TILA Research Results on Telecollaboration[1]

Chapter 9

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF TILA TEACHERS

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1 SUMMARY

Intercultural communication is much a debated issue in education and language learning and teaching nowadays, but as a scholarly field it is still quite recent. In fact, the very notion of intercultural communication is not settled and requires more empirical study. TILA as an intercultural educational environment provides a possibility for such empirical research. Hence, this case study presents what intercultural communication is from the perspectives and experiences of TILA teachers. Based on interviews with nine teachers from different countries and languages, we gained insights of what interculturality means for them and how they were able to experiment with it in their own teaching situations. First, they understand how important teachers are in fostering intercultural competences through language learning. Second, they have different interpretations of interculturality, which are not exclusive and lead to a more refined and comprehensive scope of teaching intercultural communication through language learning and practising. Finally, training and coaching teachers in telecollabororation activities with their peers seems to be as important as training them to use intercultural telecollaboration activities with their pupils. Support in task design using a variety of tools and language constellations is needed.

2 BACKGROUND DISCUSSION

The challenges and complexities of TILA's environment will be outlined through the intercultural dimension. We will not question the "impact" of TILA as an intercultural environment as the term "impact" may imply a direct cause-effect relationship, which cannot be so simply expressed and

extracted from any kind of intercultural setting. There are so many parameters to account for in approaching what interculturality is, or rather what the intercultural dimension is. In fact, the concept of "Intercultural communicative competence" is still questioned. The issue is part of a continuous, rich and fascinating debate about ICC, IC (Byram, 1997, 2008) or just interculturality (Dervin, 2010, 2011, 2012) or pluriculturalism (Zarate et al, 2008; 2011; Moore, 2006; Martinez et al, 2008; Kramsch, 2009) as all these concepts differ from multiculturalism and the last one only provides the notion of plurality within "inter".

Consequently, the case study presented here is based on an enlarged theoretical framework that would integrate the whole TILA project, founded on the use of technologies, of a task-based approach and of the telecollaboration of teachers from different languages and countries, and addressing the larger issue of plurilingual/pluricultural education in Europe (Beacco & Byram, 2007; Beacco et al, 2010; Byram, 2008; Starkey, 2002, 2011; Zarate et al, 2008, 2011). Only through a broadening of concepts could we present a clearer and more refined picture of the TILA intercultural dimension as a teaching environment foreseeing one key aspect of the future of language – culture education in Europe and the world: addressing the plurilingual and intercultural dimension of individual and collective encounters.

In the Common European Framework for Languages (CEF), plurilingualism is a key word (CEF, 2001, chapter 1, p. 11) and is also clearly associated with pluriculturalism (CEF, 2002, chapter 8, p. 129). So the notion of plurilingual, pluricultural repertoires is stated as an important dimension of language learning that cannot be reduced to languages *per se*. However, following the notion of the "didactic" triangle (Houssaye, 1988), teachers present linguistic and cultural variations to learners and this knowledge is transmitted to learners through the process of comparing, managing representations and helping learners to de-centre from their own linguistic and cultural views. Social representations can be addressed though different disciplines (sociology, psychology, history …), but can be apprehended by our interpretation (Noûs) of true realities (Gnose) validated through conversational and dialectical practices (Plato).

3 OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

We were interested in teachers' views as they are mediators of expected knowledge, of learners' needs and of classroom circumstances (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999; O'Dowd, 2007, 2015; Deardorff, 2013; Olmedo et al, 2010; Pol, 2013; Kohler, 2014; Potolia & Jamborova Lemay, 2015). Our broad questions were: how do teacher encourage the plurilingual, pluricultural competence of learners? What are teachers' representations in the different educational contexts? What discourses do they have concerning their practices? Are there variations in the way they mediate the intercultural dimension? What can we learn as researchers from the teaching experience presented in the TILA environment?

We were also interested in finding out if such an environment could foster hybrid or intercultural practices among language teachers having different educational cultures and practices. Were they able

through common task design and its implementation to create their own professional and intercultural communicative voices?

