Intercultural communicative competence and virtual encounters through telecollaboration: an empirical study

Sofia Stratilaki-Klein, University of Sorbonne Nouvelle & DILTEC / University of Luxembourg

Abstract

This article presents the results of a research conducted on intercultural interactions between teachers from different educational cultures who participated in the European TILA project. It deals in particular with the question of teachers' representations and their evolution with regard to their pedagogical practices through telecollaboration. The plurilingual dimension, present in this setting, performs at different levels and emerges in a plural and differentiated way for these teachers. The author shows that the digital space of language teaching initiated by telecollaboration no longer makes communication a pretext for language practice. In this framework, the languages in contact and the cultures in presence become the essential and integrated process of communication. However, the received representations that some teachers associate with technology are such that they find it difficult to envisage the link between learning and telecollaboration. It is therefore a whole field to be explored for the initial and continuous training of teachers, which is rarely open to this plurilingual and intercultural dimension of digital technology.

Key term: telecollaboration; intercultural interaction; plurilingual competence; educational cultures; plural identities ; TILA

Résumé

Cet article présente les résultats d'une recherche menée sur les interactions interculturelles entre enseignants des cultures éducatives différentes ayant participé au projet européen TILA. II aborde en particulier la question des représentations des enseignants et de leurs évolutions au regard de leurs pratiques pédagogiques au moyen du dispositif de télécollaboration. La dimension plurilingue, présente dans ce dispositif, s'actualise selon différents niveaux et émerge de façon plurielle et différenciée chez ces enseignants. L'auteur montre que l'espace numérique de l'enseignement des langues qu'initie la télécollaboration ne fait plus de la communication un prétexte à la pratique de la langue. Dans ce cadre, les langues en contact et les cultures en présence deviennent bien le processus essentiel et intégré de la communication. Or, les représentations reçues que certains enseignants associent aux technologies sont telles qu'ils envisagent difficilement le lien entre apprentissage et télécollaboration. C'est alors tout un champ à explorer pour la formation initiale et continue des enseignants qui s'ouvre rarement à cette dimension plurilingue et interculturelle du numérique.

Terme clé : télécollaboration ; interaction interculturelle ; compétence plurilingue ; cultures éducatives ; identités plurielles ; TILA

1. Introduction

For the last 50 years, language teaching and learning has been the field of increasing debates, innovative research and practices (Muñoz, 2012). In today's plurilingual world, this is not surprising, considering the large variety of factors that can provide greater insight into the role of context in language education. One central focus of research has been on the questioning of concepts such as Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Intercultural Competence for Language

Learning/Teaching (ICLT) (Hall, Hellermann & Pekarek-Doehler, 2011; Hellermann, 2008; Young, 2003, among others). Another more recent focus has been on ICT-enhanced communication (Information and Communication Technologies) as a significant factor in heightening language awareness and intercultural competence (Adu & Okeke, 2014; Belz, 2007; Belz & Thorne, 2006; Gonzales-Lloret, 2010; Sykes, 2005). Indeed, the insights of these studies are particularly noteworthy in language acquisition: they argue, among other issues, that if communication implies the inter-intra relations at play within possible interpretations and meanings, inter-intra can no longer be clear-cut, separate concepts as both liaise Others and Selves. Within this diversity, it is reasonable to assume that any communicative situation is based on inter-actions with social actor-speakers and intra-relations with multiple Selves. Along the same line, the authors demonstrate that identity, culture and community belong to a matrix of pluri- and multi- continua, since identities, cultures and communities are part and parcel of Selves and Others (De Florio-Hansen & Hu, 2007; Norton, 2013). In the study of Aronin & O Laoire (2004, p. 11), for example, identity appears to be a multifaceted composition, with language appearing to be a crucial constituent: ''it is necessary to base the study of multilingualism on the notion of identity, given the fact that language constitutes one of the most defining attributes of the individual. Language thus represents and mediates the crucial element of identity.'' Consequently, communication is inter-intra interaction within a specific context and intersect, in diverse ways, with the identities of learners. This raises a central question to tackle here: How do learners interpret identity and construe meaningful relations between one occasion of communication and another? Although it is quite conceivable that the school is not the starting point for the construction of identity, it may also be the place where the learner combines in new ways the elements induced by this construction to varying degrees and in varying ways (Hornberger & McKay, 2010; Stratilaki, 2011; 2014;Tajfel, 1982). This conceptual framework calls for more attention to be paid to identity building and affordances in learning environments combining enhanced communication facilities through ICT and intercultural communication within groups of people sharing the same learning environment.

Studies in Conversation Analysis (CA) view language as fundamentally located within a social context which both shapes and is shaped by language (Sacks, 1992). In other words, as language is a constituent part of culture, linguistics can provide significant aspects for reflection on similarities and differences between discourse practices and on the ways that languages and cultures are co-constructed. The research in CA has long shown (see e.g. Firth & Wagner, 2007; Gardner & Wagner, 2004; Hellermann, 2008; Lerner, 1995; Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2004; Sahlström, 2009; Seedhouse, 2004) that production of discourse builds on the possibility of shared understanding between participants. From the perspective of language education, this literature informs us about the structure of second language interactions by illustrating the wide range of interactional resources L2 learners draw on in their interactions with other speakers. In fact, samples of learner language provided significant data that can be used to develop patterns of variation of L2 learners. As a result, the analyst can define complex sequences where the learner is expressing his *voice* by using the new language in multiple contexts and cultures (Kramsch, 1993, 2008). Researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) have described the kinds of interactional activities L2 learners engage in inside and outside the classroom and the resources they draw on to do so through the development of intercultural awareness. Drawing on Hatch's (1978) key insight that learners can learn a second language (L2) through the process of interacting rather than just manifesting what they have already learned in interaction, CA-SLA addressed both macro- and micro-aspects of discourse (for instance, Van Lier's, 1989, classification of the different types of classroom). These studies argue that many linguistic traces can help learners perform in the ongoing interactional event: direct, indirect and/or hybrid represented discourses (often called speech, see Rosier, 1999). We acknowledge here that language acquisition involves more than the development of linguistic competence. Nevertheless,

