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# **Features of Online Second Language Interactional Competence in a German-Israeli Virtual Exchange**

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*Abstract: By investigating the first thirty minutes of ten initial student group meetings (cf. Rampazzo & Aranha, 2019), this study explores the interactional resources that participants display during online talk-in-interaction. Multimodal Conversation Analysis is applied to the data consisting of Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem 2 (GAT2) transcriptions of recorded Zoom video conferences. Virtual Exchange (VE), also referred to as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), is a method of intercultural online learning in which groups of learners collaborate with partners from another culture or geographical area in an authentic and immersive setting.*

*Despite the collaborative and immersive nature of virtual exchanges, microanalytic studies regarding interaction in this field are still underrepresented (Dooly, 2017). This is also and particularly true for the concept of interactional competence (IC) (Kramsch, 1986) which has hardly been considered in VE research so far. IC is a competence model that comprises interlocutors' interactional resources such as turn-taking, repair, sequence-organization, multimodal resources and other.*

*This paper depicts the interactional strategies that EFL students adopt in online video team meetings. Further, it argues that some L2 IC features, such as turn-taking and multilingual resources, come with particular dynamics and characteristics in a VE context and provides examples for these practices.*

## **Introduction**

“A good advice would be to really prepare for what is coming. And I mean that on a very basic level. Are you able to talk to other people? How do you ask questions even if they are more candid? What would you do when there are

misunderstandings or disagreements? These are the things one should think about before getting into it [a Virtual Exchange].”  
(German student, 2019/20 cohort)

This paper introduces Second Language Interactional Competence (L2 IC) in the context of telecollaboration by demonstrating how German and Israeli students display specific online L2 IC interactional resources in a Virtual Exchange (VE) project. The data consists of multimodal transcriptions of recorded Zoom video conferences implementing Conversation Analysis for Interactional Competence.

Over the last seven years, the virtual exchange project *Extended Telecollaboration Practice* (ETP) between future English as an additional language (EAL) teachers at the Kibbutzim College of Education in Tel Aviv and the Ludwigsburg University of Education has become a firmly established fixture at both educational institutions (Schwab & Drixler, 2020; Waldman & Harel, 2015; Waldman, Harel & Schwab, 2016, 2019). The ETP project between Israel and Germany is a VE with English as a *lingua franca*. Primarily guided by the didactic concept of project-based language learning in telecollaboration (Dooly & Sadler, 2016), the initiative features on-going project-based online group collaboration between pre-service foreign language trainee teachers. It links research on teacher training at the tertiary level with the implementation of collaborative online media.

After observing that students utilise specific interactional practices and strategies in remote online Zoom-based group interactions, the micro-analytic approach of Conversation Analysis (CA) was applied to the VE recordings. Since talk-in-interaction is the main object of inquiry in CA, its function is to find out how L2 speakers achieve regularity and mutual understanding or intersubjectivity, how they perform social actions through conversation, and particularly what interactional instruments they utilise and how they use them in an online video setting.

### **Virtual Exchange (VE)**

VE concepts are known by a variety of names, making it difficult for the practice to be more commonly understood and implemented (Rubin, 2016). For this paper, the term VE is applied since it is most commonly accepted and, despite some criticism of its ‘virtual’ semantics (Colpaert, 2020), has become firmly established over recent years (O’Dowd, 2021).

VE or telecollaboration entails participation in online intercultural interaction and collaboration projects with learners from other cultural contexts or students who are geographically distant. These exchanges are usually integrated into the participants' educational programs (O'Dowd, 2018). This method can be classified under the didactic concept of experiential learning (Kolb, 2014) and can be divided into two categories: tandem and *lingua franca* constellations.

In the tandem model, two native speakers of different language backgrounds contact each other online to learn each other's language. Therefore, the communication should be in 50 percent of one partner's native language and the other 50 percent in their target language and vice versa (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2015). In the *lingua franca* approach, the foreign language serves as the working language because both partners have a different L1 but share the same L2. The target language is spoken in a non-artificial authentic setting, thus participants on both sides usually have no other way to communicate with each other. Given that the participants have a similar language level, the anxiety of speaking the common foreign language in the telecollaborative setting is reduced (Melchor-Couto, 2017; McCafferty, Jacobs & Iddings, 2006). The ETP project considered in this paper is a *lingua franca* VE with English as the common language.

VE combines numerous advantages, such as the acquisition of digital literacies and the development of intercultural communicative competence (Chun, 2011). It further establishes an environment in which the foreign language is used in an authentic setting. A growing number of telecollaborative school projects go beyond the foreign language classroom and are implemented in other settings, such as bilingual or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) subject classes (O'Dowd, 2018). Recently, cross-curricular projects entirely allocated outside of foreign language teaching and learning have been increasingly implemented and considered in VE research (O'Dowd, 2016). With programs such as Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and UNICollaboration, the implementation of telecollaborative projects both in K-12 schools and universities is facilitated and institutionalised (Helm & Acconcia, 2019; Waldman, Harel & Schwab, 2016).