These questions are drawn from French research on the "teacherly actions" (*agir professoral*) of language teachers (Cicurel, 2011), and from interactional theories (Goffman, 1991, Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1990). They are also in accordance with FREPA and its Pluralistic approaches[2], and are embedded in the broader plurilingual/pluricultural conceptual approaches (Byram,1997, 2008, 2013); Coste et al, 1997; Beacco & Byram, 2007; Beacco et al, 2010; Zarate & Gohard-Radenkovic, 2005, Molinié, 2006; Zarate et al, 2008; Alao et al, 2012; Byrd-Clark & Stratilaki, 2013; Byrd-Clark & Dervin, 2014; Dervin, 2010, 2011, 2012; Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

The aim is to present an analysis of the intercultural dimension of TILA (see for an overview of TILA, Jauregi et al, 2013) through a case study focusing on teachers. How is interculturality – defined as the process of "inter" between cultures (see Abdallah-Pretceille, 1986; Abdallah-Pretceille & Porcher, 1999 for meanings of interculturality) – perceived and experienced through TILA? What are the parameters to enhance the intercultural dimension within a European learning environment aimed at intercultural language acquisition? How can the intercultural dimension be developed in order to foster intercultural communicative competence and the intercultural skills for teachers?

3.2 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research questions, an analysis of individual (or group) interviews about the TILA environment was conducted with regard to its main objective of intercultural enhancement. Relevant productions (task descriptions and handouts) of teachers with regard to the intercultural dimension of the telecollaboration were analysed. The interviews are related to the multimodality of documents produced. Nine participating teachers were interviewed: four teachers during the pilot phase and five teachers during the follow-up phase[3]. Recordings were carried out through BBB or mp4 with hand transcription. A content analysis of teachers' experiences and productions was conducted and the

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[2] http://carap.ecml.at/CARAPinEurope/tabid/3045/language/en-GB/Default.aspx

[3] TILA provided us with valuable support for creating questionnaires online and for interviewing teachers face-to-face or with BBB recordings. However, the demands placed on teachers were particularly heavy (innovative teaching and participating in research), and they were overwhelmed by the different instruments we asked them to apply. In addition, unforeseen circumstances like consortium teachers being ill, promoted or having to move, and schools that did not comply with the agreement to let teachers have some dedicated time for implementing TILA or let them deal with unresolved connection problems - led to a very unstable environment, particularly for P9 and the French cluster. Either quantitative or qualitative data collection proved to be difficult to obtain during the given period of time, notwithstanding the fact they were complementary and resulted in a better understanding of what intercultural telecollaboration is and could be within a European educational space.

teacher questionnaires ("Background and Views") helped to categorise the different perceptions of teachers considering the intercultural dimension for the analysis grid.

The main objective of the interview was to know more about teachers' representations of the intercultural dimension in language teaching and what their practices are as far as the intercultural aspect is concerned. As European teachers, they have a role in sharing culture through language learning for the future European citizens that young learners are (Coste, 2013).

The guide questions were organised into 5 subtopics as the interview was intended to be semi-structured. The 5 subtopics were about the intercultural dimension:
- in their teaching
- within TILA
- in their TILA task development and practice
- about telecollaboration and language teaching/learning

The questionnaires ("Background and Views"), the guide questions, the interviews and the tasks designed by teachers are invaluable data for understanding what was done, undertaken and understood about intercultural telecollaboration. A more ethnographic kind of methodology (Bennett, 1993; Bagnall, 2005; Wang, 2013) was carried out to obtain insights into the construction and the observation of an emerging intercultural teaching environment for intercultural language acquisition.

To sum up, data collected through a wide variety of instruments (questionnaires, interviews, tasks designed by teachers) proved to be invaluable for a better understanding of the possibilities of the intercultural teaching environment that TILA offers

3.3 CORPUS

The teachers interviewed had volunteered to participate in the TILA project and we were able to interview pilot and follow-up participants to get an overview of a sample of teachers' representations of the intercultural dimension of language acquisition. For this sample, we were careful to include teachers of different languages, countries and positions (consortium and associate).