even if communication strategies do not contribute to linguistic competence, they may enhance the development of strategic intercultural competence (i.e. the ability to overcome problems and to communicate efficiently). By showing how learners orient to a locally managed turn-taking system when doing conversations (which includes repairing them when problems arise), Liddicoat (2009), for example, argues that L2 learners need to have the linguistic understanding as well as the intercultural tools to be able to communicate successfully and effectively. In addition, Liddicoat, Scarino, Papademetre & Kohler (2003, pp. 45-51) identify a number of ways in which participants interpret and understand, in contextually constrained ways, the nature of the discursive activities they jointly enact and engage in with others. In doing so, they propose five principles of intercultural learning, as follows: (i) how to purposefully and actively construct knowledge within a sociocultural context in order to explore language and culture through active engagement, and to develop a personal, intercultural space with multiple dimensions (*active construction*); (ii) how to make connections or bridges between L1 and L2 (*making connections*); (iii) how to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, including the identification of such boundaries (*social interaction*); (iv) how to become aware of the processes underlying thinking, knowing and learning through conscious awareness and reflection; also, how to articulate the multiple dimensions of their own intercultural space and identity (*reflection*); (v) how to encourage learners to accept responsibility for contributing to successful communication across languages and cultures, and for developing intercultural perspectives (*responsibility*). We note that these principles cover a large range of skills including the ability to establish and maintain attention to a common task and the coordination of action to accomplish such tasks (Goodwin, 2000, 2007; Nishizaka, 2006). Thus, each of these categories plays its role in explaining how the participants in some communicative event interpret and understand the unfolding interaction. In this sense, social identity is multiple and fluid, and it is this complex, changing self that the learners bring to the task of L2 learning.

In our view, the above five categories highlight the dynamics of interactions by arguing that in order to understand what is going on in intercultural language learning, we need to do so from the participants' perspective (see also Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Stratilaki-Klein, 2016). This *emic* (or insiders') account of the interaction is also outlined by Kramsch (2006, p. 324): "language teachers should teach non-native speakers how to reorganize and adopt the discursive behaviour of the native speakers…in order to find out ultimately how they think, what they value, and how they see the word." The same point is made by De Angelis (2011), with respect to teachers. The author argues that teachers play an essential role in fostering behaviour in the language classroom and that their actions can exert great influence on their pupils. On this basis, we discuss, in this paper, some empirical data from the European project 'Telecollaboration for Intercultural Language Acquisition' (henceforth, TILA)[1]. The project provides a network of secondary school language teachers, with the aim of assessing whether teachers' beliefs may impact pupils' lives in some meaningful way. More specifically, to explore how pedagogical practices may be linked to teachers' personal beliefs, the following fundamental question was addressed: What relation to alterity is constructed by learners and teachers during an online exchange which lays emphasis on culture? Accordingly, the project attempts to show how teachers can experience different ways of working together and exchanging their pedagogical knowledge in very concrete settings. In other words, how they learn different teaching practices and become familiar with numerous educational contexts during the process of participating and working together. In order to provide a coherent response to the above question, TILA considers that learners can experience different ways of communicating and interacting together by creating multiple pedagogical tasks

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[1] See: http://www.tilaproject.eu/

particularly in OpenSim[ulator], and, in extension, they develop a kind of autonomy and self-confidence by interacting with others. The challenge is to be able to identify regularities and at the same time, to contextualise them, i.e. to link them to a specific school, at a particular time, with unique learner.

Since the study is too complex for all aspects of the question to be examined in one single article, we will leave some issues for future consideration. We concentrate our analysis here on secondary schools. This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a brief overview of the theoretical dimensions of intercultural education; Section 3 shows how the TILA project aims to bring concrete support for inter-/pluricultural language education. The analysis focuses on selected statements and the ways that interactional dynamics relate to the emergence of intercultural competence. In doing so, we present some examples of TILA teachers' beliefs about language education. Finally, in Section 4, we discuss several issues raised by teachers regarding intercultural competence and suggest some avenues for the investigation of these issues. In conclusion, we emphasize the significance of shifting the analytic focus from the individual as learner to the act of learning seen as participation in the social world.

2. Intercultural education and virtual encounters: theoretical account

Intercultural education is an extremely large field that concerns different disciplines and covers a huge range of issues. Some approaches describe educational contexts where the main emphasis lies on psychological dispositions, characteristics and abilities of a person who is an intercultural competent speaker. Others involve dynamic models, tasks and tools produced in order to enhance intercultural competence and critical cultural awareness acquired by school or university learners in the course of foreign language learning or other parts of their curriculum (De Angelis & Dewaele, 2011; Grommes & Hu, 2014). As noted above, the TILA project links media more explicitly and systematically with language variation and cultural education and aims to contribute to the current research in this field. As described thoroughly in the following section, it focuses on helping learners narrate and analyse their own ''virtual encounters'' with otherness, which may take place within six different countries in Europe. Learners are invited to discover, in the shape of avatars, the imaginative worlds of OpenSim, create short scenarios of intercultural interactions (us/them; self/other; real/imaginative) and build up their journals, self-reflexive essays and diaries of accounts of encounters, with potential for learning and discussion with peers and teachers. Using Big Blue Button (BBB), learners work through an analysis of interactions and communicative speech acts, comparing and contrasting their first language practices with those of the target language in order to gain insights into deeper issues of the relationships between language and culture and sometimes with a focus on cultures when language is a lingua franca or another language for all participants (see Jauregi & Melchor-Couto, 2017). More specifically, the pedagogical objectives of this project, addressing learners and teachers as well, can be defined as such:

- to enrich and make foreign language teaching programmes more attractive and effective by encouraging the implementation of media and telecollaboration activities in secondary schools across Europe;
- to empower teachers (in the sense of García & Kleyn, 2016) in order to assist them in developing ICT literacy skills as well as organisational, pedagogical and intercultural competences to guarantee adequate integration of telecollaboration practices;

- to study the added value that telecollaboration may bring to language learning in terms of intercultural understanding and motivation amongst younger learners and pedagogic competence development.

