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Marco Cappellini, Macré Nicola

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*Apprentissages interculturels dans un télé-tandem pour la pré-mobilité*

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# Intercultural Learning in Pre-mobility Teletandem

*Apprentissages interculturels dans un télétandem pour la pré-mobilité*

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

### **Open Science Statement**

#### **Open Methodology**

“We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in the study.”

#### **Open Data**

“The data and/or datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.”

## Introduction

- 1 Where the development of outgoing mobility and internationalisation is concerned, the objective set by the Ministerial Conference of EHEA (European Higher Education Area) member states in 2009 was to reach 20% of European students with an international experience by 2020. However, in most European countries, including France, this percentage is still below 10% (de Wit 73). Among the factors identified as deterring students from planning a mobility, lack of general motivation accounts for 27% (Hauschildt 1). In particular, Hauschildt (2) identifies insufficient language skills as one of the two most common obstacles to French students' mobility. Lack of general motivation and insufficient skills in foreign language therefore need to be addressed in order to intensify outgoing mobility of students. The main aim of the pedagogical setting we analyse here was to address these issues.

- 2 This study is part of an action-research on a pedagogical setting based on the teletandem method for helping students' academic mobility. Teletandem (Telles) is a form of telecollaboration where two students help each other to learn their respective languages during videoconference-based interaction. Following Stickler and Hampel's recommendations (381), this study aims to develop a qualitative approach to understand the learners' perspective on the tasks-as-a-process and to compare them with the pedagogical intentions and objectives of the tasks' designers, that is the tasks-as-a-workplan. More precisely, we address the issue of the development of intercultural communicative competence (Byram and Zarate) during the teletandem sessions.
- 3 First, we provide a literature review presenting the concepts of teletandem learning, of intercultural communicative competence, and to discuss the need for insights into the students' perspective on learning tasks. Second, we describe the learning context, data collection and analysis. Third we present our analysis. Finally we draw some practical implications and future directions.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1 Teletandem

- 4 Tandem language learning (Lewis and Walker) is a pedagogical method where two speakers of different mother tongues interact to help each other learn the respective languages. This method was developed during the 1960s in face-to-face contexts. It was subsequently adopted when computer-mediated communication (hereafter CMC) became widely available, at first in the form of asynchronous written CMC (Little and Brammerts), then for synchronous CMC (Cziko). CMC-based tandem took the name of eTandem (O'Rourke). Teletandem designates the form of eTandem based on webconferencing tools such as *Skype* (Telles). Since teletandem involves groups of students in different geographic locations, following O'Rourke we consider it as a form of telecollaboration or online intercultural exchange.
- 5 Tandem language learning is based historically on two principles: the principle of autonomy and the principle of reciprocity. The principle of autonomy refers to the language learner autonomy framework (Holec; Little). According to this framework, learners should be accompanied and given the opportunity to take both responsibility and control of their learning, which includes planning, selection of resources and learning methods and assessment, among others. In tandem learning, this is accomplished mainly by counselling, both individually (Brammerts et al.) and collectively (Helmling). Moreover, autonomy is fostered through reflection, which may take the form of logs and portfolios (Garcia Moraes et al.). The principle of reciprocity (Koch) means that each partner should profit equally from the exchange. At a first level, this means that the time spent using each language should be the same. At a second level, reciprocity means that learners are structurally encouraged to collaborate, since the help received is linked to the help provided.