The practice of VE has gone through numerous evolutionary steps. During its developmental phase in the early 1990s, it mainly featured e-mail exchanges (Harris, 1999; Warschauer, 1996), and with the growing inclusion of video conferencing software in the

late 2000s, there was a conceptual shift to Telecollaboration 2.0 (Guth & Helm, 2010). This concept integrated new tools and possibilities and also highlighted the new competencies, multi literacies and responsibilities that were necessary for its application in online exchanges. The concept of Telecollaboration 2.0 has proven to be long-lasting and sustainable as it continues to allow for the integration of new technologies, devices and apps.

Current VE projects feature practices such as gamification (Jauregi & Melchor-Couto, 2017), 3D-webquests in a flipped classroom (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2015), smartphone integration and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) (Andujar, Salaberri-Ramiro & Martinez, 2020; Sevilla Pavón & Haba Osca, 2017), critical approaches to culture (Helm, 2018; Chanethom, 2020; Porto, 2014; Tcherepashenets, 2016) as well as augmented and virtual reality integration (Anton, Kurillo & Bajcsy, 2018; Rhee et al, 2020). Recent publications have also focused on the impact of COVID-19 on VE (Bali et al., 2021; Liu & Shirley, 2021; Sebastian & Souza, 2022), noting an increasing number of VEs since the beginning of the pandemic and highlighting the professional implementation of VEs as best practice for other university courses that suddenly had to be organised entirely online.

### **Interactional Competence (IC)**

Interactional Competence (IC) was first introduced by Claire Kramersch in 1986, building on the foundation of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Kramersch (1986) argues that IC presupposes “a shared internal context or ‘sphere of intersubjectivity’” (p. 367). Building a shared internal context helps to reduce “the uncertainty that each speaker has about the other’s intentions, perceptions and expectations” (Kramersch, 1986, p. 367). In this process of negotiation of meaning (Long, 1996), interlocutors adjust their utterances according to the effect they have on those of their conversational partners. Therefore, interaction involves anticipating the reaction of others as well as potential misunderstandings by “clarifying one’s own and the other’s intentions and arriving at the closest possible match between intended, perceived, and anticipated meanings” (Kramersch, 1986, p. 367).

Through these descriptions, Kramersch (1986) delineated social interaction as a multi-faceted, highly complex process, distinguishing it from the “oversimplified view on human interactions” (p. 367) associated with the 1980’s language

proficiency movement (Byrnes & Canale, 1987; Higgs, 1984).

IC is characterised as:

- being based on social, context-specific communicative events,
- including various activity types and trajectories of actions, that enable interlocutors to align themselves to certain communicative situations,
- including the ability of the interlocutors to understand and recognize context-specific patterns and actions,
- interlocutors having a deep knowledge of prosodic, linguistic, sequential, and nonverbal resources usually used by L1 speakers in a definitive communicative act,
- including the ability to interpret interlocutors' verbal and non-verbal actions allowing the construction of one's own actions to be easily recognized by other participants of the speech act,
- allowing the interlocutors to solve linguistic problems and maintain understanding throughout the entire act of communication (Hall & Pekarek Doehler, 2011).

Further developments in IC elaborate on Kramsch's (1986) conception of multi-faceted and highly complex individual human interaction. Young (2008) views IC as a "relationship between the participants' employment of linguistic and interactional resources and the contexts in which they are employed" (p. 101), whereas Markee (2008) suggests three constituents of IC: 1) speech as a formal framework, including vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, 2) semiotic frameworks, including repair, turn-taking, sequence and preference organization, and 3) paralinguistic features or multimodal resources, including gestures, mimicry and gaze orientation (Markee, 2008; Sert & Seedhouse, 2011).

### **Second Language Interactional Competence (L2 IC) in Virtual Exchange**

Recent studies have shown that learning an additional language without learning IC can be counterproductive to authentic communication and discourse (Stivers et al., 2009; Moorhouse, Li & Walsh 2021; Young, 2014). It has also long been understood that the capacity to speak a language grows through communication with other people (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Vygotsky, 1987).

Interaction is best conceptualized in this sense as a collaborative process that enables communicative activities to be carried out and lays the foundation for language growth (Wells & Bridges, 1981).

Despite this collaborative nature of interaction, L2 IC within telecollaboration has barely been subjected to scientific scrutiny (Dooly, 2017). Moreover, microanalytic studies, in general, and CA studies, in particular, are still small in number in the research of VE (Balaman & Sert, 2017; Cunningham, 2017; Hauck & Youngs, 2008; Tecedor Cabrero, 2013). As argued in Dooly (2017, p. 177):

There is a growing call for more microanalytical approaches that take into consideration the participants' perspectives (e.g., through the application of Conversation Analysis) [...]. These are just a few of the numerous questions that will inevitably emerge as telecollaboration – that is, an embedded, dialogic process that supports geographically-distanced collaborative work, intercultural exchange, and social interaction of individuals or groups through synchronous and asynchronous communication technology (Internet, mobile services, etc.) so that they co-produce mutual objective(s) and shared knowledge-building – continues making prodigious strides in practice and research.