Certainly, these objectives are multiple, and a single tool is unlikely to fit all purposes and may fail, in many ways, to reflect the dynamics of individuals and the diversity of situations. An increasing number of scholars (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1986; Corbett, 2003; Kramsch, 1993; Stratilaki, 2011, *inter alia*) have proposed ways for learners to develop reflexive and critical skills. The role of prior language and culture knowledge in the learning process has begun to appear as a regular feature of academic discussions (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013). In fact, crosslinguistic interactions and transfer phenomena, in particular, are well documented in Second language acquisition research (henceforth, SLA) (Gass & Selinker, 1983; Kellerman & Sharwood Smith, 1986; Odlin, 1989, *inter alia*). Several publications have also investigated the specific influence of the L1 on the plurilingual repertoire and the multiple effects (implicit or explicit) of language sources on third language acquisition (TLA) (Cenoz & Hoffman, 2003; Clyne, 1997; Coste, 2001; De Angelis, 2007; Hammarberg, 2009; Herdina & Jessner, 2002; Hufeisen & Lindemann 1998; Rast & Trevisiol, 2006; Ringbom, 2006). However, how the learners build up these skills through such activities and what they think of these skills are often less known. The focus of TILA lies on understanding intercultural education as a complex practice of meaning making, communicating and interacting in more than two languages. With regard to intercultural competence (in the sense of Zarate, Gohard-Radenkovic, Lussier & Penz, 2004), major objectives have already been achieved and the project entered its final phase in 2016 (followed by the European TeCoLa project, see *infra*). The influence of language on culture and of culture on language are bi-directional for TILA. Thus, the aim of the project was to test the intercultural awareness and sociocultural adjustments of the project participants to new encounters with other learners and teachers as well as to various environments. As Feng and Fleming (2009, p. 237) point out, ''it is important to bear in mind that intercultural competence involves social action that necessarily requires social interaction between individuals in specific contexts.'' According to Di Luzio (2003, p. 4), ''the negotiation of meaning necessarily presupposes assessment and understanding of the culture and communicative habits of the interlocutors. The assessment of the meaning in the ongoing interaction is also culturally conditioned.'' For example, in many studies in which Gumperz (1982; 1992; 1996; 2002) analysed problems of intercultural understanding, he showed that communicative failure in speech activities mostly depends on (i) the interactants' different cultural assumptions about the situation and their choice of appropriate speech behaviours; (ii) the different ways of structuring and developing information as well as argumentation; (iii) the different ways in which contextualisation cues as indexical signs are used and made functional. In what follows, intercultural competence is seen as a ''process of (co-)construction and negotiation of the Self through interaction'' (Liddicoat, Scarino, Papademetre & Kohler, 2003, p. 6) in which subjectivities, social representations[2] and variations are not understood as a superficial way of communicating and understanding cultures but rather as its constituent parts. In line with this theoretical approach, the project seeks to contribute to the study of intercultural education in general as it examines how languages and cultures or, rather, certain images of languages and cultures become both symbolic and significant resources for young learners in plurilingual settings.

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[2] Since Aristotle, two levels of shared social representations or "commonly held beliefs accepted by the wise/by the elder rhetors and/or by the public in general" are distinguished: *doxa* (δόξα) and *endoxa* (ένδοξα), the latter seen as a more stable belief as it had been valid in argumentative struggles in the polis by prior interlocutors.

Intercultural communication as a set of resources for social interaction and language acquisition has been investigated from a number of approaches, among them ethnography of communication, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic approaches (Ricœur, 1965, 2004). In fact, the literature on CA-SLA/TLA has focused on several key variables. As noted, linking the micro and the macro, various studies of linguistics have provided elements for the analysis of the language repertoire that individuals bring to social intercultural encounters (see Beacco, 2005; García & Wei, 2014; Hanks, 1996). Byrd-Clark & Stratilaki (2013), for instance, pointed out the importance of understanding intercultural competence as a symbolic competence (see also Kramsch, 1993), which enables social actors to interpret identities, experiences, and practices in different contexts and cultures. In his work, Coste (2004) argues that the speakers' plurilingual repertoire fundamentally emerges from their inter- or subjective worlds; that is to say, it is constructed by developing new forms of discourse and modes of formulation (see also Blanchet & Coste, 2010). The basic idea is that any utterance consists of two parts: a dictum (what is said) and a modus (how it is said). Thus, there are infinite options in meaning-making and language can be seen as a 'meaning potential' (Halliday, 1975, p. 16). In other words, Hallidays (1975, p. 17) claims that "the speaker expresses his experience of the phenomena of the external world, and of the internal world of his own consciousness." In line with this framework, dialogism, which is complementary to the Theory of Enunciative Operations, is based on the central idea that there is a functional interdependency between the 'self' and the 'other'. According to Delory-Momberger (2013, p. 48), ''there can be no ego without others, no voice without other voices and no self-discourse without other discourses.'' From a didactic perspective, Blanchet and Coste (2010) propose a typology of the intercultural process structured around four poles, which are not presented by the authors as stages, but more as modalities. For instance, the participants to an event engage in communicative practices, where verbal expressions, indexical signs like code-switching or non-verbal signs, and other signaling modes may achieve different communicative effects. Depending on how these factors interrelate in specific circumstances, communication can serve either to accentuate or attenuate the effects of intercultural diversity. Therefore, it seemed important, for the authors, to focus on specific events as the sites where language and culture meet in order to understand how knowledge is acquired and how it circulates. More specifically, the four poles of social relations are described as: i) The intercultural contact is an awareness of the existence of people. These contacts produce stereotypes or reactions of rejection, but also of convergence. ii) The intercultural encounter is based on regular social relations and produces either ignorance or awareness of the relativity of cultural systems. iii) The intercultural syncretism leads to an appropriation of cultural landmarks and resources. iv) The intercultural synthesis is a system of criteria we use for determining similarities and differences in and across contexts. These poles are thought in terms of an intercultural path that facilitates passages by allowing one to freely move back and forth between these components (see also Ringbom, 2006).