## 1.2. The development of the intercultural (communicative) competence

- 6 As a form of telecollaboration, one of the aims of teletandem is the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence. In this article, and in the teletandem context described below, we follow the observations about intercultural competence formulated by Byram and Zarate and developed by Dervin and Liddicoat among others. Byram and Zarate develop a culture-general model (Jackson 306) integrating both the intercultural and the communicative dimensions. Apart from the nowadays well-known three-way split of communicative competence between linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, used for instance in the *Common European Framework for Languages* (Council of Europe), Byram and Zarate introduce a set of five skills ("savoirs") for the intercultural part of their model. These are: "attitudes" ("savoir-être"), "knowledge" ("savoirs"), "skills of interpreting and relating" ("savoir comprendre"), "skills of discovery" and "interaction" ("savoir apprendre" and "savoir faire") and "critical cultural awareness" ("savoir s'engager"). Very briefly, "attitudes" refer to curiosity and openness and the ability to reflect on one's own stance toward another culture. "Knowledge" covers everything that is linked to declarative knowledge, or processes typical of social groups and their environments. "Skills of interpreting and relating" indicate the ability to understand the meaning of a document or a communicative act. "Skills of discovery and interaction" are the ability to acquire new knowledge, possibly in real-time communication. "Critical cultural awareness" consists of being able to evaluate one's own and the other's culture based on explicit criteria.
- 7 More recently, Dervin and Liddicoat noted that "there is an increasing agreement that intercultural education has surrendered to the concept of culture as a fixed static entity, especially in terms of national culture" (4). This critical perspective on the concept of culture has led to focus on the 'inter' in "intercultural", on the relationship between interlocutors in intercultural contact. In other words, the development of intercultural communicative competence can be seen as a shift away from a "culturalist perspective" (Abdallah-Preteuille and Porcher), a perspective that reduces the other to a given set of characteristics, a set with a heuristic power similar to the one of stereotypes. In this sense "intercultural is more about constructing a relationship through negotiating images of the Self and the Other, cultures, languages, etc. rather than using these elements as explanatory static elements (Dervin and Liddicoat 7).
- 8 This shift of focus on the co-constructed relationship during the interaction has also been highlighted in recent studies of the development of intercultural communicative competence through telecollaboration. For instance, Lewis and O'Dowd (59) quote Dooly and note that along with the development of ethnographic approaches online and with relational approaches based on comparison and decentering, telecollaborative activities may show instances of work in a third space or a contact zone. This is in line with what Yang called the co-construction of shared space, which was also observed in teletandem settings (Cappellini et al. "Reciprocity 2.0"). In other words, the co-construction of the online intercultural relationship, accomplished by adopting a set of rules and references within a group (idioculture) possibly based on shared interests providing a platform for dialogue (shared space), may be conducive of a conception of interculturality allowing students to develop interpreting skills within dialogue.

### 1.3. The need for insights into learners' perspective about tasks

- 9 As noted by Guichon (ch. 4) or Mangenot (ch. 3), the most efficient way to structure the development of communicative competence using ICT and CMC is task-based learning/teaching. If tasks have become central in telecollaboration, and therefore teletandem, it is probably because they are a way for the teacher to direct the online interactions, that often take place without his/her presence (Kern 17). However, the concept of 'task' has been challenged through the years.
- 10 To our knowledge, the first researchers having questioned the stability of tasks in SLA are Coughlan and Duff. In their paper, they discuss, from a vygotskian perspective, the assumption that a given task is a constant, a characteristic that should enable comparison and replication in SLA research. They distinguish between 'task' and 'activity', the latter defined as "the behaviour that is actually produced when an individual (or group) performs a task" (Coughlan and Duff 174). Through the empirical study of language productions emerged from an oral interaction task, they demonstrate that the same task can result in different activities with different learners or even for the same learner at different times.
- 11 On a pedagogical level and in the field of telecollaboration, task variation is also recognised by Dooly, who distinguishes between task-as-a-workplan and task-as-a-process. The former is defined as the set of pedagogical intentions and expectations of the task designer, that is usually a language trainer, while the latter corresponds to Coughlan and Duff's 'activity', that is the actual behaviour produced by learners.
- 12 Based on these studies, we argue that we need to focus on learners' perceptions of tasks. In Kurek and Muller-Hartmann's words "we do not necessarily need 'new kind of tasks or activities', but we do need to look critically at task design and the task-as-process" (133). In this vein, El Hariri for instance developed a questionnaire that she administered to learners involved in an Austrian-Spanish teletandem. This allowed her to gain insights into students' perception and to understand, among others, that students were in demand of opener tasks for their language learning pathway.
- 13 The aim of the action-research we present was to develop the intercultural communicative competence as defined following the studies above. The present paper investigates learners' perspective in order to understand if the tasks we proposed were efficient for such a development. In other words, we analyse students' perspectives as they are observable in their learning logs (Rivens Mompean and Eisenbeis par. 25) on a collective blog (Cappellini "Du carnet") to understand what tasks-as-a-process were elicited by the use of the tasks-as-a-workplan. More precisely, we addressed the following research questions:
  1. Is there evidence of a convergence between task-as-workplan and task-as-process in students' logs?
  2. Are there occurrences of divergence between task-as-workplan and task-as-process? If yes, what are the characteristics of such a divergence?
  3. What are the links between convergence/divergence and the reaching of pedagogical objectives?
- 14 To understand the learner's perspective and the tasks-as-process and to assess the outcomes of tasks in relation to the pedagogical intentions/objectives, we asked three research questions:
  1. Is there evidence of a convergence between task-as-workplan and task-as-process in students' logs?
  2. Are there occurrences of divergence between task-as-workplan and task-as-process? If yes, what are the characteristics of such a divergence?
  3. What are the links between convergence/divergence and the reaching of pedagogical objectives?