Common occurrences in telecollaborative videoconferencing, such as topical or general small talk or troubles talk are necessary components of these exchanges for the purpose of facilitating group identity and intercultural learning. In order to understand these phenomena, interaction must be regarded from an emic perspective (cf. Sert, 2015), applying conversation or interactional analysis (Dooly & Smith, 2020). Taking an emic perspective implies that speech and interaction insights are made from the standpoint of the participants or social actors in the very moment of the interaction (Jenks, 2014). The inductive, bottom-up approach of CA has proven to be an optimal choice to take this perspective and to analyze the typical components of L2 IC in online learning environments, namely online presence, identification practices, turn-taking, summons-answering exchanges and ongoing talk (Jenks, 2014).

### **Multimodal Conversation Analysis**

Multimodal aspects such as gaze, pointing, nods, body orientations, raising hands or facial expressions are well-covered in pragmatic

research (Kupetz 2011; Mondada 2007; Stein 2007) but at the same time highly under-represented when it comes to online video conversations (Sindoni, 2014). According to Kupetz (2011), who examined multimodal resources in CLIL classrooms, gaze, hand movements and body orientations play a significant role in L2 interaction, particularly when explaining specific facts and circumstances. It is, therefore, crucial that the linguistic as well as interactional and multimodal resources of participants are thoroughly examined when evaluating IC in VE. As this study shows, the scrutiny of L2 IC requires research methods that are precisely tailored to examining a range of multimodal resources as objects of investigation - one such research method is CA.

Based on audio/video recordings and transcriptions, the goal of CA is to explain, analyze, and comprehend talk as a fundamental and constitutive aspect of human social life. For decades, CA was primarily applied to transcribed cassette recordings of talk-in interaction, such as recorded telephone calls (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1978). CA traditionally focuses on several of IC's observation points, for example, sequence organization, repair, turn-taking and preference organization (Markee, 2008). While multimodal resources such as gaze and paralinguistic features were historically neglected until the 1990s, research based on video data and focusing on aspects of embodied interaction in combination with talk and beyond talk, has been on the rise since the early 2000s in CA-related fields (Stivers & Sidnell, 2005; Deppermann, 2013). These facets of bodily conduct are taken into consideration in my analysis of three interactional resources that played a major role in our VE, namely (1) epistemic resources, (2) turn-taking, and (3) multilingual resources.

### **Epistemic resources**

CA research on epistemic resources focuses on “the knowledge claims that interactants assert, contest, and defend in and through turns at talk and sequences of interaction” (Heritage, 2013, p. 370). It describes on the one hand, how knowledge emerges and, on the other hand, examines how claims to knowledge and prior knowledge are brought into conversation by participants. This practice can be observed and studied by focusing on knowledge claims or their opposite, i.e., claims of insufficient knowledge (e.g., ‘I don't know’) that interlocutors assert, contest or defend in talk-in-interaction (Sert & Walsh, 2013).

Epistemic resources are also central to the conception of IC.

Young (1999) characterises IC as “a theory of the knowledge that participants bring to and realize in interaction and [that] includes an account of how this knowledge is acquired” (p.118). These epistemic details and practices are crucial in the research of IC since the language that interlocutors learn to utilise in interaction already comes with specific personal as well as cultural judgements towards that knowledge (Hall, 1995). Similarly, CA research has shown that interlocutors’ management of knowledge asymmetries (Heritage, 2012) and the coordination of knowledge are the main drivers of spoken interaction (Mushin, 2013; Sert & Jacknick, 2015).

Numerous CA studies address social epistemics in face-to-face interaction. Mondada (2013), by way of example, has scrutinized how knowledge is recognized and distributed in groups of interlocutors during guided visits. Her study focuses on the ways in which participants’ epistemic status, that is their access to knowledge, is upheld as well as how it is contested, transformed and negotiated. Siegel’s (2013) longitudinal study observes epistemic practices, particularly word search sequences, between two speakers of English as a *lingua franca* who share the same dormitory.

A large number of epistemic studies have been implemented within traditional classroom settings where the construction is carefully guided, including focal points on extended information request sequences between EFL teachers (Leyland, 2014) and epistemic-search sequences between L2 students during learning tasks (Jakonen & Morton, 2015). Even though these very practices are similarly observable in the data of this study, the classroom-centered approach differs substantially from *lingua franca* VEs which entail the formation of knowledge through negotiation of shared cultural knowledge and meaning (Kääntä, 2014). Thus, in order to analyse epistemic resources, this study focuses on knowledge asymmetries by participating students and how they manage to create spaces of shared knowledge to overcome these discrepancies (Kramsch, 1986).

