

Understanding the complexities associated with conceptualising pedagogical scenarios for online multimodal interaction between two languages and cultures

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Abstract. The complexity surrounding the design of collaborative pedagogical scenarios can allow foreign language learners to develop intercultural and linguistic skills; however, careful consideration must be given when conceptualising telecollaborative projects. Many research studies have been conducted which led to significant discoveries, but only few studies examine the intricacies of developing pedagogical scenarios for online multimodal interaction and the outcomes of these complexities. This paper reports on a Franco-Jamaican telecollaborative project, ClerKing, which took place in two phases between Applied Foreign Languages (AFL) students of English from University Clermont Auvergne (UCA), France, and Modern Languages students of French from Shortwood Teachers' College (STC), Jamaica. Each phase had a different pedagogical scenario, with the first being restricted and the second being more open. Using the exploratory method, various parameters of online pedagogical scenarios were identified and examined with varying degrees of granularity. Preliminary findings show that a less restricted and more flexible pedagogical scenario allowed for students to develop language and intercultural competencies, while strengthening negotiation skills.

Keywords: complexity, pedagogical scenario, multimodal interaction, clerking, telecollaboration.

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1. Introduction

One way to prepare our students to communicate successfully with people from varying backgrounds is to foster their development of linguistic and intercultural competence; this can be achieved through telecollaborative projects. Helm (2015) defines telecollaboration as the “practice of engaging classes of geographically dispersed learners in online exchange using Internet communication tools for the development of language and/or intercultural competence” (p. 197).

Critical to telecollaborative projects is a pedagogical scenario. This is a plan that outlines the expectations of and instructions for the learner. It includes the objectives of the project, prior and targeted skills, and resources and tools made available for accomplishing proposed activities and tasks (Nissen, 2006).

Closely associated with the pedagogical scenario, or even sometimes included in it, is the communication scenario. Nissen (2006) explains that this entails all the possible forms of interactions that the learner has at his disposal and which are clearly communicated to him as part of his online project. Nissen (2006, p. 4) also identifies five variables for defining the type of communication scenario in an online project: the prospective conversation partners (who communicates with whom?), the status of the learner and his interlocutors (novice, expert), the purpose of the interaction (e.g. practice of the language), the temporality of the exchanges (duration, frequency, rhythm), and the communication tools used (the choice of platform may lead to more synchronous or asynchronous exchanges). To this list, Foucher (2010, p. 86) adds the following: the language(s) of interaction (native, foreign, third language), the objective of the exchanges (collaborative realisation of a final task or ‘simple’ communication), and the number of interlocutors possible (in a chat session, for example). All these elements play an essential role in regard to how the learner will position himself throughout the project.

Pedagogical scenarios can either be restraint or open. Pernin and Lejeune (2004) explain that the former describes precisely to the learner the activities to be executed. This type of scenario leaves a low degree of initiative to the actors of the learning situation. Conversely, they note that the latter outlines the activities to be achieved, leaving the actors in the learning situation varying degrees of freedom to organise the activities or determine their course (Pernin & Lejeune, 2004, p. 6).

Several studies have found that there are multiple interactional factors that could impact the success of telecollaboration and the benefits it brings to language learning. Kötter (2002) underlined delays in asynchronous communication. Kern

(2006) noted challenges regarding mismatched language levels. O'Dowd and Ritter (2006) established areas such as low participation and motivation, negative evaluations of the target culture, and failed opportunities for cross-cultural exchange. They also cited methodological aspects such as task design which can significantly influence the outcome of telecollaboration.

Using the exploratory approach, we are particularly interested in the complexity associated with the following elements of pedagogical and communication scenarios: language(s) of exchanges and communication platforms.

2. Method

ClerKing, a Franco-Jamaican project, was conducted in two phases for ten weeks in the second semester between AFL students of English from UCA, and Modern Languages students of French from STC. There was a total of 50 participants of mixed genders, between the ages of 18 and 33. A restrained pedagogical scenario was used in the first phase, while the second phase was more open (see Table 1 for differences). Participants were paired based on their profiles submitted before the start of the project. The main objective of this project was for students to practise the target language(s) studied and to improve their linguistic and cultural competencies in said language(s) based on their respective levels (Jamaican students were between Common European Framework of Reference for languages levels A2-B2 in French, while French students were B2-C1 in English). Students discussed different intercultural topics weekly, and specific instructions were given concerning communication tools, language choice, and outcome of each session.