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Context and participants

- 15 The data of our study come from two teletandem telecollaborations for pre-mobility intercultural development between the Lille3 University on the one hand and University of Western Australia (hereafter UWA) and the Georgetown College (USA) on the other. The learning pathway was designed in order to increase first the awareness of intranational differences and international commonalities, and second to let students reflect on how meaning-making could vary and how the same «facts» could take different interpretations. Our objective was not to force the students to take the other's perspective, but rather to be able at least to understand it.
- 16 The learning pathway started with a group session to explain the course, followed, on the French side, by an individual and group interviews with a tutor where each learner fixed learning objectives and considered learning strategies to be deployed in the tandem sessions, discussed difficulties and how they were to evaluate their work. The main part of the pathway consisted of six learning tasks, among which 3 were mandatory. All students were therefore required to communicate via Skype at least six times during the course with their partners. The French students were provided with tasks they could complete during the 1h30 sessions (see below).
- 17 To motivate and encourage reflection, students were also required to participate in writing a collective online blog (Cappellini, "Du carnet"), one for the French-Australian teletandem and another one for the French-American one. Students produced short articles on each of their interaction sessions and following the conferences. They could also post photos, links to websites and animated gifs to share with other participants. These blogs constitute the source of data for the present study.
- 18 The participants considered for this study were the 16 students participating in the Australian-French teletandem and the 16 students in Lille of the American-French teletandem. American students were not included since their teacher required them to produce individual logs on word documents. As for the language, French students were free to use French or English to write their logs, in order for them to be able to express possible nuances in their learning. Australian students, on the other hand, received the instruction to write in their target language. Students in Lille came from second and third year of bachelor's degrees in different disciplines of the humanities, including Psychology, Language Sciences, or English. Students in Perth were majoring in a wider variety of disciplines, including Chemistry, Engineering, Geology and Media Studies. All the students had a proficiency level in their foreign language ranging from B2 to C1, according to the *Common European Framework for Languages* (Council of Europe), established using an online adaptive test for French students or according to subscription needs in the course for the other partners.

### 2.2. Data collection and analysis

- 19 Data were collected from 2 teletandem collective blogs produced by the 16 French students of the Lille – Georgetown teletandem and by the 8 pairs of the Lille – UWA teletandem. We were interested in establishing whether the task-as-process (the traces

found in the reflective articles) actually converged with the task-as-a-workplan (the pedagogical intentions and objectives of the task designers). To do so, we analysed the data from two different perspectives using two types of content analysis (Bardin). One of the researchers carried out a 'blind' content analysis to find recurring topics. The second researcher performed a content analysis coding data using the pedagogical objectives as the coding categories. If a blog article or a comment was related to a coding category (i.e. to a pedagogical objective), then it was counted as a unit. The results were then compared to enrich both perspectives, objectively which led to the identification of a certain number of categories for each task, including, but not limited to, the pedagogical objectives.

- 20 Due to limited space, in the following we provide analysis of two compulsory tasks: tasks 1 and 5. Examples will be given for each task as will the objectives aimed at. General remarks concerning all the tasks will be included in the discussion and conclusion.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Task 1

#### 3.1.1. Description and objectives

- 21 The first task (mandatory) consisted of a list of questions, requiring students to share their likes and dislikes, designed to allow them to get to know their partner and as underlined by Muller-Hartmann "to learn about each others' backgrounds, personalities and feelings" (173) in an indirect way (Lamy 41). The pedagogical objectives were therefore for the students to establish contact and break the ice. The questions were intentionally a mix of trivial topics (Pepsi or Coke, beer or wine, chocolate or vanilla?) and topics that could be developed or not (best friends, best memories).

#### 3.1.2. Results

- 22 The following quote, taken from the Lille-UWA blog, is a perfect illustration of the divergence between instructions and what actually happens.