### **Turn-taking**

Turn-taking in talk-in-interaction is at the heart of many CA-based studies (Heritage, 2017; Sert, 2015) and, moreover, was one of the main foci in the design and development from the very beginnings of CA (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1978). Turn-taking includes opening and closing moves, topic management (development and extension), repair and evaluation, backchannelling, self- and



other-assessment, pauses, minimal response tokens, holding and maintaining the floor, handing over the floor (turn-transition moves), clarification tokens, mutuality, checks and requests (Hall, 1995; Balaman & Sert, 2017; Tecedor Cabrero, 2013; Moorhouse, Li & Walsh 2021).

“As an empirical matter, turn-taking is remarkably orderly, with the transition from one speaker to the next recurrently managed with a minimum of silence between turns and with little overlapping speech.” (Clayman, 2013, p. 151)

In co-present environments turn transition usually occurs after the completion of turn constructional units or near turn completion (Seedhouse, 2005). In online environments, however, turn transitions can happen before completion of turns (Stivers et al., 2009) and thus disrupt video group meetings. During video conferencing, participants therefore need to pay attention to falls in pitch which indicate end of turn (Sert, 2011). Thus, online L2 IC is dependent on the production and coordination of vocal cues, including micro changes in stress and intonation, as they may indicate turn-taking much more than in co-present environments.

Overlapping utterances as a variation of turn-taking occur when turn transitions seem to be close or when speakers attempt to speak at approximately the same time. In such cases, pauses open up the conversational floor for other speakers and might lead to overlapping (Markee & Kunitz, 2013). The difficulty of eliminating overlapping utterances in online VE environments can be explained by the lack of physical proximity which causes students to start speaking at the same time. Interlocutors must affectively identify when it is appropriate to take a next turn which can be a guessing game. It should be highlighted that most interactions pause when overlapping occurs, causing interactants to wait for clarification of the pause and to try to gain mutual orientation again. At the same time, interactants use pauses to reset the conversational floor back to a one-speaker-at-a-time format (Long, 2015).

### **Multilingual resources**

In current studies, the term ‘multilingual resources’ is often used synonymously with ‘code-switching’, ‘own language use’ or ‘use of L1’ (Sert, 2015). Code-switching, for example between L1 and L2, can be used as evidence of both advanced (Lee, 2016) or rudimentary (Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain, 2009) access to

resources in the target language. It is thus context-dependent whether code switching is considered a resource or competence, or in contrast, indicates a lack of L2 linguistic competence.

Compared to other interactional phenomena such as turn-taking, the study of CA focusing on the strategic use of other languages than the target language, namely multilingual resources, is still a (relatively) young field of scrutiny (Sert, 2015). A CA methodology to investigate language alternations was developed and implemented in the early 2000s (Mondada, 2004; Torras, 2005; Li, 2002) and the CA-specific approach in the scrutiny of multilingual resources “dispenses with motivational speculation in favour of an interpretative approach based on detailed, turn by turn analysis of language choices” (Li, 2002, p.167). Therefore, the phenomenon needs to be regarded neutrally and descriptively and is included as a feature of IC only in specific instances.

The majority of the CA studies of multilingual resources focus on language alternations in classroom-based settings (Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005; Bonacina & Garafanga, 2011), i.a. pointing out the central role of teachers’ code-switching, and therefore have little bearing on online L2 communication.

With regard to multilingual resources in online communication, Lee (2016) points out that “much of the existing research on CS [code-switching] in online communication points to a common theme: that the negotiation of language choice and alternation between linguistic codes serve as an important resource for self-presentation and identity performance” (p. 124). However, the CA research on online multilingual resources to which Lee (2016) refers has focused mainly on written or asynchronous discourse, such as blogs (Leppänen, 2007) or YouTube videos and comments (Androutsopoulos, 2013). Therefore, it still needs to be determined whether the use of different languages in synchronous VE online team meetings is used for the performance of identity, and self-expressive purposes.

## **Methodology**

This explorative study analyses features of L2 IC during initial online team meetings using CA as a methodological tool.

## **Data**

The data for this study was acquired via the ETP project (see Introduction), during November 2019 and January 2020. These online meetings between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduate students in secondary school teacher training

programs are part of the VE project *Extended Telecollaboration Practice* (Waldman, Harel & Schwab, 2019) between Israel and Germany which was initiated in 2015 and is still on-going.

The intercultural groups predominantly consist of two to three students of each country, adding up to four to six students per group, who meet on a weekly basis to discuss their projects. The aim of the student projects is to design secondary school teaching units that foster Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). The full corpus consists of 229 recorded synchronous student group meetings of approximately 157 hours between 2017 and 2022 (six cohorts).

This paper reports on analysis of the recordings of the fourth cohort (2019/2020) online group meetings of German and Israeli students, consisting of 49h 14min 39sec of student video conferencing data in total. In these meetings, German-Israeli mixed groups of four to six students met each other online for the first time, after having worked asynchronously for two weeks beforehand. Only the first thirty minutes of online conferencing was analysed (cf. Rampazzo & Aranha, 2019) in order to compare acquaintance and common ground interactional strategies of ten randomly distributed Israeli and German students (cf. Rampazzo & Aranha, 2019).