Population interviewed: the nine teachers come from three different countries (France, Germany and Spain) and the languages they teach are English, French, German and Spanish. Four teachers were consortium partners (they had some funding for TILA implementation) and five teachers were associate with no funding. Most interviews were conducted through BBB and lasted from 1 to 2 hours.

STF1: Spanish teacher of French (associate)

FTS1: French teacher of Spanish (associate)

FTE1: French teacher of English (associate)

FTG1: French teacher of German (consortium)

FTE2**:** French teacher of English (associate)

STE1: Spanish teacher of English (consortium)

STE2: Spanish teacher of English (associate)

GTF1: German teacher of French (consortium)

GTS1: German teacher of Spanish (consortium)

Concerning the tasks produced by these teachers, two teachers did one task and two teachers carried out six tasks. All of them started with "introductions", followed by various topics such as "family and friends", "holidays", "hobbies", "environmental issues", "European issues", "festivities", "fashion", "food habits", "schools", "organising a party" etc. As for telecollaboration and language constellations, there were three ELF (two telecollaboration partnerships with Spanish and Dutch speakers, and one with Spanish and French speakers), one Spanish as a lingua franca or SLF (with Catalan and German speakers), one German as a lingua franca or GLF with French and Dutch learners, and two tandem constellations, French/German and Spanish/French. Six teachers were interviewed in French and three in Spanish. For both languages, we will provide the original version of their interview.

To sum up, the case study presents a variety of languages and countries, language combinations, consortium and associate teachers who designed a variety of tasks. The plurilingual, pluricultural setting of TILA is clearly taken into account as all languages can potentially have a status of lingua franca, which is not exclusively the privilege of English.

4   ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' INTERVIEWS

Teachers are all extremely motivated and enthusiastic about TILA and have given much of their energy and determination to implement telecollaboration partnerships within their secondary schools. They believe that intercultural competences are part an parcel of the language curriculum and that they should be developed regarding the more globalised world their pupils will be living in (Questionnaires, Interviews).

The analysis and results will be organised into three parts, what teachers mean by the intercultural dimension, how they relate it to the Tandem or Lingua Franca situations and how they address the development of an intercultural, plurilingual environment through telecollaboration.

It is worth noting that teachers, when expressing examples related to this general topic, usually code-switch when they give examples of cultural specificities of the target language/culture. Teachers present the target culture through anecdotes for snapshots, but present it in a more academic way when using a textbook or applying the curriculum.

4.1   WHAT THE INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION MEANS FOR TEACHERS

These interviews showed a wide range of perceptions of interculturality which was one of the major attractions for TILA for teachers (Derivry-Plard, Sratilaki, Potolia, & Boughnim, submitted).

For Teacher-FTE1, culture has to be presented through documents and particularly for younger learners through visual documents like maps and statistics as they trigger interest and speech from the learners who want to understand the differences they can observe and the interpretation of such differences.

Even though the focus of such an approach enables interaction and speaking activities, documents and media organised by textbooks provide a somehow "academic" angle to the cultural dimension (a more learned version of culture "*culture savante*"), which may also overestimate cultural differences relative to cultural similarities. However, culture seems to be understood as cultural knowledge, getting to know about cultural facts of the target culture such as knowing more about geography, history, the arts and so on.

The same kind of attitude towards culture is reported by Teacher-GTF1, as the textbooks and the texts provided are documents to be discussed in class about salient characteristic of the target culture: "*dans le manuel, il y a donc des sujets comme la banlieue, les problèmes sociaux là bas, la francophonie et aussi l'Afrique ou le Maghreb, ce sont des sujets qui reviennent toujours dans les bouquins*" but when one has a learner from this target in class, what is presented in textbooks can sometimes become clichés[4] and this has to be worked on even more with telecollaboration exchanges following a Tandem constellation.

A French teacher in Spain, Teacher-STF1 seems to perceive culture more as social habits, traditions and everyday life rituals, a more "anthropological" view of culture. In that sense, her perception of culture makes her a good match with Teacher-FTS1, a Spanish teacher in France for whom the intercultural dimension is presented whenever learners are comparing their life styles and specific rhythms or pace of their lives.

