp and other social media tools might have prevented them from using less attractive punctuation marks as required in a Moodle chat.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The following extract from an English lingua franca conversation in Skype between a Turkish boy and three girls from Bulgaria and Portugal (ENx_Skype_TR1_BG2_BG3_PT1) aptly concludes this study about the pedagogic value of intercultural telecollaboration. In their conversation, the pupils talk about using Facebook and Skype. The Turkish boy points out that online communication tools facilitate intercultural communication. He emphasizes that without these tools they would not be able to communicate with each other right now. While expressing concerns about communicating with strangers in Facebook, they all agree that a school project would offer a safe environment for getting in touch with peers from other countries.

TR1: In in fact as I..things as like Facebook make us more international and ah..by using them we can know another cultures. As like we do we are doing now.

BG2: I don't think that helps us so much to get to know another cultures, because most of the people don't accept people they didn't don't know or if they do.. you can't learn so much about anybody's culture through Facebook by watching photos or playing games.

TR1: I I [unclear/probably "mean"] not by photos or playing games. I mean to communicate with others. For example if there is no Skype or Facebook I couldn't talk with BG3, or PT1 or you

BG2 [laughs] But it's really risky, you can't be sure that the person with this picture [overlap by PT1] in real life is actually this person, so I wouldn't risk

TR1: I dunno

BG3: hm, yeah but actually I have recen...when I have spoken with TR1 for the first time..that was one of project so we didn't know each other, but we started to communicate and later hm to to call and to make discussion.

BG2: But this is different because it's project..it's not..just chatting on Facebook

BG3: Ja maybe ..maybe you have right.

Telecollaboration exchanges are ideally suited to facilitate foreign language contact between peers from different lingua-cultural backgrounds. Pupils engage in communicative interactions they can authenticate for their own needs and purposes beyond school. And most importantly for intercultural competence development, they pay attention to one another and cooperatively explore a common intercultural ground (“third space”) of views, opinions and attitudes.