In our study, drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) conceptions of situated leaning, we argue that language learning is strongly determined by the personal experiences of the learners, the general ability to interact with others – a key component to learn a language – and the learning environment, his/her self-confidence and motivation for language learning as well as language awareness (Hufeisen, 2009; Hu, 2005). Language research (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Hoffman & Ytsma, 2004; Hoffmann, 2001, *inter alia*) has shown that learners of a second (or third) foreign language apply their acquired linguistic knowledge (as well as learning experiences and strategies) to the target language and make inferences from one language into another as there is a continuous adaptation and interdependence between different language systems. Kesckés & Papp (2000a, 2000b), for example, argue that what makes a speaker multicompetent is the common underlying conceptual base, rather than the existence of two separate grammars in the mind, and have postulated a multilingual language

processing device which consists of two or more constantly available interacting systems. While the processes used in L3 and L4 may be similar to those used in L2 acquisition (Cenoz, 2001) as Clyne (1997) points out the factor of the additional languages being acquired complicates the process. Hoffman (1999) argues that trilingual language competence contains linguistic aspects from the three language systems, as well as the ability to function in trilingual contexts (decisions on code choice and code switching, for instance). Cenoz & Genesee (1998, p. 17) use the term 'individual multilingualism' in the sense of an individual's unique acquisition of plurilingual competence, stating that ''multilingual competence in individuals can be understood as the capacity to use several languages appropriately and effectively for communication in oral or written language'', but they caution as to the applicability of this definition. Herdina & Jessner (2002, p. 84) advocating a ''holistic'' view on TLA, refer to the complex psycholinguistic system to be found in a plurilingual speaker. In sum, researchers have already noted the complex nature of TLA, pointing to the presence of individual or personal characteristics, the presence of language competence and the capacity to use the languages effectively. Plurilingual learners are highly aware of these cross-linguistic influences and exploit – more or less – consciously language transfer and associations in the learning process. Thus, to come to an understanding of how three or more linguistic systems may overlap, differ, interact and compete in interaction, the potential influence of each system in the repertoire should be acknowledged without the assumption that one linguistic system may have a stronger or weaker influence on the target language than another linguistic system.

Based on the research reviewed above, we posit that learners can improve their language abilities when the possibilities for comparisons and interference from one language to the other are taught systematically (see also Grommes & Hu, 2014; Pavlenko, 2011). Nevertheless, there is at present little empirical research on the educational outcome of instruction promoting language transfer. In fact, taking language transfer in its most general sense, we still do not really know what in principle can and cannot be transferred in the learning process as the skills and knowledge from various language systems overlap, fluctuate and interchange depending on the changes in the speakers' lives. Some authors prefer to describe such interactions as cross-linguistic influence rather than transfer (e.g. Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith, 1986; Odlin, 1989). So far, a consistent result in SLA/TLA studies is that L1-based patterns dominate even at advanced stages of acquisition (e.g. Caroll & Stutterheim, 2003; Stutterheim, 2003). However, Bylund (2011) suggests that transfer may also occur in the reverse direction, i.e. L2/L3 patterns may influence the L1. Following Butler's (2012, p. 127) suggestion, we argue, in our study, that ''the notion of transfer […] is no longer considered to be either uni-directional or uni-dimensional.'' Hence, as Bono (2011, p. 26) points out, ''whatever the level of consciousness underlying transfer operations, the sources of transfer are hard to pinpoint and, needless to say, learners may or may not be able to offer an explanation for their linguistic behaviour'' (see, for an overview, Gass & Selinker, 1983). Language anxiety, for instance, in L2 and L3 language learners described by Dewaele (Dewaele, 2002), performs a specific function within the construct of transfer which is particularly difficult to determine. A number of factors that facilitate or hinder transfer have been identified. One of the major factors is language distance, or the degree of linguistic similarities and differences between one L1 and a L2. We may assume that linguistic similarities lead to easier acquisition of the L2 (Bono & Stratilaki, 2009; Kemp, 2009; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007; Kroll & de Groot, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 2007, *inter alia*). However, what happens when the learners also have culturally diverse representations of languages? Even if the language-culture relationship is a central part in the field of multilingualism theory and didactics, it is still unknown, for instance, to what extent this perspective can be adopted in order to develop useful insights into the ways in which languages and cultures are both at play in the learning process (Beacco & Coste, 2017). Furthermore, the question whether there is a significant difference between the groups of learners (or the linguistic composition

of groups) with regard to intercultural communication in learning environments still has to be explored. According to Schmiedtová, von Stutterheim and Carroll (2011, p. 68), ''what is selected for verbalisation does not completely reflect all that the speaker has perceived with respect to a given situation. When speakers process input for verbalization, they select and interpret information on the basis of a particular perspective''. Along this line of reasoning, it is also unclear, despite many years of research, how learners interpret linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom and whether they actually feel valued in terms of linguistic identity and cultural background (e.g. García, 2009; García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2016; Potolia & Stratilaki, 2017).

Consequently, further research is needed to extend the scope of analysis to intercultural understanding. As Butler (2012) points out, many directions are open to be further explored, from plurilingual language acquisition to transfer of meaning and L2 processing, as well as the interaction of culture and language. The present study, integrating virtual encounters through telecollaboration in the classroom, intends to provide an example of an innovative method that would be relevant not only to the researchers interested in L3 or L2 acquisition, but also to the teachers, teacher trainers and all educational actors who are primarily concerned by the rich linguistic and cultural knowledge that young learners bring with them.

3. Understanding the European Learning Environment of TILA: research design

Coordinated by Utrecht University, the European project TILA involved a multimedia designer partner and twelve institutional partners, namely six universities and six secondary schools within six countries. Five languages were concerned: Catalan, English, French, German and Spanish.

In order to better grasp this study, it is important to provide some information about its background. TILA was indeed preceded by the NIFLAR project[3] whose primary concern was university education and included only a few pilot schools. The outcome of the NIFLAR project at the university level pointed the positive impact of this action-research programme with regard to communicative skills enhancement (Canto, Jauregi & van den Bergh, 2013), motivation (Jauregi, de Graaff, van den Bergh & Kriz, 2012) as well as intercultural awareness development (Canto, de Graaff & Jauregi, 2014) among students. Drawing on the results of the NIFLAR project, several observations enriched the reflection and the first reason for developing TILA was that most studies on telecollaboration refer to tertiary language education (Pol, 2013). The challenge was to find out if the positive research results on telecollaboration do actually apply to teenagers who are learning languages in quite a different educational setting.

However, during the project, TILA faced important challenges such as matching synchronous sessions between secondary schools in Europe. Furthermore, on both cases, once the projects (NIFLAR/TILA) were finished, the participating teachers were free to go back to their day-to-day teaching activities as they no longer received any support from the project. This result led us to the conclusion that the "deconditioning process"[4] (Holec, 1991, p. 3) of learners and even more of teachers is a long process, which requires a significant amount of time exceeding the three years of

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[3]   NIFLAR project (2009-2011): Networked Interaction in Foreign Language Acquisition and Research. TILA (2012-2015) was followed by the Erasmus+ project TeCoLa (2016-2019), *Pedagogical differentiation through telecollaboration and gamification for intercultural and content integrated language teaching.* Our study here concentrates on the TILA project, in which I participated as scientific member.