Teacher-FTE2 uses a lot of videos presenting different English-speaking countries (US, UK, Ireland, South Africa, India …) to present cultural and linguistic variety within the Anglophone world and he emphasises the power of controversial issues (the death penalty, arm permits, GMOs) as they represent different cultural, social and judicial systems. Therefore they are appropriate topics to develop intercultural communicative skills.

Just like Teacher-FTE2, for Teacher-STE1, the plurality of the Anglophone world has to be presented, and a few textbooks present the differences between American English and British English. The priority is not to use the language in itself to produce these differences, but rather to offer the learners the opportunity to recognise different accents: "*Si si, hay alguno método, algún libro de texto [...] que hablan de diferencias algunas diferencias que hay básicamente entre el ingles americano y el ingles británico, eso se utiliza y después cuando hay listenings, [...] canciones, yo procuro hacer un pocito de, enfocar también las diferencias que hay de pronunciación y cosas con el vocabulario pero no es una prioridad. La prioridad si es ofrecer a los alumnos unos diferentes acento*". Teacher-GTS1 also agrees with the presentation of different accents as part of the Spanish curriculum, and acknowledges the importance of knowing the different meanings of expressions, for example "*coger un autobus*" meaning something different in Argentina and in Spain.

For Teacher-FTG1, the intercultural dimension is pervading language teaching in all aspects: "*on fait quand même du culturel un peu tout le temps … de l'interculturel même sans s'en rendre compte*" as this

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[4] Teacher-GTF1 « J'ai une classe, il y a Laura, une française, qui est là dedans et parfois je la regarde et elle roule avec ses yeux pour me montrer oh la la quel cliché! Elle n'aime pas trop ça et je comprends bien »

is by definition how to get into a new language. Therefore, the classroom with all its objects and posters is a gateway towards alterity, to lead learners towards new attitudes, to reflect on different lifestyles, representations and clichés. This is also mentioned by Teacher-STE1 outlining the intercultural physical dimension of the classroom. With Teacher-FTG1, the intercultural dimension sounds more complete as it is about sharing attitudes, engaging with texts, images (films for Teacher-GTS1)[5] and objects but above all exchanging opinions in order to build one's own critical thinking. In that sense, this French teacher of German agrees with the French teacher of English (Teacher-FTE1) in valuing the exchange of opinions as a salient characteristic of he intercultural dimension in language teaching and learning. Her tasks were particularly successful in engaging German and French learners on interesting topics about the environment, what they think and do about it. They really learn about different perspectives with the topic. For instance, the notion of a "veggie day" was totally new for French pupils and as it was also controversial in Germany, it produced lively intercultural exchanges.

Even if textbooks are relied on to present cultural knowledge or cultural awareness, teachers like Teacher-GTS1, Teacher-FTG1 or Teacher-STE1 like to bring their intercultural experiences to the class as well. As Teacher-GTS1 said: "*Siempre intento eh:: contarles como es en tal y tal país si conozco este país. He viajado bastante y entonces les cuento un poco mis experiencias*" and "*tu como profe quieres también transmitir tu propia experiencia no solamente como se habla español*".

However, although textbooks are a large part of the resources for secondary-school language teachers, they can also design their own tasks, such as Teacher-FTG1 and Teacher-GTF1 discussing the environment or presenting clothes styles. As Teacher-GTF1 said: "*Et ça je crois que c'était vraiment une tâche réussie. Il y avait des panneaux dans OpenSim où les élèves se montraient avec leurs vêtements préférés et ils ont discuté et là c'était à mon avis une tâche très réussie aussi pour l'interculturalité. Mais ce que j'ai observé c'est que les élèves ils étaient* très vite à remplir les tâches et puis ils ont discuté un peu sur n'importe quoi. Ça c'était encore plus important que la tâche et dans ce discours libre, c'était peut être plutôt interculturel que l'autre*."

So here, we have the notion that the intercultural dimension is again linked to lifestyles and the way young teenagers dress, and that commenting on the differences and similarities results in an engaging kind of intercultural communication.

