Motivational factors in telecollaborative exchanges among teenagers

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Abstract. Motivational factors play an important role in (language) learning processes and research indicates that this is also true for telecollaboration exchanges (Jauregi, de Graaff, van den Bergh, & Kriz, 2012; Melchor-Couto, 2017; in press). This short paper will introduce a study into how motivational factors play a role in telecollaboration exchanges by teenagers depending on the interaction constellation, the tools being used, and the telecollaborative experience. A total of 202 foreign language learners from different European countries took part in telecollaboration activities. All participants carried out an average of four telecollaborative sessions either by written chat or by video communication. Data from a survey measuring motivational factors, including self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and anxiety, was gathered after every session. A small number of pupils were also interviewed on aspects related to motivation and anxiety. The results show: (1) a significant decrease in anxiety across conditions as sessions progress, especially for those communicating in Lingua Franca (LF) constellations using chat; (2) that pupils interacting with Native Speakers (NSs) seem to be the most confident concerning their perception of competence; and (3) that those communicating with NSs were significantly more positive about the learning potential of communicating with NSs.

Keywords: telecollaboration, motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety, video communication, chat.

1. Introduction

Motivational factors play an important role in (language) learning processes (Bandura, 1997; Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and

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research indicates that this is also true for telecollaboration exchanges (Jauregi et al., 2012; Melchor-Couto, 2017, in press). Telecollaboration or online intercultural exchange is an "internet-based intercultural exchange between groups of learners of different cultural/national backgrounds set up in an institutional blended-learning context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence" (Guth & Helm, 2012, p. 42).

Most of the studies addressing telecollaboration to date have focused on university students. This study addresses the motivational dimension of telecollaboration among teenagers, a much neglected target group in studies addressing online intercultural exchanges.

This study intends to analyse the motivational dimension involved in telecollaboration by looking at pupils' self-efficacy and anxiety levels as well as their attitudes towards interactions with Native Speakers (NSs) and Non Native Speakers (NNSs). Interaction was in the foreign language either via the chat application in Moodle or via video communication (BigBlueButton (BBB) in Moodle), and with or without a webcam.

2. Method

A total of 202 foreign language learners from Spain, France, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK were recruited for telecollaboration activities within this project, which was funded as part of the European TILA project (Telecollaboration for Intercultural Language Acquisition)[3]. All participants carried out an average of four telecollaborative sessions either by written chat or by video communication. They worked in either Lingua Franca (LF), Tandem (T), or Mixed constellations (M).

A survey measuring motivational factors, including self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and anxiety was circulated to all participants after every session. Three pupils were also interviewed on aspects related to motivation and anxiety.

2.1. Instructional context

Every pupil was paired with a peer from another country in order to carry out regular telecollaboration sessions during class time. A total of 44% of the survey

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3. http://www.tilaproject.eu/

responses came from pupils telecollaborating in a LF constellation (interactions between NNSs of the target language), and 17% of the reactions correspond to pupils interacting in T constellations (with NSs of their target language, who were in turn learning their partner's mother tongue). Finally, 39% used a mixed approach (tandem with lingua franca).

2.2.   Data collection

A questionnaire measuring self-efficacy beliefs, attitudes toward NS and NNS interaction and anxiety was adapted from Jauregi et al. (2012) and distributed among learners to be completed after every session. Most items were to be scored by participants on a five-point Likert scale (1='strongly disagree'; 5='strongly agree').

Questionnaires were devised in English and translated into Dutch, French, German, and Spanish. They were circulated electronically via SurveyMonkey. Three students from Colexio Apóstol Santiago (Vigo, Spain), all at the B1 proficiency level, were randomly chosen to be interviewed for this study.

2.3.   Data analysis

The quantitative data collected was coded for analysis and mean values were calculated. The qualitative data was analysed by identifying different coding categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) related to the topics being researched in the present study.

3.   Results

The first part of this section will present the survey analysis per category and the second part will focus on the interview findings.