### **Participants**

Participants of this paper are 22 Israeli and 30 German undergraduate teacher students, most of whom are in their third to sixth semester. These students were allocated into ten groups and met seven times (two groups met six times) on a weekly basis between 19/11/2019 and 14/01/2020. The groups consist mainly of 4-7 students, generally with one or two more students on the German side since the class size ratio of the respective courses in this cohort was unequal. Two groups on the Israeli side feature one German guest student respectively.

The seminar referenced in this study (cohort 19/20) ended almost concurrently with the first cases of Covid-19 in Europe in January and February 2020. Since then, the VE between Israel and Germany took place two more times with students mostly participating from home. Participants of these later VE exchanges were better accommodated and experienced with video conferencing.

### **Data transcription and analysis**

The data was transcribed according to the specifications of the

GAT2 transcription system (Selting et al., 2011) utilising the transcription software, Transana. “In CA, naturally occurring talk should be recorded first, and then transcribed; transcriptions allow the analyst to see the complex nature of talk captured in an easily usable, static format” (Sert, 2015, p. 24). The choices researchers make during transcription, however, enact the hypotheses they hold and limit the interpretations they can make of their results. Contrary to the assumption that transcripts are the data of CA, they are often “rather a convenient way to capture and present the phenomena of interest in written form.” (Ten Have, 2007, p. 95). In order to counteract these biases and reliability problems, standardized transcription systems have been established in the field of CA research.

Even though most CA scrutiny utilises the commonly known transcription system adapted from Gail Jefferson (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008), this study will rely on GAT 2 transcription. GAT 2 (Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem 2) is the renewed version of GAT, a transcription system designed and implemented in 1998 by a group of German interactional linguists and conversation analysts (Selting et al., 2011). GAT 2 adopts the majority of Jefferson transcription conventions and principles, yet distinguishes from it by providing certain functions that are more suitable to analysing spoken language and multi-modality in video-captured talk-in-interaction. The transcription was carried out by Transana<sup>®</sup>, a program highly suitable for creating transcripts for video and other media files (Schwab, 2006).

The analysis for this paper focuses on phenomena that particularly stood out or occurred as patterns in many groups during the initial meetings. Further L2 IC features such as sequence organisation, repair or preference organisation in online communication are not included in this paper, but will be considered in more detail in future publications.

## **Results**

The following transcribed video sections show the students during their first synchronous online group meetings via Zoom. Their assignment is to find a name for their group as well as a group philosophy that includes their own rules of conduct. The video data reveals whether close students stick to their assignments or spend time with off-task discussions, which the lecturers neither encourage nor forbid.

The excerpts can be analysed for not just one but several features of L2 IC, e.g., a code-switching sequence is often followed

by a repair sequence. However, the analysis of each excerpt will focus on one particular interactional practice. The analysis of excerpts will also take into account the concomitant multimodal resources which are italicised in the transcripts.

Video data of the first online meetings show that most groups employ similar strategies or stereotypical moves to create common ground, such as talking about the weather and cultural contact points ('I just ate shakshuka yesterday.'). Other moves were more specific to the online space, such as giving their counterpart a small 'tour' of the campus or sharing the view out the window. Even though these moves were not assigned to the participants, they were evident in every group during their initial meeting. Additionally, in reviewing the video data, specific features of L2 IC stood out as distinct features of synchronous L2 online group interaction: (1) negotiation processes of epistemic resources, (2) turn-taking and (3) multilingual resources.

*Excerpt 1 (00:17:25 – 00:18:21)*

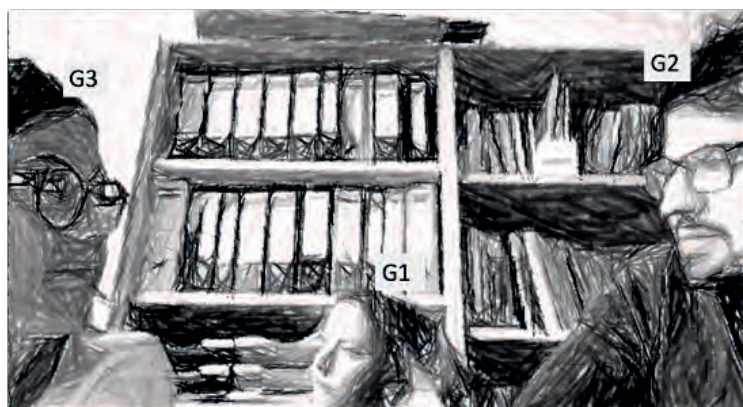


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

01 G3 [v] ok[ay'then (.) we]Also have com'up with-

02 I2 [v] [yeah perfect-]

03 G3 [v] what was the OTHER thing ˘e::hm (1.55)

˘e::hm. (1.70)