His perspective complies with the notion of European citizenship that Teacher-STE1 explained: "*hay una identidad europea o hay una diversidad, somos idénticos, en qué somos idénticos, en qué somos distintos*". Therefore, the objective of European language teachers is to deal with the intercultural dimension: "*eso básicamente el trabajo fundamental de lo que es la interculturalidad y el enfoque tiene que ser*".

Teacher-GTS1 also said from his experience of Spanish as a lingua franca with Britain: "*Eso no es un problema intercultural sino un problema más bien social y económico, son diferencias diferentes pero*

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[5] Teacher-GTS1 : "*Pues yo utilizo muchas películas en mis clases de español. Las películas pues es un material perfecto para hablar de diferentes manera de comunicar, pues de gestos y también vez el ambiente donde viven los personajes. Esto permite mucho, mucho más que los libros de textos*".

también es una cultura, la cultura de la gente rica en escuelas privadas y la cultura de la gente en escuelas públicas pero no es como yo lo había imaginado antes pero bueno si hablan de sus cosas tienen mucho en común, gustos de música y películas, mascotas, [...], sus amigos, sus hobbies, cosas de la vida cuotidiana, sobre eso hablan muy bien y les interesa lo que es los otros. Y se nota que la juventud en Europa tiene un mundo de experiencias común, es lo que yo veo".

In this excerpt, there are two interesting ideas:

- The first one means that interculturality expands to all aspects of social life and that the intercultural dimension cannot be restricted to "national differences" but pervades all kinds of social dimensions such as being rich or poor, going to a private or state school etc.

- The other one deals with a media culture that young people have in common and that telecollaboration can foster even more through a common educational experience.

To sum up, teachers have different interpretations of the intercultural dimension:

- Some have a knowledge-based cultural perspective that textbooks provide. Telecollaboration is about getting to know about similarities and differences with partner learners about the target language and culture. They are in phase with the "culture savante".
- Others think the intercultural dimension is best expressed through telecollaboration discussing similarities and differences in lifestyles, and behaviours and that clichés and stereotypes are to be addressed through these exchanges of different behaviours and attitudes.
- Finally, some teachers think the intercultural dimension is best expressed through telecollaboration exchanging ideas and opinions about controversial issues as they engage interest in different cultural, social, historical and judicial systems.

4.2 TANDEM / LINGUA FRANCA THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERCULTURALITY

However, if textbooks or anecdotal snapshots usually refer to the target culture of the target language, language and culture can be dissociated. For one teacher (Teacher-FTE2) English can be used to know, for instance, more about Chinese students and how English is taught and learnt in China. Learning English no longer means exclusively learning about English-speaking countries cultures (Hu, 2005; Hufeisen, 2006). In Teacher-FTE2's case, if we get to know more about teaching and learning practices in China; this is nonetheless linked to the fact these Chinese students in the video presented are learning English.

This is an interesting point to consider as TILA offers the organising mode of any TILA language to be used as a lingua franca. Therefore, language and culture are disconnected or dissociated when a French learner speaks English with a Spanish learner, they speak English but interact from their own cultural settings to discuss their own culture or other topics understood through their own cultural filters. This is a salient feature of the intercultural dimension in TILA offering online tandems but enlarging the principle of a strict exchange of matched students in a reciprocity of learning the language and culture of

the partner. The Lingua Franca constellation offers exchanges of students learning the same foreign language and therefore getting the possibility to learn about the culture of the partner though the medium of a common foreign language with no necessary link with the cultural dimension of the foreign language itself.

The tandem and the Lingua Franca constellations provide an unprecedented learning and teaching environment as the Lingua Franca mode, which can be more related to real life situations outside class, particularly for English, with TILA on a par with the more classical tandem version working as a model within classes. In fact, the lingua franca mode brings more pluriculturalities into the classroom and suggests a shift of paradigm within language education as the model of the native speaker (NS) on which the tandem mode and its reciprocity of language-culture is based. It is therefore enlarged with the model of the non-native speaker (NNS) on which the lingua franca mode is designed.