"Coming from a military culture where the mission is sacred, I had prepared myself to follow the given instructions to the letter; I had the list of questions printed and inserted in a binder and I had my pen in hand, ready to write down the answers. Sara, on the other hand, appeared on the screen very relaxed, sitting on her bed with a cup of tea in her hand, and then, as she found the questions on the list uninteresting, she started us into a conversation without an itinerary in which we talked about all kinds of topics."<sup>1</sup> (Lille-UWA blog)

- 23 One of the partners is ready to follow the instructions to the letter and then he meets his partner. The path they take to get to know each other is not the one that was planned, yet they do get to know each other and fulfil the original objectives.
- 24 Global analysis shows that all the objectives were achieved but not in the way that was initially intended. Students actually modify the task to allow for more spontaneous conversation and to enable themselves to find out what they have or don't have in

common. This also confirms previous results which underline the importance of the emotional dimensions in the modification of the task (Garcia Moraes et al.). The table below provides an overview of the analysis.

Table 1. Analysis of task 1

Category	N° of students
Establish contact	18
Getting to know each other	21
Getting to know each other pedagogically	All
A virtual ecosystem	
Evaluation of Interaction	

### 3.1.3. Discussion of categories

#### 25 *Establish contact*

26 The list of questions provided to the students is not used as an icebreaker but as an added support (in case they lack inspiration) to fill in the blanks when lost for words. When students don't give any information about themselves, the partner jumps in asking the questions in an interview style. Generally, students look for subjects that they are more at ease with (university, studies, where they live, music) before going back to the list or not using it at all. When students have to reflect too much on the answers, it appears to slow them down and prevents fluid 'natural' interaction. As a result, they pick and choose their questions to suit their needs or do not refer to the list at all.

“And because we tended to go a bit off-topic at times, we only had time to answer the questions and didn't do the family portrait part, but we talked about maybe doing it next week.” (Lille-UWA blog)

#### 27 *Getting to know each other*

28 In this first interaction it is important for the students to establish common ground where both partners feel at ease and are ready to build on their relationship (Cappellini et al. “Reciprocity 2.0”). Getting to know each other pedagogically and socially enables them to do so. Once they have sorted out who is going to speak and for how long, in which language, and how they are going to correct themselves, getting to know each other socially seems to entail finding out what subjects they have or don't have in common.

“Sean and I got along pretty quickly, and I was impressed by her knowledge of French[...] We also share some common interests in music, books, films and TV shows, so I think we had a great time getting to know each other. I'm definitely looking forward to next week's session!” (Lille-UWA blog)

#### 29 *A virtual ecosystem*

- 30 Analysis showed the emergence of two categories different from the pedagogical objectives and widespread in the students' written reflections. The first one is what we have called a 'virtual ecosystem' and is visible in the following excerpts:

“After a brief exchange of emails, we started chatting on skype to try and find a convenient time for our session. On Wednesday night, we eventually managed to be both available, and after some small connections problems, we could talk and hear each other just fine when we turned off the video.”  
(Lille-UWA blog)

“However, we made plans to talk via Skype again next Friday. In the meantime, we talk by Facebook to write down minor corrections and to keep in touch.” (Lille-UWA blog)

- 31 In the data we analyzed, many pairs established communication through a variety of different channels, such as email and Facebook in addition to Skype and the blog. These channels are not perceived as concurrent but as working together and probably with different functions, as in the second excerpt above where Facebook seems a channel to provide linguistic feedback in an asynchronous way (Garcia Moraes et al.). In other words, students co-build an ecosystem to establish and maintain communication beyond the channels set out by the trainers. In our view, this may be a hint for the co-construction of local cultures-of-use (Thorne) not anticipated by the trainers.

32 *Evaluation of interaction*

- 33 The time spent in the interactions also seems to be an evaluation, generally positive (De Garcia Moraes et al.) when the time is perceived as being short.

“I thought an hour and a half would be a lot of time, but finally it goes fast!”<sup>2</sup>  
(Lille-UWA blog)

- 34 As Cappellini and his colleagues showed, this aspect is linked both to the principle of autonomy (“Interactions plurielles”) and to the principle of reciprocity (Cappellini et al. “Reciprocity 2.0”).

## 3.2. Task 5

### 3.2.1. Description and objectives

- 35 The fifth task was also mandatory and it also seems to be one of the most appreciated. Students were directed to a guide of international etiquette<sup>3</sup> and were asked to discuss the content related to their countries. This task was one of the most important of the learning path since it was meant to help understand that a stereotypical perspective is too simplistic and to familiarize themselves about what could be acceptable in each interlocutor's country. The task should have allowed students to shift from a culturalist perspective on culture to an intercultural one. In other words, we designed the task to let students come to the conclusion that in intercultural encounters negotiations of identity and power are more important than any pre-given set of dos and don'ts or any framework reducing a culture to a set of statements. It should also be noted that the objective was not to force a positive attitude toward the other.