3.1.   Self-efficacy

Pupils participating in Colexio Apóstol Santiago T exchanges showed the highest mean scores for language competence and expressing themselves correctly (3.8), closely followed by the LF group (3.7), see Table 1.

As for the last item, the LF group showed the highest mean scores (4.6), followed by the T group (3.8). The pupils participating in M constellations got the lowest mean values across sessions for the three items (3.1; 2.9; 2.9).

Table 1. Mean values for self-efficacy according to language constellation (LF, T, & M) and environments (chat & video communication (VC)) used in telecollaboration

Item	LF	T	M	Chat	VC
I think that my foreign language competence is good enough to communicate with native speakers.	3.7	3.8	3.1	3.6	3.3
I can express myself correctly in the foreign language.	3.7	3.8	2.9	3.6	3.3
I understand (almost) everything that my partner says in the foreign language.	4.6	3.8	2.9	4.5	3.4

Regarding the differences in use of tools, pupils collaborating in chat were much more confident about being able to express themselves correctly (3.6) and particularly about understanding the partner (4.5) compared to those interacting by video communication (3.3; 3.4, respectively). As to the differences across sessions for the last item (understanding the interaction partner), in the first session the item scored average (3.5), while in the sixth session the mean values reached 4.2.

3.2. Willingness to communicate

Pupils communicating with NSs in the telecollaboration exchanges got much higher mean scores for the first item (4.1) than M constellations (3.4), while the LF group obtained the lowest mean values of all (3.1) (see Table 2). The pupils performing in BBB video communication thought they had learned a lot by communicating with NSs (3.5) compared to the chat group (3.1).

3.3. Anxiety with communication

Anxiety diminished as pupils got more familiar with telecollaboration. For instance, for the first item (I get nervous when I communicate), the first session got a mean score of 3.1, while the sixth session obtained a mean score of 1.5. The same tendency was observed for worrying about making mistakes (2.9>1.7) or getting nervous about a lack of understanding (2.7>1.7).

As to the language constellation, the LF group showed the lowest anxiety scores and the M group the highest ones. Regarding the tool being used for the exchanges, chat showed much lower anxiety scores than those communicating by VC.

Table 2.   Mean values for anxiety comparing language constellations (LF, T, & M) and the environments (chat & VC) used in telecollaboration

Item	LF	T	M	Chat	VC
I get nervous when I communicate in the foreign language.	2.1	2.3	2.6	x	x
I worry a lot if I make mistakes when I communicate in the foreign language.	1.8	2.4	2.7	1.6	2.4
I get nervous when I don't understand every word that my exchange partner says.	1.6	2.4	2.6	1.6	2.4

3.4.   Interview outcomes

The TILA activities undertaken were highly valued by the pupils, who rate them nine out of ten for enjoyment. What they valued the most was being able to get to know someone their age from a different country who is also learning English. They were interested in learning about how other people from different countries speak English. One of them pointed out that this is very important because in real life they will not always have the opportunity to interact with NNSs of English. None of the pupils expressed a preference towards NS interaction. Video communication seemed to be more appealing to them, although they preferred to start with written chat.

4.   Conclusions

The present study shows results regarding motivational issues related to self-efficacy, interactions with NSs/NNSs, and anxiety.

Regarding the self-efficacy items, pupils interacting with NSs seem to be the most confident as far as their perception of competence (communicate and express correctly) is concerned, closely followed by the LF group, while the LF group outperformed the other groups regarding their perception of understanding the speech partner. The confidence on their competence seems to be higher by those engaging in chat sessions.

As far as willingness to communicate is concerned, those communicating in T constellations with NSs are significantly more positive about the learning potential of communicating with NSs than the other groups, and so are the pupils communicating in BBB.

A significant decrease was noticed as sessions progressed across conditions. Pupils engaging in LF constellations showed the lowest anxiety levels while the M constellation group showed the highest ones. The chat group showed lower anxiety scores than pupils performing in BBB.

5. Acknowledgements

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