[4]   Our translation in English.

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funding for a European project. More specifically, Holec's studies in the 90s dealt with self-directed learning centres and learning to learn environments. Recently, Potolia & Stratilaki (2017) reminded that telecollaboration was defined by O'Dowd & Ritter (2006) as the integration of online communication tools with the purpose of bringing together classes of learners in geographically distant locations in order to promote the development of social skills and intercultural communicative competence through collaborative tasks and projects. In other words, encouraging learners to practise reflexivity is part of developing a learning to learn attitude, which is indeed an intercultural strategy. Furthermore, Muller (2017) draws our attention to the fact that any interaction, exchange, or speech is connected to past interactions, which cannot be played down when one seeks an analytical focus and understanding of participants, who are social stakeholders in their own right, and not just the technical aspects that make their exchange of views effective. Along this line of argumentation, the idea has been put forth that the teacher has to build upon the knowledge and skills of the learners; in other words, his/her role concerns mainly a reflexive analysis of the learning experience (e.g. O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). The sooner this process takes place (for both learners and teachers), the more meaningful, lifelong learning is. Consequently, the need to "step one education level down" to the secondary schools (before, why not in a future project, stepping down to the primary schools) became a major objective for the TILA project.

In addition, this project aimed at going beyond the pure technological dimension of networking with a focus on telecollaboration for intercultural language acquisition. Actually, if the term "telecollaboration" refers to "the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language in geographically distant locations to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence" (O'Dowd, 2011, p. 342), then telecollaboration for intercultural language acquisition allows learners to negotiate with peers, language and culture in authentic contact situations. Finally, learners have real opportunities to interact with others through another language to interpret meanings and share opinions, and will develop other qualities such as empathy, tolerance to ambiguity or behavioural flexibility (Byram, 1997). Intercultural scholars have suggested this aspect as integral to an intercultural stance to teaching and learning foreign languages (Liddicoat, Scarino, Papademetre & Kohler, 2003; Moran, 2001).

3.1 TILA Communication Modes

Two different telecollaboration modes, tandem and lingua franca were the organising force of the learning/teaching environment in the TILA project. We chose two modes of interaction for several reasons:

Firstly, since the 60s, tandem learning has been functioning in face-to-face teaching (Herfurth, 1993) but at the end of the 90s, the arrival of the Internet brought a new drive to this practice. Tandem is built on the reciprocity principle since "two persons belonging to two different mother tongues community […] collaborate in order […] to mutually learn each other's mother tongue" (Lewis & Stickler, 2007, np)[5]. The relationship is based on equal expertise of the L1 in a bilingual and bicultural kind of communication (i.e. two languages and two cultures in reciprocity). On the contrary, the *lingua franca* mode allows learners to engage in interactions in a language they are both learning and the relationship is based, in most cases, on similar learning expertise of the L2 in a monolingual and pluricultural kind of communication (i.e. one language of communication and three cultures in

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[5]   Our translation in English.

presence). We note, however, that both modes of communication have to be monitored by the teachers so as to enhance different ways of learning and reflecting on languages and cultures.

Secondly, each of these two learning modes has its advantages. In the tandem mode, the partners get the chance to "get to know each other [and] […] to discover their mutual cultures. When working in tandem, the two partners swap continuously between a role of second language learner and a role of informant expert of their own culture and mother tongue" (Lewis & Stickler, 2007, np). As an expert of his/her language and culture, each learner does not only pass on knowledge, know-how or even behavioural skills, but is meant to gain some distance with the language and culture that he/she has always considered as obvious and ever-present (Beacco, 2004; Beacco & Byram, 2007). As to the *lingua franca* mode, the target language, far from being confined to the classroom and its exolingual learning situation – becomes instead an authentic language of communication as telecollaboration goes beyond the language classroom. While lingua franca communication remains somewhat faulty with its errors or failures, it also mirrors the language learning process itself and its authenticity makes it part of the learning process.

Finally, taking into account these two modes for "bringing closer" the learners to each other, teachers have to choose one option or both according to their own constraints, educational culture and their own representations or beliefs about the learning process and intercultural communication in a foreign language.

3.2 TILA Tools

To support each communication mode, the TILA project proposed both synchronous and asynchronous delivery modalities, in real or virtual mode.

More specifically, for synchronous interactions, *open source* applications like BBB and OpenSim were used. With BBB, the learners (e.g. from two different countries) met and interacted on the Moodle platform, that is, an environment that could only be accessed by the members of the TILA project. They exchanged about the tasks designed by their teachers. With OpenSim, the learners, while keeping their original identity (learning an X foreign language in a Y country) appeared endowed with the physical aspect (and hence psychological too) of their avatar. Furthermore, while the interlocutors only saw each other virtually, they were able to interact with one another via voice chat and written chat. Therefore, they were brought to interact within a virtual world specially created by the project's multimedia designer under the supervision of their teachers.

Regarding the synchronous tools relied upon, BBB or OpenSim both provided instant communication media (Develotte, Kern & Lamy, 2011). In the case of OpenSim, we could focus on the choice of an avatar and on the design of the virtual worlds as created and seen by the teachers and the media designer. These can be turned into semiotic marks of the representation of the Self, of Others or even of the learning process through telecollaboration and the link between real and virtual affordances (Degache & Mangenot, 2007; Wigham & Chanier, 2012).

As for asynchronous telecollaboration, the tools offered by the project such as forums, blogs or wikis and their benefits for second language learning are well documented (Celik & Mangenot, 2004; Mangenot & Louveau, 2006; Mangenot & Zourou, 2007).

The main questions raised in this study are the following:

- to what extent is the TILA learning/teaching environment intercultural?
- to what extent are the tasks successful in improving cultural/intercultural/pluricultural learning?

In terms of intercultural communication, the TILA project provided a set of communication modes and tools that ensured a diverse and successful telecollaboration, at least on the technical level. However, research has been pointing out – from the beginning of the existence of ICT and multimedia – the fact that technical availability, which is a prerequisite of telecollaboration and authentic language learning beyond the walls of the classroom cannot prevail over the pedagogical approach whether it is the whole learning/teaching environment or the tasks assigned to the participants. In other words, the results of the study confirm that technicality is useful for gaining insights from learners regarding their experience with the online spaces and their perception of them. In fact, it appears that technology helps to provide a better understanding of the learners' interactions in the digitally mediated spaces, but as such it is not enough for a successful intercultural learning/teaching (see also Linard, 1996; Jeanneret, 2000; Grosbois, 2012; Guichon, 2012).