Table 1. Differences in pedagogical choices between the two scenarios

Elements of pedagogical and communication scenarios	Scenario 1	Scenario 2
Language of exchange	English and French (Imposed by teacher) Some tasks in French and others in English	English or French (Free choice of the students)
Types of communication	Pairs (one Clermontois and one Jamaican)	Groups of four (two Clermontois and two Jamaicans)
Communication platforms	Facebook, Moodle, Skype, WhatsApp	WhatsApp

Tasks and topics given	All topics imposed Complete guided and systematic tasks One imposed final task	Choice of two out of ten topics Complete tasks in a personal manner Choice of one out of two final tasks
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The data collection for this study included all the types of interactions that took place within ClerKing as well as two questionnaires: the first one administered at the start of the project, which gathered data on the participants’ biography, linguistic competencies, usage of communication tools, and elements related to intercultural communication. The second one examined the same elements but in the context of the project at the end.

3. Discussion of preliminary results

In assessing the objectives of the project, findings show that students declared greater improvement in culture compared to linguistic gains in both scenarios. As illustrated in [Table 2](#), the less restricted scenario seemed to have allowed for more cultural development.

Table 2. Students’ declaration of linguistic and cultural gains in percentage

	Linguistic gains	Cultural gains
Scenario 1	60%	66%
Scenario 2	55%	88%

In citing examples of cultural gains on the second questionnaire, students provided the following responses in [Figure 1](#) below.

3.1. Choice of language

It was observed that even though students were instructed in Scenario 1 to use a specific language at given points, most of the exchanges happened in English as this was the more comfortable mutual language within each pair.

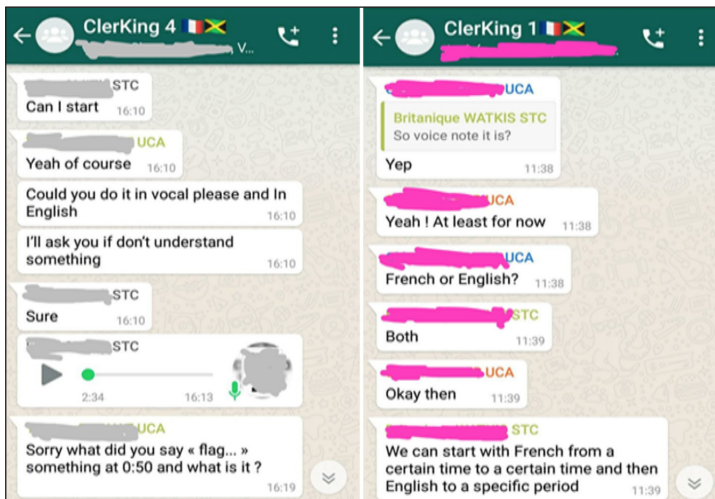
In Scenario 2, the non-imposition of language not only led to the development of linguistic skills, but also negotiation skills. On many occasions, students had to agree on which language to choose to discuss the given topics (see [Figure 2](#)).

Provisions were also made on both ends to utilise both languages to facilitate adequate practice.

Figure 1. Excerpts of declarations of students' cultural gains in both scenarios

Scenario 1	Scenario 2
<p>"France is a very beautiful country and the government takes care of its citizens by offering free healthcare and education."</p> <p>"Certain stereotypes were cleared up. I learnt that the youth of France don't drink as much wine as their predecessors. I also learnt that religion doesn't play an important role in government in France."</p> <p>« L'importance de la religion en Jamaïque. »</p> <p>« Le système éducatif, la façon de vivre, l'éducation religieuse... »</p>	<p>« Au niveau du créole jamaïcain et de leurs coutumes traditionnelles ou encore sur l'histoire du pays. »</p> <p>« Le créole jamaïcain, le night life en Jamaïque, Anansi, les espaces touristiques de la Jamaïque. »</p> <p>« A propos des rastafaris et qu'ils sont très croyants. »</p> <p>"French people are not religious, more free-minded."</p> <p>"I learnt about the protest culture in France."</p>

Figure 2. Screenshots of excerpts from conversations in Scenario 2



3.2. Communication platforms

Even though there were four communication platforms in Scenario 1, it was found that only two of them were given priority, WhatsApp and Skype. Students attested

that these two platforms were the most feasible for communication: Skype for video and WhatsApp for chat.

Students from Scenario 2 also confirmed that WhatsApp was, indeed, an ideal platform because of its features; however, certain functionalities such as voice and video call proved difficult in a group of four people.

4. Conclusions

As O'Dowd and Ritter (2006) and Permin and Lejeune (2004) noted, we have observed that the design of a pedagogical scenario plays an important role in telecollaboration. Open scenarios seem to allow for the development of linguistic but more so cultural and negotiation skills in foreign languages.

It is also noteworthy that Skype and WhatsApp are suitable communication platforms for telecollaborative projects. Therefore, it would be wise not to use multiple tools, but to choose the pertinent ones that require less cognitive manipulation from the students because they are already familiar with them.

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