04 G3 [nv] *gazes to G2*

*hits desk with her*

*pen 3 times*

05 G2 [nv] *shrugs*

06 G3 [v] e:hm[m].

07 G3 [nv] *gazes to ceiling*



- 15 I2 [v] <<slowly> we 'need to talk about'our expectations  
 16 from the course and what we expect from each  
 other: and'e::h  
 17 how we are going to work thi:ngs and ta::sk an' (-)  
 rules,>  
 18 I1 [v] work's enough-

The word search sequence in lines 03-14 of Excerpt 1 is similar to typical search sequences in L2 classroom settings (Greer, 2013) in that the gaze is aimed toward the ceiling and the interactant struggles to find the correct term. It is noteworthy though that, as soon as the sequence is initiated (l. 03), G3 moves her gaze away from the camera and towards her German group members, particularly G2, seeking assistance (Fig. 1). Her group members are verbally non-responsive and, by shrugging, display multi-modal epistemics (Melander, 2012) in an embodied claim of insufficient knowledge (Sert, 2015). G3 then hesitates to address the Israeli group members and initiates a repair sequence (l. 11) which is overlapped by G2 addressing the Israelis by gazing into the camera and taking a turn (Fig. 3).

Excerpt 1 also shows the challenge of involving the local group in ESSs and, concurrently, the advantages of directly involving the virtual counterpart when problems or questions arise. The complete search sequence on the German side (ll. 01 – 11) takes 37 seconds until the question is then – verbally and by gaze – addressed to the Israeli participants (l. 12) who promptly provide an answer (l. 15).

Similar task-related ESSs were visible in six of the ten initial video student meetings. Some of which were coupled with code-switching, which resulted in temporary exclusion of the virtual counterparts. The reasons for this might be multifaceted, such as face-keeping, since the group formation process is still taking place and the group members are just getting to know each other.

Considering other epistemic practices, a large number of conversational strands revolved around cultural differences and similarities, trying to establish shared internal contexts and a sphere of inter-subjectivity (Kramsch, 1986). In the context of video conferencing, epistemic claims were often reinforced with multi-modal embodied actions (Hoffmann & Schwab, 2015; Heath & Luff, 2012). For example, the participating EFL students often applied distinctive and exaggerated body language to better convey their words via webcam. Some common ground practices were online-specific, such as showing the surroundings with the

camera or exhibiting personal artifacts, e.g., shoes etc., that were not initially captured by webcam. Some other prototypical moves, like talking about the weather, were evident in every student group.

## 2. Turn-taking

Excerpt 2 shows four German students (G1 to G4) working together with two Israeli students (I1 and I2). They have just met online for the first time after having worked on specific tasks asynchronously two weeks before. The group has previously been talking for 00:01:15 and had noticed that, due to the mandatory military conscription in Israel, the Israeli students are about three years older than the Germans. In Excerpt 2, group members continue this conversation by talking about what they did after graduating from high school.

Figures 5 and 6 shows the challenging group setting with four participants on the German side and six students in total. As a result, it is difficult for the local group members to keep track of each other and to register multi-modal cues for turn-taking. What becomes clear even at this early stage of talk-in-interaction, is that G1 is conceded a leading role on the German side. This matter is enforced by the fact that the German students sit in a row at a straight table with G2 and G3 slightly in the background (Fig. 5 & 6).

Excerpt 2 shows how G1 struggles with the intricacies of online turn-taking and illustrates the resources she utilises to handle the situation.

*Excerpt 2: 00:02:56 – 00:03:24*



Fig. 5

01 G1 [v] <<acc> 'it'\_s interesting so actually in>  
'GERmany is li:ke; (-)



02	G1	[nv]		<i>gaze in orientation to G2, G3, G4 (Fig. 5)</i>
03	G1	[v]	<<pp, acc>'m speaking all the time> do <<laughing> YOU want to	
04	G1	[nv]		<i>points her pencil to G2, G3, G4</i>
05	G3&4	[nv]		<i>look to G1, smile and straighten up</i>
06	G1	[v]	SPEAK> [as well?]='m sOrry °hh	
07	G3	[v]	[no'lright]	
08	G1	[nv]		<i>runs hand through hair, smiles</i>
09	G3	[nv]		<i>back to former sitting posture</i>



Fig. 6

10	G1	[v]	so_in GERmany i''s li:ke (.) you ´finISH schoo:l-	
11	G1	[nv]		<i>gazes into camera to address Israelis</i>
12	G1	[v]	a:nd then (-)probably what !I:! did is I	
13	G1	[nv]		<i>mutual gaze to G3, G4</i>
14	G1	[v]	went to Australia (-) of` course i did heHEhe;	
15	G1	[nv]		<i>gazes to ceiling, gazes to camera, laughs (Fig. 6)</i>

At the beginning of the transcribed excerpt, G1 takes turn by contrasting the Israelis' sequence on the military service with her experiences after finishing school (l. 01). G1 becomes aware that she is taking the lead in the interaction with the Israeli group members (l. 03). At an early stage of conversation, she interrupts her utterance in the middle of a sentence (l. 03) and gazes to G2,

3 and 4 while initiating repair (l. 06). G1 then offers the stage to her group members by pointing her pencil towards them (Fig. 5) which is declined in the next turn procedure (l. 05) (cf. Hutchby & Wooffit, 2008). As a consequence, G1 looks back into the camera and addresses the Israelis again with an anecdote about stereotypical endeavors of German high school graduates.