4. Teachers engaged in the intercultural dimension of language teaching

As the TILA project was based on language teaching volunteers from various EU member states, the participating teachers are not representative of all European secondary language teachers. We acknowledge also that, given the limited scale of the project, starting with just one secondary school in each of the five participating countries, cannot reflect communal attitudes and practices of each educational system. Hence, in discussing telecollaboration, caution should be advised with respect to generalisations from one educational system to another. The following two observations should be made in relation to teachers: firstly, as noted, the project attempted to characterise how secondary language teachers engage in innovative telecollaboration practices implying a variety of ICT tools such as synchronous and asynchronous sessions through Moodle (BBB, blogs, forums, wikis) and OpenSim. Accordingly, teachers were encouraged to develop the intercultural dimension of language learning. Not only did they have to overcome the difficulties in dealing with synchronous and asynchronous sessions within their own school, but they had also to design common tasks with their teacher partners. The task designing process was particularly complex and demanding as they had to combine a series of set parameters such as:

- schedules for synchronous and asynchronous tasks;
- choosing either a *tandem* or a *lingua franca* working mode;
- time of task sequences;
- task sequencing for preparing pre and post synchronous tasks;
- task sequencing for preparing asynchronous tasks in relation or without any relation with the synchronous tasks;
- task designing for language acquisition with an intercultural objective, which means that linguistic and intercultural goals had to be phrased explicitly;
- task assessment combining formative or qualitative assessment of language and intercultural assignments.

Secondly, considering the list of parameters needed to design and develop common tasks, teacher training sessions based on exchanges of what the project could offer for both teachers and learners were essential to help secondary teachers grasp the tools, potential and affordances of the TILA

learning environment. In what follows, a brief description of the training sessions is necessary in order to examine more closely the interactions between the teachers.

4.1 Teacher training sessions as a key dimension for engaging teachers in innovation

Once the whole framework of the TILA learning environment was fully understood, it was important to provide very practical tasks to help teachers relate in very concrete terms how the European network could be implemented in very pragmatic, direct and detailed tasks, so that teachers could adjust the objectives of the project to their own circumstances. In other words, linking the general practical framework and its theoretical implication for language acquisition and intercultural awareness to hands-on tasks enabled teachers to imagine and design assignments suitable to their learners and teaching circumstances. Hence, as the teacher training sessions were paramount for the development of successful telecollaborations, TILA provided at least two face-to-face training sessions in each country, namely at each consortium school, which other associate teachers could attend. These face-to-face sessions were country based, which means that language teachers shared the same educational environment and the same educational constraints while teaching different languages so as to relate TILA with their own specific programmes. In other words, even though the general educational system was common to all language teachers attending the face-to-face sessions, the languages they taught followed different objectives and language specific programmes.

Once the language teachers had exchanged and brainstormed about the TILA learning environments, the groups of teachers were formed so they could discuss the tasks provided and adjust them to the language they teach. One important point should be underlined at this stage, the fact that all language teachers were qualified teachers of the language taught but had no qualifications for teaching their mother tongue as a Foreign Language. For example, language teachers in France were all qualified to teach English, German or Spanish but had neither certificates nor substantial experience for teaching French as a Foreign Language. This means that the French language teachers opting for a *tandem* mode had teaching expertise in the language they teach but not in the language they speak as a mother tongue or L1. Their teacher partner was in the same situation: they knew how to teach their L2 to their learners, they had the non-native teacher expertise but at the same time, they could serve to deliver expertise in their L1 ("mother tongue") and C1 ("home culture") to their peers as they did not have a native teacher expertise *per se*.

On the contrary, the *lingua franca* mode means that language teachers are experts of the L2. For example, Dutch and French teachers of English shared the same status of non-native teachers of English had the same objectives and teaching expertise of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) but in different cultural contexts, each having its particularity. Nevertheless, as discussed in the introduction of this article, the cultural dimension of EFL is restricted as learners will primarily use English in order to get to know one another and exchange about their own cultural practices. In that specific case, Dutch learners learned about French learners and vice versa, through the medium of English. They also discussed English cultures but as they were not used to resources and learning stepping-stones for intercultural exchanges, they missed the intercultural-oriented dimension of TILA and the assumption that language acquisition is based on authentic communication allowing the development of meaning-making within intercultural communication (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013; Díaz, 2013; Jauregi, Melchor-Couto & Vilar Beltrán, 2013; Kohn, 2015). In sum, the two modes of communication provided by TILA helped learners and teachers to experience new methods of language learning and teaching, to go beyond the borders of the classroom and to perceive differently the relationship between language and culture (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Zarate, Lévy & Kramsch, 2011). Obviously, apprehending the

intricacies of this project is what researchers will have to clarify in the future so as to inform the multi-faceted implications of an embryonic European language educational system through telecollaboration.

As far as teacher training is concerned, the face-to-face, one-day sessions in each country were supplemented by online group or individual sessions tailored to a variety of needs such as dealing with technical, organisational practicalities or developing tasks. The online sessions made it possible to cross borders again as they were no longer country specific. The focus lied instead on language, relating how to develop tasks in the target language to specific educational contexts. In order to improve these multi-modal and multi-function training sessions either face-to-face or online, as they were essential for implementing the programme and its sustainability, much care had to be given to who TILA teachers were, what their schools and teaching practices were and what they thought about the intercultural dimension of TILA. To do so, we opted for two short questionnaires in English. As the questions were rather simple and close-ended, we assumed all the teachers could answer them regardless of their languages. Considering the qualitative dimension of the TILA project in European language education, the questionnaires proved not to be the most appropriate tool and could only work as sources of primary information. The teachers didn't always take the necessary time to answer thoroughly to the two questionnaires of the study. The first questionnaire gave us information about the teachers' backgrounds and their teaching practices; the second informed us about their beliefs regarding intercultural learning. Nevertheless, as the study raised many more questions than it answered, we decided to complete the data with interviews.