However, Teacher-STF1 prefers a tandem situation to communicate with "real" French people and also because she thinks that language is the priority over culture: "*je vise surtout qu'ils puissent communiquer par écrit ou à l'oral […] avec des Français et donc la culture, je n'insiste pas trop*". Conversely, FTS1 would rather appreciate a lingua franca situation as Paris is a very cosmopolitan city and "*there are so many traces of Spain in France*"[6]. This observation made by Teacher-FTS1 also suggests his understanding of Spanish lingua franca does not dissociate the target language from the target culture. For him, even though French and Dutch learners could interact in Spanish, they will be talking about Spanish culture. There is nothing wrong with speaking or interacting about Spanish culture between French and Dutch learners, but one cannot help thinking that the real encounter of French and Dutch learners might be a bit lost as they will get to know one another only indirectly, possibly being channelled through the objective of the target culture - being closely linked and associated with the Spanish language as if there was no escape from the language - as if one could not be fully accepted as a Spanish learner using Spanish to know more about Dutch culture, or the culture of Dutch learners. From this comment, we wonder about the strong filter imposed by a language curriculum on language teachers to the extent that they do not feel it legitimate to get to know about other people's cultures if the latter are not closely linked to the language they teach. Moreover, the traditional stance of target language only, which has been credo for years is still very strongly at play in this representation as it means a language teacher feels fully legitimate when his/her learners only speak the target language, and talk and learn about the target culture. This representation is in accordance with the French directive on language teaching and learning which does not encourage interdisciplinary language activities: "*Alors, sincèrement je pense que l'idéal pour mes élèves ça serait de s'exprimer en espagnol […] que ce soit des espagnols ou des polonais ou des britanniques ou peu importe*".

It is worth mentioning the even more complicated lingua-cultural configuration that Teacher-FTE1 opted for with her Dutch teacher of French. In fact, it was an English-French tandem situation, but English was nonetheless the ELF as her partner was a French teacher from the Netherlands. Here, we have an interesting type of partnership as it was probably not imagined by TILA. The learning environment open

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[6] Teacher-FTS1 : « (Paris étant une capitale cosmopolite) il y a également des traces de l'Espagne en France, le musée Picasso ».

to exchanges between European teachers offers this possibility of experimenting with an even more complex intercultural dimension of a telecollaboration partnership. In this instance, the model of the NS is combined with the NNS model: French learners are used as NS of French in communicating in French with the Dutch learners learning French, and Dutch and French learners are both NS of English when communicating through English.

The respective advantages and disadvantages of Tandem vs Lingua franca are also put forward with other teachers.

Teacher-STE2 clearly expressed the views of many teachers (FTE2/STE1/FTG1 …) about the benefits of a lingua franca constellation: "*Pero cuando trabajas en lingua franca y no hay nativos, los dos estudiantes del par están en igualdad de condiciones y esa situación también es muy motivadora para los alumnos. Ellos ven que los holandeses también dudan a la hora de elegir una palabra, etc... . Juegan en igualdad de condiciones*".

Teacher-GTS1 felt that the Native/Non-native relationship that a Tandem constellation entails is a real challenge for shy learners.

However, Teacher-STE2 thinks his leaners have been able to appreciate the change of roles, from a learner to an expert: "*En la primera telecolaboración con Nijmegen trabajamos tandem y la experiencia fue positiva. Mis alumnos hacían un poco de "maestros" de español e intentaban hablar despacio*". Here, we have definitely something to foster, which is exactly what the CEF recommends with the capacity of native-speakers to adapt to intercultural communication (CEF, 2001)

However, doing the same task in two languages should be avoided. It can help understanding and pronunciation as Teacher-STE2 said: "*Las ventajas de trabajar con nativos son obvias: los alumnos escuchan una pronunciación nativa y eso les hace mejorar la suya*"

 But, this can be quite demotivating as there is no longer new information to be gained from the exchange: *"Ellos obviamente disfrutaron más cuando empezamos a hacer tareas en inglés. Lo que considero importante es hacer tareas distintas para que los alumnos no tengan la sensación de que están haciendo lo mismo pero cambiando la lengua"* (Teacher-STE2).