### 3.2.2. Results

36 Global analysis, in table 2 below, shows different trends.

Table 2. Analysis of task 5

Categories	Number of students
Critical view on stereotypes	16
Use of stereotypes without distance	8
To identify auto-stereotypes	3
Not to force a positive attitude	/
Astonishments	
Humour	

37 Out of 32 students, only 16 developed a critical view on stereotypes in their blog articles, but without interrogating the framework of stereotypes itself. 8 other students went as far in the opposite direction as to affirm that some stereotypes are indeed true. Only 3 blog posts identified auto-stereotypes. Finally, one of the objectives, coming from Byram and Zarate, was not to force a positive attitude toward one culture. This objective was difficult to operationalise in our research methodology since given the participation in the pedagogical setting, a positive attitude toward the other was always present before the learning took place. Two other categories, astonishments and humour, also emerged during analysis.

### 3.2.3. Discussion of categories

38 *Critical view on stereotypes*

39 The following quote is an example of how the students' reported on the task.

“Overall, as you have understood, these stereotypes are totally incompatible with reality. There is no smoke without fire, indeed there are very rude French people, but I honestly do not think it is the majority. There are lazy Americans, but again, that's only a small portion of the population. I think that despite some cultural differences we are quite similar.”<sup>4</sup> (Lille-UWA blog)

40 This student, as others, exchanged about the stereotypes but generally commented on them as being true/false without reframing their perspective. In other words, students executed the instructions they received and they discussed the different stereotypes, sometime recognizing that they were inapt to describe what happens in a whole nation. However, the task did not succeed in encouraging them to change their perspective to understand that each general description is necessarily different from reality and cannot be used as an explanation in intercultural encounters, which is why negotiation should be more important (Dervin and Liddicoat 12) in order to undercover the

framework of interpretation that could generate different perspectives on the same facts (Cappellini, “Un forum”). In this sense, even the second excerpt below, which is the one that came nearest to reaching the pedagogical objective, fails to do so since, in its final sentence, it brings back a generalization about a supposed fundamental similarity. In other words, students did what was asked, but the pedagogical objectives were not reached.

41 *Use of stereotypes without distance*

42 In eight cases, the task was even counter-productive, since not only did it not succeed in letting the student question the concept of stereotype itself, but it even let the students have a confirmation by their partners of the truthfulness of stereotypes, as in the excerpt below:

“I found that lots of French stereotypes are true. For example: French people like to eat cheese and wine... Also in Paris some people are very pretentious.”  
(Lille-UWA blog)

43 *To identify auto-stereotypes*

44 This objective was linked to the fact that sometimes the stereotypes of a community about itself are different from those of other groups about the same community. Identifying auto-stereotypes and comparing them with the stereotypes of the interlocutor was intended to be a first step in recognising that stereotypes are to be questioned. We found only three instances of the report of an auto-stereotype in the blogs, and they apparently did not lead to the comparison that was expected. This objective was therefore not reached.

45 *Astonishments*

46 Two other categories emerged during analysis. The first one is the one of astonishments, which is illustrated by the excerpt below, from a French student engaged in a tandem with an American fellow-student.

“Apparently for them, even wearing just a shirt and jeans is considered stylish for a man, when it's just what every guy wears here? And when men are dressed "stylishly", they're even called "Europeans", because they'd be dressing like us, which seems so strange, doesn't it?” (Lille-UWA blog)

47 The excerpt shows that during the discussion of stereotypes, sometimes a frame of interpretation appears as unusual or astonishing. These astonishments are what Byram and Zarate called an ‘intercultural error’ (Byram and Zarate 22), that is a reaction built drawing upon a single framework of reference which is not relevant to fully understand what happens. In this sense, astonishments can be used for intercultural development (Cappellini, “Un forum”) if learners are pushed to understand what is relevant to understand a situation. In the excerpts we found, however, this does not happen, and students limit to report differences without questioning them.