From the end of Excerpt 2, G1 keeps looking back and forth between the camera and her fellow students on site. Constantly keeping an eye both on the screen and on the local group's needs can hamper the flow of conversation as shown in this example. In the larger data set, turn allocation is handled differently from group to group. One group (Group 6), consisting of four German and three Israeli students, clearly stands out since one participant takes over the conversation and conducts a quasi-interview, interrupting the counterquestions of the others at times. In another group, turn taking is hesitant so that interaction increasingly fizzles out, as evidenced by a high number of extended pauses.

### 3. Multilingual resources

In the seven years of the ETP project, one phenomenon of online social interaction was continuously prevalent, which is the multilingual resource of code-switching. When analyzing code-switching as a multilingual resource, it is important to differentiate between the necessary or involuntary code-switching (e.g. Excerpt 3) and voluntary or unforced code-switching (cf. Lipski, 2016; Wei & Martin, 2009).

When problems occur, for example of a technological or task-related nature, participants tend to switch codes. Situations in which participants switch from the *lingua franca* to their L1s include handling connectivity issues, dealing with procedural problems, expressing social identity or assisting participants by translating into the L1. As can be seen in l. 01 and ll. 05-07 of Excerpt 3, participants in vEs are sometimes required to communicate in their L1, namely when it comes to communication with individuals in their country of residence and in on-site surroundings.

Excerpt 2: 00:02:56 – 00:03:24



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

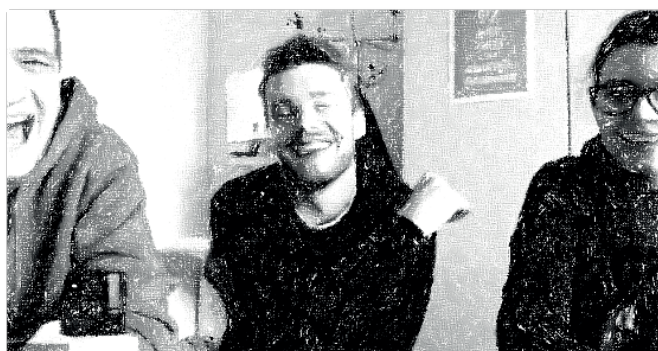


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

- 01 I1 [v]: הנשמ אל זא ,ומז הברה ונל יאש ללגבש תבשוח ינא ,וליאכ  
 <<in Hebrew> *like i think that we do't have a lot of time so  
 never mind> (.)*
- I1 [nv]: *gazes to technical assistant (1.8; Fig.7) then back  
 to camera*
- 02 I1 [v]: <<acc> nEver mind (.) ok [so>
- I1 [nv]: *raises both hands and lowers them in reassuring  
 gesture (Fig.8)*
- 03 G3 [v]: [*<<laughing along with group(2.7)> sounds>  
 brilliant (Fig.9)*
- 04 I1 [v]: sorry for THAT; (.)
- 05 I1 [v]: הבר הדות הדות ינא  
 <<in Hebrew> *sorry thank you thank you very much>*
- I1 [nv]: *leans to the left (technical assistant)*
- 06 I1 [v]: הכירצ אל ינא הז ,הז תא  
 <<in Hebrew> *this (.) this I don't need>*
- I1 [nv]: *stands up and adjusts camera (6.9)*
- 07 I1 [v]: הבר הדות  
 <<in Hebrew> *thanks a lot.>*

08	I2	[v]:	תודה means dAnke (1.7) e:rr thank you];
	I2	[nv]:	<i>raises eyebrows and chuckles</i> (Fig. 10)
09	I1	[v]:	ok (---) (chair screeches) mazingg. (--)
	I1	[nv]:	<i>sits down again</i> <i>in a dry tone (ironic?)</i>
10	I1	[v]:	so our expectATions (.) e:h (.) a:re;
	I1	[nv]:	<i>right hand on chest</i> <i>points hand towards camera</i>
11	G3	[v]:	[...] ye´ah?

Excerpt 3 exemplifies how code-switching sequences (l. 01; ll. 05-07) are often followed by repair sequences (l. 04). Prior to this excerpt, there had been no code-switching to Hebrew. First, I1 communicates verbally (l. 01; ll. 05-07) and multimodally (Fig. 7) with the IT support employee in Hebrew. At the same time, she makes adjustments to the technical setting or camera positioning. Her code-switching sequence (l. 01) is followed by two repair sequences, addressed in English (l. 04) to the German group members and Hebrew (l. 05) to the technical assistant. I1's swift code-switching from Hebrew to English is spontaneously responded to by G1, G2 and G3's laughter (Fig. 9) and G3's ironic remark 'sounds brilliant' (l. 03) in the next-turn procedure.