4.2 The TILA teachers and what they said about their school and teaching practices

The teachers had participated in the TILA project voluntarily and were therefore particularly active and dynamic. They belong to the fringe of committed teachers who are ready to test new techniques and experiment with new environments for their learners to enhance their teaching repertoires.

Even though TILA teachers knew that a scientific follow-up of the experiment would accompany the whole process, just about half of the participating teachers answered the questionnaires. In what follows, we examine the answers of the first questionnaire.

Nationalities	
French	6
Spanish	5
Dutch	2
German	1
British	1

Table A:15 Respondents to the teacher's background questionnaire (TBQ)

Among the 15 respondents, 70% are female teachers and 30% male teachers. Their teaching experience ranges from less than 4 years to more than 25 years. They all have a master's degree and most of them also have a teaching license. They work in state secondary schools (90%). Their learners are from 12 to 18 years old. They teach one language (France) or 2 languages (the NL, Spain, the UK)

or up to 3 subjects (Germany). They all mention some lack of support for computer technologies in their schools.

We can nonetheless point out that all the teachers of our study have a plurilingual and pluricultural capital (Zarate, Lévy & Kramsch, 2011), although living and working abroad is not necessarily part of the language curriculum of pre-service language teachers in Europe. That means, for example, that one can get a teaching license in France through very selective language exams (Capes or Agrégation) without having set foot in a country where the language is spoken. More specifically, among the 15 respondents, 80% have worked in a foreign country, mainly in Europe (except for the USA and Vietnam) from less than a year to more than 5 years. They have also taught in a foreign country (80%) mainly in Europe (except for North America) from 1 to more than 10 years. Half of the respondents have French as their first language. We can also count Catalan, Dutch, English, German and Spanish among the languages mentioned by the teachers as part of their repertoire. Just one teacher considers herself to be bilingual in French and English. With regard to plurilingualism, it is very difficult to interpret the responses about the L1 as the questionnaire, even if it included the option of bi-/plurilingualism, was implicitly in line with the common belief that the L1 corresponds to the first language acquired and generally speaking the dominant one. Further interviews will allow us to complete the data by indicating how language teachers view themselves as language professionals: are they "native", "non-native", bi-/plurilingual speakers or intercultural speakers of the language they teach? For example, although most of the teachers had lived abroad for a short period of time, we cannot dismiss the possibility that even minimal exposure to the L2-speaking and cultural environment may affect one's beliefs about intercultural communication. The results showed that among the 15 respondents, 60% teach English. French, German, Spanish and Catalan represent only 13%.

To sum up, the data (questionnaire and interviews) indicate that the TILA teachers' trajectories are coherent with their general background. They have studied languages as the major subject of their degrees (American Studies, British history, English literature, English studies, English philology, German Literature, Didactics of French and Foreign languages), they have lived and taught abroad and are fully qualified and experienced language teachers with teaching licenses. But interestingly, to the questions related to how intercultural teachers view their school, the answers show some mixed feelings and attitudes, as implies the following table:

Items	Value
Intercultural competence is an important student outcome	++
The intercultural dimension is a priority	++
Colleagues are willing to get a Language assistant	++
Partnerships abroad are encouraged	+
Colleagues develop partnerships	=
Language assistants are easy to get	-
School supports intercultural exchanges	-
Colleagues support intercultural exchanges	-

Table B: How intercultural is your school?

In addition, we realize that, on the one hand, there is a willingness for schools and teachers to engage with intercultural perspectives (i.e. consider interactions as part of the learning process, promote partnerships with other schools, encourage language assistants, develop intercultural competence) and, on the other hand, realities contradict these views as it appears to be quite problematic getting support to innovate for intercultural exchanges from both colleagues and the school administration.

Thus, concerning the questions related to language teaching and, more specifically, how the language curriculum is perceived by teachers, we observe that the four language skills are still the focus of language teaching and the cultural dimensions play a somewhat minor role. These results are also restricted to the questions we asked, based on broad definitions of the language curriculum in secondary schools. So, even if our questions tended to infer such results, the fact that we asked teachers to rank each item in order of importance for them, gave nonetheless an interesting indication of what the teachers think and what is more important for them within the language curriculum.

Teaching activities	% (respondents)
Speaking	53%
Listening	33%
Reading	33%
Vocabulary	26%
Culture	21%
Intercultural dimension	21%
Writing	13%

Table C: Teaching activities that are most important for TILA teachers (% given on a five-point Lickert scale)

Certainly, we cannot compare these results with other European language teachers, but we can observe a strong interest in speaking activities, which are considered essential in teaching activities. The (inter-)cultural assignments are not neglected either, even if they are thought as less important than listening, reading or even vocabulary; we notice also that they ranked higher than writing activities. In the open-ended question, it is also worth mentioning that one teacher felt it important to write that beyond the "technicalities" of language teaching, teachers were also educators and had to make learners think about language and culture through brainstorming activities.

4.3 TILA teachers and what they say about the intercultural dimension of the TILA project

The second questionnaire was filled out by 21 respondents. It was about the teachers' views regarding intercultural communication. Its objective was to explore the motives for these teachers to engage in TILA as far as the intercultural dimension is concerned. The questionnaire combined questions relevant to the TILA project, a set of questions taken from Byram's model (1997, 2008) and Sercu's study (2005). We made this choice because the study addresses directly the Common European framework of reference (2001, 2018), which is to various degrees present within the different language curricula of EU countries, and the intercultural practices of European teachers.

Teachers think that the most important contribution for their learners using the TILA tools can be enhanced motivation, then interaction and communication, followed by intercultural skills.

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Items	Point 5	Point 5 + 4
Motivation	60%	90%
Interaction and communication	55%	80%
Intercultural skills	45%	80%
Telecollaboration with other peers	45%	80%

Table D: How important is TILA for your students with regard to the following aspects? TILA will enhance or develop: (5-point Lickert scale)

Furthermore, they think that the most important contribution for themselves as teachers using TILA will be the innovation possibilities, then collaboration with teachers from other countries, as well as improving their ICT skills, followed by enriched intercultural competence and creativity.