However, Teacher-GTF1 also thinks that a Tandem constellation can be unbalanced if there is some kind of tacit agreement with a weak learner of French and a strong learner of German. The learners might eventually chose one language, in this case German which is good for the French learner but not too appropriate for the German pupils learning French: "*Premièrement, pour lingua franca, ça pose peut être un problème parce que les élèves ils sont plutôt tentés de parler la langue qui va mieux pour les deux. Alors si l'élève est faible en français et le Français il est fort en allemand, on va peut être plutôt parler en allemand, et on va négliger un peu la tâche de parler telle ou telle langue*".

So, when both constellations have been explored, it seems to teachers that they should be used as much as possible as Teacher-STE2 said: "*Yo creo que si se tiene ocasión hay que utilizar los dos sistemas*".

On the whole teachers agree that their learners are enthusiastic about the TILA environment as it deals with technologies that belong to the common culture of the learners (chats, BBB and OpenSim) (Lamy &

Zourou, 2013) as Teacher-GTS1 said: "*Aceptan inmediatamente que el avatar es la representación de su persona. Esta fase requiere una introducción, una hora algo así pero después [...] ya la barrera no existe, tu aceptas totalmente el tono virtual como el tono para la comunicación y la actuación!*"

Moreover, these technologies allow the intercultural dimension when monitored by the teachers. As Teacher-STE2 said: "*Yo creo que las nuevas tecnologías son el futuro y si además introducen el elemento intercultural pues mucho mejor. En mi opinión el futuro de la enseñanza de idiomas está en proyectos de este tipo*".

The supervision of teachers to help intercultural communication is even more important in OpenSim for Teacher-GTF1: "*par exemple de se dire bonjour et au revoir, et dans le monde virtuel il n'y a apparemment pas de règles, ou normalement, les élèves connaissent plutôt des, des trucs comme des jeux vidéo ou l'autre est un ennemi qu'il faut tuer, je sais pas, et puis ils rencontrent des avatars qui sont des amis, des correspondants et là il faut apprendre aussi de se dire bonjour, merci, au revoir*" . With this excerpt, we can see how teachers have an essential role in sustaining and developing polite communicative behaviours and show the relativity and necessity of such polite attitudes, in particular in intercultural encounters.

There are other intercultural communicative incidents that have been reported by teachers, which highlight the essential role of teachers in developing intercultural skills for communicative encounters.

For example, Teacher-FTE1 had to deal with the cultural shock that her learners experienced in seeing a Dutch pupil with a muslin veil or scarf as this is forbidden in all French schools due to the secularity of the state and law in France. Reactions and the necessary language have to be dealt with in class to elicit what is shocking. Putting words to the situation can help us see whether French pupils share the sense of shock and decide if might be interesting to discuss dress codes in European schools. In such a situation, it is important to let people express in polite ways why they may feel insulted or, on the contrary, liberated by discussing a religious or simply cultural piece of clothing. Preparing young learners to communicate with others is definitely one of the major objectives of education in a more and more diverse world. So teachers have to set the rules of communication as well as accompany their learners to their better understanding of others, in all their diversity.

To build that relationship with others, Teacher-GTS1 rightly remarks that telecollaboration cannot be limited to one task, and that it requires time to build a relationship, to build trust in it as to better grasp otherness: "*Si se sienten más seguros y cómodos*" and "*Pero con más confianza, con el grupo, si trabajas siempre con el mismo grupo, en Inglaterra [...] eso crece la confianza. Es como en el mundo real! Si te encuentres la primera vez ya es así, no hay una diferencia tan grande*".

To sum up, either tandem or lingua franca constellations lead to the development of intercultural skills but in very different communicative and intercultural modes. Both are necessary to expand the intercultural repertoires of learners and teachers. Moreover, they should be sustained to really develop intercultural competence, as communication with and trust in others need time in order to build a

relationship. Multiplying intercultural situations throughout a significant period of time would help both teachers and learners to develop their intercultural skills.