Excerpt 3 also shows use of multilingual resources by I2, a German guest student in Tel Aviv who can switch and translate between German, English and basic Hebrew. During language-based confusion (ll. 07 -08), she translates a Hebrew utterance produced by I1 into German instead of English and repairs this mistake (l. 08). This observation can be categorized as code-mixing (Tay, 1989) and exemplifies participants' abilities to draw on their multilingual resources in L2 IC.

### Limitations

One limitation of the present study became apparent to the author after the data were collected: even though multimodal resources were considered in the transcription of the current study, it should be noted that the Zoom recordings on hand only display the side of the current speaker. Thus, a complete multimodal analysis could not be performed. The project-affiliated researchers noticed this shortcoming after cohort 19/20 and therefore decided to maintain an audio/video recording mode which consistently records all participants.

### Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this explorative study was to point out interactional resources of online L2 IC in a VE and their impact on interaction

and common ground facilitation in online video meetings. Using a CA based multimodal analysis, the L2 IC features identified include multilingual and epistemic resources as well as the organisation of turn-taking. The data demonstrates that gestures, mimicry and gaze are primary drivers of conversation not only in face-to-face (Goodwin, 1981; Schegloff 1984) but also in online video talk-in interaction.

Similar to existing research, a common observation in the analysis of telecollaborative group conversations in the data of this study were epistemic search sequences (Jakonen & Morton, 2015) and word search sequences (Leyland, 2014). In face-to-face interaction, when one interactant displays a lack of knowledge, a sequence is commonly initiated that proceeds until the missing knowledge is given by another interactant, thereby swiftly achieving a state of “epistemic equilibrium” (Leyland, 2014, p. 136) on a specific matter. The data of this study suggests, however, that interlocutors in L2 initial online team meetings hesitate to request information and thereby share their lack of knowledge with their virtual team members. Instead, they prefer to address their local peers first. This happens non-verbally by gaze orientation towards their fellow students in the same room and is, in some cases, accompanied with code-switching to L1. This delay causes the virtual communication to briefly break down and prevents a seamless process of knowledge exchange, that is the ‘epistemic engine’ (Heritage, 2012).

In terms of turn-taking, the participants of the project had to consider not only their local conversation group but also additional team members on their screens. Further online-specific factors, such as a limited field of view and connectivity problems, hampered the finely-tuned coordination that is necessary for taking turns and thus constituted a considerable challenge for the participants. At the same time, there were a number of turn-taking behaviours in the data that seem to occur in both virtual and face-to-face settings. Even though the participants of the project were communicating online rather than being in each other’s physical presence, they frequently yielded multimodal resources such as pointing for turn allocation (Auer, 2021; Mondada, 2007), by utilising gaze to address their group members online (Markaki & Mondada, 2012) or by displaying embodied completions (Mondada, 2015).

The analysis of student online talk-in-interaction in the ETP project found that code-switching took place frequently in the initial meetings. Similar to Lee (2016) and Lipski (2016; 2014) the

data indicated that such utilisations of multilingual resources are highly context-dependent and require a distinction between voluntary and involuntary code-switching. A cause for involuntary code-switching that is particular to VE was that both sides of participants remained in the surroundings of their respective institutions and switched to their L1 in order to interact with individuals who were onsite and did not speak in the target language (e.g., technical assistants). In cases of troubles talk (Steensig, 2019) or other interferences, the analysis shows that some students used voluntary code-switches to discuss issues with their fellow students first before addressing their remote teammates. This practice was intensified by changes in gaze direction towards their local peers.

As discussed above, the concept of ‘multilingual resources’ is often used interchangeably with ‘code-switching’ in current literature (Sert, 2015). Yet, in the data at hand, students’ occasionally switch to their L1 without necessity or, seemingly, out of lack of L2 linguistic competence. The analyses of these practices show that a stronger distinction between the two terms in CA research might help to clarify and prevent misunderstandings. Involuntary code-switching sequences (cf. Lipski, 2016) often entail a certain detachment of the group on-site from the remote virtual group members. As is outlined in the existing literature, participants in this study frequently yielded multilingual resources to perform multicultural identities and to display openness (Lee, 2014). Additionally, students from both participating countries picked up words or phrases from each others’ L1 and utilised these resources in further conversation.

Future studies, both in the overall field of telecollaboration and in the ETP project, should address further use and development of interactional resources in this virtual setting, e.g., by implementing comparative research designs that include face-to-face communication, as future VE curriculum development can benefit from these insights. Some of the practices yielded by the participants, such as showing their surroundings via webcam or picking up words and phrases of the others’ L1, had positive interactional effects and created opportunities for further topics of conversation. Thus, these practices could be explicitly suggested as interactional strategies when preparing students for their first video team meetings. On the other hand, processes such as code-switching to their own L1, e.g., when problems occurred, have proved to be detrimental to the further course of participants’ conversations. Teachers should point out this problematic nature

of own L1 use and demand both the use of the target language and collaborative problem solving by all group members.

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