48 *Humour*

49 The second category that emerged from analysis is the pervasive presence of humour in the blog entries. The excerpts below come from two French students of the Lille-UWA teletandem:

“First things first [in English in the original], American stereotypes about the French:

Gentlemen, you obviously wear the mustache, a beret and a sailor's sweater. Ladies, we are very chic and fond of Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent and other things so expensive that it is only in our wildest dreams that we could afford them. So we would be very stylish and sophisticated, but in terms of character it gets worse [...].”<sup>5</sup>(Lille-UWA blog)

“Then it was his turn to ask me if I knew any stereotypes about Americans, and it's true that it's not obvious, it's still a difficult question, but I felt comfortable enough with him to speak openly.”<sup>6</sup> (Lille-UWA blog)

- 50 In many blog articles, we found remarks concerning the fact that the task was entertaining and that students laughed, even more than for the other tasks, characterised by a friendly atmosphere (Cappellini et al. “Reciprocity 2.0”). In our opinion, this is to be linked to the fact that talking about the stereotypes that one has on the interlocutor’s culture could be face-threatening, especially since the national stereotypes are far from being always positive. This probably led the students to use humour as a way to put distance between themselves and the stereotype descriptions, as in the first excerpt above, which was not foreseen by the task designers. However, once again this detachment does not lead to a paradigmatic change from a culturalist perspective bringing back culture to a set of characteristics to an intercultural perspective where culture is seen as negotiated.

### 3.3. General discussion and pedagogical implications

- 51 Our analysis of tasks 1 and 5 and the analysis of the other tasks bring us to the following answers to our research questions. For questions 1 and 2, in our analysis, we both found evidence of convergence and of divergence between tasks-as-a-plan and tasks-as-a-process. For the research question 3, four cases were logically possible:
- 52 I. Convergence + pedagogical objective reached  
 II. Divergence + pedagogical objective reached  
 III. Convergence + pedagogical objective failed or partially failed  
 IV. Divergence + pedagogical objective failed
- 53 From our perspective as task designers, we expected to find cases (I) and (IV) in our analysis. This indeed happened for case (I), for instance for the task 3, where the instructions, inspired by a *Seagull* project’s task<sup>7</sup>, were meant to let students complexify their view on culture as national culture considering regional cultures. Case (IV) was not found in our analysis, since for the compulsory tasks we did not find any instance of divergence from the task leading to failing the pedagogical objectives.
- 54 The two most interesting, and unexpected, cases were cases (II) and (III), which we found and discussed in relation to tasks 1 and 5 in the sections above. In the analysis of the articles related to task 1, we found that students usually diverge from the task-as-a-workplan and started to talk about topics which were not included in the task. Yet, they attained the pedagogical objective of getting to know each other. In other words, students did not follow the instructions, yet they reached the pedagogical objective of the task. This leads us to question firstly our task design and to think about other possible ways to formulate the instructions, or even, in this case, the necessity to formulate instructions at all. Secondly, we wonder if this case of divergence leading to reaching the pedagogical objective is possible because of the specificities of this task, where the objectives were to establish a contact to get to know each other. In fact,

possibly, or even probably, for other kinds of more complex pedagogical objectives it could be harder, or even impossible, to find this case.

- 55 As for the second task we analysed, task 5, we found it to be an instance of the case III above, where even if students followed the instructions provided by tasks designers, the pedagogical objectives were not reached. In our analysis, we highlighted how the task was based on the discussion of stereotypes and was aimed at letting students come to the conclusion that a culturalist view on cultures is insufficient. However, the analysis of what students reported about the teletandem interactions they had, led to appreciate how some stereotypes were just rejected, but some were even accepted as representative of some truthfulness of a culture, which is the opposite of the pedagogical objective we as designers wanted to achieve. More precisely, we found some phenomena that in the literature on intercultural learning are considered conducive of intercultural development, such as the identification of auto-stereotypes and astonishments. However, even in these cases the students stopped before reaching the conclusion of the inappropriateness of stereotypes and more broadly of set of descriptions to deal with cultures.
- 56 We link these observations to a common dynamic which is the tension, in teletandem learning, between learner autonomy and intercultural development as we defined it. The first facet of this tension is that students, during teletandem sessions, are in charge of the agenda of the sessions and can decide to (partially) ignore the instructions in order to focus on what interests them the most (task 1 above). This is an important part of what makes (tele)tandem learning motivating for learners and allows their implication in their learning. In line with the conclusions of El Harariri (59), we therefore think that task design should integrate a space for the learners to appropriate the interaction/task and invest themselves meaningfully in it, in this case in the exploration and co-construction of shared space (Yang; Cappellini et al. "Reciprocity 2.0"). As for the specific learning context we analysed, this means that in task 1, the list of binary choices we provided could be offered as an optional and suggested support. The students could also be invited to simply find the subjects that they have in common with their partners and/or what they don't have in common. Another possibility would involve the counselling support that is offered to the students. A discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of using the list could be carried out prior to the first task, including suggestions about overcoming shyness and the embarrassment of not knowing what to say.
- 57 The second facet of the tension between learner autonomy and intercultural development is the fact that in this study, teletandem learning seems conducive of the development of intercultural communicative competence (Byram and Zarate) only, at best, in terms of knowledge. In other words, students develop a culturalist view on culture (Barbot and Dervin 6), which is also confirmed by analysis of discursive positioning during actual teletandem interaction (Cappellini and Rivens Mompean). This can be interpreted in light of Bateson's observations about human and animal behaviour (30). According to Bateson, the behaviour of an agent is to be understood in relation to the conceptualisation the agent has of what they want to reach, which we called 'guiding representations' (Cappellini, "Modélisation" 167). In this view, the development of intercultural communicative competence is to be thought of not only in terms of addition (adding vocabulary, adding grammar rules, adding interpretational frameworks...), but also in terms of revolutions<sup>8</sup> which act on a metalevel. In the