Items	Point 5	Point 5 + 4
Innovation	40%	75%
Collaboration with teachers from different countries	35%	75%
ICT skills	35%	75%
Creativity	30%	70%

Table E: How important is TILA for you as a teacher with regard to the following aspects? TILA will enhance or develop: (5-point Lickert scale)

Both teachers and their learners view the TILA project as a positive experience, explaining their main motives for getting involved in this European project. For them, intercultural education goes beyond a ''sensitivity to the essentially different values of the other''. It rather means being able to balance one's own beliefs about culture with those of target-language speakers in each given situation. The following table presents an overview of the participating teachers' views on the intercultural dimension, on their intercultural practices and about why the ICC should be taught.

Items	Point 5	Point 5 + 4
Teachers should be trained in ICC	50%	90%
Motivation plays an important role in intercultural communication	45%	100%
Telecollaborative tasks are part of ICC	35%	85%
Intercultural and cultural dimensions are priorities in the language and school curriculum	30%	80%
In intercultural communication adaptability is important	25%	100%
Learners are interested in learning about other cultures	25%	85%
Empathy with the foreign culture is important in intercultural communication	20%	90%

Table F: What are your views on the intercultural dimension? (5-point Lickert scale)

What is interesting from the data is that motivation is linked to intercultural communication, i. e. getting to know other people from different cultures enhances motivation, curiosity and the development of interaction and language skills. In order to achieve that goal, which is also part of the language school curriculum, teachers should be trained. We also note that experiential skills like empathy with others and adaptability to different ways of being and communicating have to be developed through telecollaboration, along with knowledge about other cultures.

Moreover, the political agenda behind developing one's intercultural communicative competence is clearly understood by the teachers. They strongly agree with the fact that ICC should be developed due to increasing internationalisation of the world (95%) and that ICC is part of developing some kind of intercultural citizenship (90%). These views are also consistent with the romanticised version of the language teaching profession according to which language teachers promote "cultural dialogues" and "peace" among peoples.

Trying to get more in depth into the matter of intercultural dimension, we asked questions on how teachers define intercultural practices in their teaching. The answers were the following:

Items	Point 5	Point 5 and 4
ICC is about developing cultural knowledge about one's own and one's interlocutor's cultures	25%	100%
ICC provides information about daily life and routines (living conditions, traditions)	15%	95%
ICC is about developing attitudes such as curiosity, openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. It is about relating to Self and Other and about cultural awareness of differences and similarities	55%	90%
ICC provides knowledge and experience of a variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre, films…)	15%	90%
ICC facilitates good language learning and teaching	20%	85%
ICC is more about communicative skills and positive attitudes towards people from different cultures	35%	85%

Table G1: What are your views on intercultural practices? (5-point Lickert scale).

From these results, we can observe mixed representations about ICC: on the one hand, ICC is still strongly linked with knowledge and information about cultures as part of the traditional curriculum (Zarate, 1995), and on the other hand, ICC is also related to attitudes and the development of positive values about others and decentring from one's own culture. These representations opposing knowledge and attitudes do not necessarily contradict one another, just as knowing about the language does not contradict language communication. The main question remains: to what extent do these items define language or culture teaching? The results of this study suggest that language communication can no longer be restricted to knowing about the language system, just as intercultural communication can no longer be restricted to knowing about cultures.

The following table expresses more obvious mixed and contradictory views when the model of language learning is questioned.

Items	Point 5	Point 5 and 4
The intercultural speaker is a good model for learners	26%	79%
The native speaker is a good model for learners	25%	75%
ICC is about class collaboration between N/NN speakers (TILA *tandems*)	20%	95%
ICC is about class collaboration between NN speakers of different countries (TILA lingua franca)	15%	80%

Table G2: What are your views on intercultural practices? (5-point Lickert scale).

From these results, we can assuredly outline that the native speaker model contradicts the intercultural speaker model as these models represent two divergent goals in language teaching (Byram, 1997; 2008; Coste, Moore & Zarate, 1997; Derivry-Plard, 2013; Zarate, Lévy & Kramsch, 2011). The first one is the traditional model of language education, which is still very much alive and in which, the learner has to mimic the "native" speaker and change identity to become a successful learner mastering the language in all its dimensions like the "educated native speaker". The second one is based on a more realistic view of language learning: the learner has to acquire ways of being intelligible in communicating in the foreign language and fulfil his/her own needs in the target language. The model of language learning has therefore had huge implications in the language curriculum and language teaching activities. These findings show that the two language models are hardly compatible even though they coexist due to lack of language curriculum updates or lack of teacher training and development.

Furthermore, the two modes of telecollaboration that the TILA project proposes reflect in part, the two models of language teaching, the traditional one giving priority and exclusivity to exchanges between native and non-native speakers. Even though the two modes of telecollaboration are contradictory in the development of language and intercultural acquisition, which can be conducted with native or non-native speakers alike, the slight preference for a tandem system among TILA teachers seems to express the view that their learners will benefit more from interactions with native speakers of the target language, in line with the traditional view of the native speaker model for language and culture.

5. Conclusion: inter-pluricultural perspectives in language education

The learning/teaching environment provided by TILA is the kind of educational offer that affords inter-pluricultural education, insofar as teachers, learners, school administrators and chief education officers from different countries have their say in the implementation of this go-between environment. In this sense, the TILA environment is "inter" as it allows the co-construction of language and cultural tasks with the social actors such as teachers and learners are within their school and curriculum constraints. Moreover, the TILA environment is "pluri" as the co-construction was not only between two language teachers from two different countries. That is, teachers could co-construct tasks with different teachers from different countries. Furthermore, one has to pay attention to the fact that the "pluri" dimension is not an addition of different "inter" modes since the TILA teachers developed a wide range of pedagogical actions with teachers from other countries and by different modes of communication, either tandem or lingua franca, reshuffling one-to-one collaboration to multi-collaborations.

The TILA teachers are forerunners of this European inter-pluricultural learning/teaching environment and the researchers who were following the study were also part of this intercultural

environment. The researchers showed that the traditional representations about language education are still present among teachers (our data presented here complemented, Houghton & Yamada, 2012; O'Dowd, 2003, 2007; Sercu, 2005). New practices have still to be analysed as national educational systems were only put in place in the second half of the 19th Century in Europe. We note that this research was conducted as an experiment funded by the European Commission within the lifelong learning programme.

However, as indicated, like many European projects, it is a very short-term one. Few people have benefited from this experience and there is still much to do to promote intercultural awareness within the secondary education systems in Europe. Nevertheless, we still think that innovative methods may represent a dynamic way of linking teaching and research.

Acknowledgments

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