4.3 DEVELOPING AN INTERCULTURAL, PLURILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH TELECOLLABORATION

This analysis makes us deal with the limitations of the term "intercultural", which has also been criticised as implying interaction with two cultures whereas the majority of situations are plurilingual and pluricultural (Zarate et al, 2008; 2011). However, the notion of "inter" is also a very useful term to underline the social and somehow democratic reciprocity of "inter": its meaning is to relate two entities, to influence and be influenced (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1986; 1999; Dervin, 2010, 2011, 2012). Dervin (2011) suggests a fluid dimension of interculturality so as to emphasise the hybridity of self/other and human relations.

As a consequence, researchers are trying to find more precise concepts expressing "inter" and "pluri" at the same time. Intercultural telecollaboration cannot be understood without the depth of the debate around "intercultural" (Dervin, 2012). Intercultural telecollaboration entails taking into account this general debate about what interculturality is, and there is no denying this is a key dimension of language teaching and learning. However, the notion is certainly not understood in the same ways by researchers and therefore cannot be understood in the same practical ways by language institutions and teachers.

As regards the pedagogical exchanges that teachers working together could benefit from, it is worth noting that teachers mentioned the pleasure of collaborating with their partners but that coaching was also very much appreciated if it was really to support the exchange. For Teacher-FTE2, the telecollaboration coach was really helpful: "on faisait pas de démarche chacun dans son coin […] voilà, toujours les messages en copie pour être certain d'abord de pas faire deux fois le boulot ou de pas tirer dans deux directions différentes". Teacher-STF1 did not have such a smooth coaching experience, as she could not get direct access to her English partner, having to pass through the supervision of the head of department.

However, the tandem situation was particularly beneficial for language teachers as they can reciprocally help their partner with language and culture. Teacher-GTF1: "*alors, ça donne un peu de sécurité de travailler avec un professeur de langue native. Quand on crée des tâches ou des exercices, on a toujours quelqu'un qui va les corriger si on a faux et par contre moi je peux aussi vérifier ou corriger des tâches que l'autre propose*". So an intercultural teaching environment like TILA allows some kind of linguistic and cultural training like a linguistic sojourn that helps to brush up the language and culture with the partner colleague. Teacher-GTF1 show by a slip of the tongue "giant/géant" instead of "annoying/gênant" that his is really enthusiastic about working with a native-speaker colleague: "*ça peut être un peu géant, euh gênant pardon, que l'autre ne parle pas ou qu'il pense qu'il ne parle pas assez la langue mais pour moi ça ne pose pas de problème. Moi j'apprécie beaucoup s'il y a quelqu'un qui sait corriger s'il faut*".

To sum up, TILA as an intercultural telecollaborative environment allows teachers to develop their language, cultural and intercultural repertoires as it works as a direct in-service training for language

teachers. Through these language and cultural exchanges, longer-term partnerships also have the potential of developing common pedagogical repertoires.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Teacher either consortium or associate and whatever the language taught have been very enthusiastic about the intercultural dimension that TILA offers.

Even though they mean different things about the intercultural dimension for their learners, they see the importance of developing intercultural telecollaboration for addressing a more and more diverse world and for fostering European citizenship as their learners will be part of a European and global world.

They see that either tandem or lingua franca constellations should be explored hand in hand as they offer different intercultural situations. With a tandem constellation, the pupils are both learners and experts of the language-culture. With a lingua franca constellation, the pupils are all learners of the target language and culture but are also informants of their own language and culture to others.

Intercultural telecollaboration also requires time for their learners to build a relationship and develop their intercultural skills. This can also be said for the teachers, who benefited from a safe and egalitarian kind of online in-service training to enhance their lingua-cultural repertoires as well as their pedagogical ones. Coaching teachers is also an essential dimension of the process of working together and should not be discarded if such a sustainable European platform is put in place. Coaching and training could be supported by the writing of experience journals and diaries to foster reflection and reflexivity on teachers' lingua-cultural and pedagogical repertoires (Byram, COE, nd; Causa & Chiss, 2013; Lin-Zucker, 2011; Molinié, 2006; Moloney et al, 2012; Peterson, 2010; Zarate, 2008/2011). In his way, a complex meshing of teachers' inter-relationships for developing a European educational space for language learning and teaching could emerge and be put forward.

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