present case, the revolution needed would therefore be at the level of the guiding representations about what intercultural learning is for students. According to our analysis, students are not able, in teletandem interactions and in reflections on them, to shift from a description of a culture in terms of a set of characteristics that can be true or false to a description of culture as a locus of negotiation of identities and of interaction. In other words, students stick with a guiding representation of intercultural learning as getting to know rules of what is 'normal' or 'acceptable' in a given culture. We argue that to produce a change at the metalevel of guiding representations, more direct forms of instructions are needed, despite the autonomy principle of teletandem. This could take the form of group or individual counselling to understand the shift and produce a change in the guiding representations for intercultural development. This can be followed by more direct instructions for reflective writing in the blog for this particular task. Finally, another possibility would be to draw on other models in order to hybridise punctually the model of eTandem (O'Rourke) with other forms of telecollaboration providing facilitated dialogue with the presence of mediators during the online sessions, such as Solyia (Genet). This is also suggested, from a different perspective, by the *Erasmus + Virtual Exchange* project (O'Dowd 19).

## Conclusions

- 58 This article wanted to enquire in a qualitative way about the students' perspective in teletandem tasks in order to understand whether the designed tasks effectively led students to achieve pedagogical objectives of developing their intercultural communicative competence. The analysis showed unexpected results, where divergence between task-as-a-workplan and task-as-a-process led to reaching the pedagogical objectives of the designers, while convergence led to failing the pedagogical objectives. The observed phenomena were interpreted as symptoms of a tension between the autonomy principle of teletandem learning and the intercultural objectives of the learning setting. Pedagogical implications were discussed as well as options to improve the pedagogical setting.
- 59 Our study is obviously subject to some limitations. First of all, the data come from a limited amount of students (32), moreover all coming from western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic (WEIRD) countries. The number of tasks we considered and their specificities also hinder generalisations. However, we hope – and think – that this study may provide some food for thoughts to task designers in (tele)tandem settings and possibly more broadly in telecollaborative settings where a trainer is not (always) present during synchronous interaction.
- 60 Our final word is to say that this study was accomplished as part of passing on a pedagogical setting between the two authors. In fact, one of the authors was the main designer of the pedagogical setting for its first iteration but had to leave it behind due to a change of institution. The other author adopted and adapted the pedagogical setting starting from the second iteration. This study was therefore valuable for both: for the first author it allowed to understand the effects of the design on the one hand and to let the pedagogical setting survive his departure on the other; for the second author it allowed to better understand the logic of it and to improve it. We hope that

this example of collaborative (action-) research may inspire others not to lose pedagogical innovations because of staff mobility.

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## NOTES

1. Our translation for: "Venant d'une culture militaire ou la mission est sacrée, je m'étais préparé à suivre les instructions données à la lettre; j'avais la liste de questions imprimée et insérée dans un classeur et j'avais mon stylo en main, prêt à noter les réponses. Sara, par contre, est apparue à l'écran très décontractée, assise sur son lit avec sa tasse de thé à la main, et puis, comme elle trouvait les questions sur la liste peu intéressantes, elle nous a lancé dans une conversation sans itinéraire au cours de laquelle on a parlé de tout genre de sujets."

2. Our translation for: "Je pensais qu'une heure 30 serait beaucoup de temps mais finalement ça passe vite !"

3. <https://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/guides/>

4. Our translation for: "Dans l'ensemble comme vous l'avez compris, ces stéréotypes sont totalement incompatibles avec la réalité. Il n'y a pas de fumée sans feu, effectivement des français très impolis il y en a, mais je ne pense honnêtement pas que ce soit la majorité. Des américains fainéants il y en a, mais là encore ce n'est qu'une petite portion de la population. Je pense que malgré certaines différences culturelles nous sommes plutôt similaires."

5. Our translation for: "First things first, les stéréotypes américains sur les français : Messieurs, vous portez évidemment la moustache, un béret et un pull marinère. Mesdames, nous sommes très chics et férues de Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent et autres trucs tellement chers qu'il n'y a que

dans nos rêves les plus fous qu'on pourrait en porter. Nous serions donc très stylés et sophistiqués, par contre au niveau caractère ça se gâte pas mal [...].”

6. Our translation for: “Puis, ce fût à son tour de me demander si je connaissais des stéréotypes sur les américains, et c'est vrai que ce n'est pas évident, c'est quand même une question difficile, mais je me sentais assez à l'aise avec lui pour parler ouvertement.”

7. <http://seagull-tandem.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Englisch-B2.15.pdf>

8. We take the idea of development as composed of additions and revolutions from the work of Vygotsky (143), but we have not the space to discuss the theoretical implications of this. See Cappellini (“Modélisation”, 160-168).

## ABSTRACTS

Our study focuses on a teletandem (Telles) environment for pre-mobility language and intercultural development. The telecollaborations' main pedagogical objective was the development of the intercultural competence with a shift from more *savoir*-based culturalist development (Abdallah-Pretceille and Porcher) to a development in terms of *savoir-apprendre* (Byram and Zarate). This aim was pursued by the design of six teletandem tasks. Moreover, to enable students to reflect on their learning and to share their learning strategies and reflections, within the telecollaborations we set up two collective reflective blogs (Cappellini, “Du carnet”) where the students had to post an entry after each teletandem session. By analyzing the students' posts in these blogs, we observe convergence and divergence between the pedagogical intentions of the telecollaboration designers (or task-as-workplan, “Divergent perceptions”) and the actual outcomes (or task-as-process). Finally, we draw some pedagogical suggestions on how to improve task design for autonomous intercultural learning.

Notre étude se focalise sur un dispositif télé-tandem (Telles) pour le développement de compétences langagières et interculturelles avant une mobilité. L'objectif principal de la telecollaboration était le développement de la compétence interculturelle, avec un passage du développement culturaliste fondé sur les savoirs (Abdallah-Pretceille et Porcher) à un développement en termes de savoir-apprendre (Byram et Zarate). Cet objectif a été visé par la conception de six tâches télé-tandem. De plus, afin de permettre aux étudiants de réfléchir sur leurs apprentissages et de partager leurs stratégies d'apprentissage, dans le cadre de chaque télécollaboration nous avons créé deux blogs réflexifs collectifs (Cappellini “Du carnet”) où les étudiants devaient poster un article après chaque session télé-tandem. En analysant les articles des étudiants dans ces blogs, nous avons observé une convergence ou une divergence entre les intentions des concepteurs (ou *task-as-workplan*, Dooly) et les réalisations effectives (ou *tasks-as-process*). Enfin, nous tirons des suggestions pédagogiques concernant la manière d'améliorer la conception de tâches pour l'apprentissage autonome interculturel.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** apprentissage en autonomie, télé-tandem, compétence interculturelle, blog, conception de tâche

**Keywords:** autonomous learning, teletandem, intercultural competence, blog, task design

## AUTHORS

### MARCO CAPPELLINI

Marco Cappellini est maître de conférences en didactique des langues et cultures à l'université Aix-Marseille et membre du laboratoire Parole et Langage (UMR 7309). Ses champs de recherche principaux sont l'utilisation de la communication médiatisée par ordinateur (CMO) pour l'enseignement-apprentissage des langues étrangères, la communication exolingue, l'apprentissage des langues en tandem, l'autonomie de l'apprenant.  
marco.cappellini@univ-amu.fr

### NICOLA MACRÉ

Nicola Macré est maître de conférences à l'université de Lille et membre du laboratoire Savoirs Textes Langages (UMR 8163). Ses recherches portent sur l'autoformation et plus particulièrement sur les dispositifs hybrides, l'ingénierie pédagogique, le processus d'acquisition des langues en autonomie accompagnée et le public Lansad.  
nicola.macre@univ-lille.fr