Oral Proficiency Assessment of Intercultural Online Collaborative Tasks

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Why online intercultural collaborations?

- Mark Twain: “I was greatly discouraged …”
- The use of internet communication tools to support dialogue, collaborative task completion, and social interaction between internationally dispersed groups of learners
- Articulates with shift from “linguistic” and “communicative” competence to “intercultural” and “plurilingual” competence
- Embeds L2 in development of meaningful relationships
- New linguistic repertoires afforded by interpersonal mediation (Thorne, 2003; Kinginger & Belz, 2003; Vyatkina, 2007)
Importance of assessment in CMC

- Assessment of CMC and online engagement often considered difficult and fuzzy -> marginalization of online intercultural exchanges in institutional L2 contexts
- Assessment is a necessary condition in instructed learning contexts
  - Grades
  - Accountability – teachers and students
  - Articulation with other components of the curriculum
- Assessment affords data-driven improvements to task design and orientations to online interaction
- Assessment may assist learners with developing critical language awareness
- Assessment as a catalyst for formative intervention research
- *Particular need for oral production assessment
Common European Framework of Reference at University of Groningen

- **Rationale:**
  - Linking TBLT to CEF beneficial, because it puts an outcome-based perspective on task-based work (Nunan 2004; Willis and Willis 2007)
  - Provides a starting point for designing a performance-based curriculum
- **Use of CEF in language courses (supported by Dialang, European Language Portfolio, etc.):**
  - Making students familiar with principles and levels of framework
  - Making them aware of own levels of proficiency
  - Setting personal learning learning objectives
- **Use of CEF in teacher training (supported by CEFTrain and WebCEF):**
  - Standardizing assessment, getting teachers ‘on the same page’
- **Primary skills assessed:**
  - Writing (written production)
  - Presentations (spoken production)
- **Less experience in assessment of interactive work (spoken interaction)**
- **No experience yet in assessment of online interactive work**
The Groningen-Padova project

- Collaboration between students in Groningen and Padova (teachers Estelle Meima and Gillian Davies)
- University students of English (mostly Dutch and Italian)
- Approx. 20 students on each side
- Collaboration through Skype
- Introduction in class, followed by three self-arranged online meetings
- Sessions are video recorded and uploaded to WebCEF
- Blackboard used for presenting the tasks, student journals, and additional information and communication
- Project started on 29 April, only brief report on first results
The tasks

- Guidelines from literature, e.g. O’Dowd and Ware (2009)
- Topics of mutual interest
- Clear objective / outcome of the task: speaking followed up by writing in Blackboard journal
- Tasks:
  - 1: Interviewing - written biography
  - 2: Comparing and contrasting cities – written report
  - 3: Role play (three topics, information gap) – reflection report
- Recordings in WebCEF for self-assessment
### Range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conscious searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel and current events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Uses basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations.</td>
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### Summary

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<tr>
<th>Sub技能</th>
<th>Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Spoken Interaction</td>
<td>B2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
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<td>Fluency</td>
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<td>Interaction</td>
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<td>Coherence</td>
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“Before I started the conversation with [my partner] I was agitated. I was worried to give wrong answers. My fear vanished immediately when I started to speaking with him. He is very nice and has a good pronunciation.”

“Using English for communication with foreign people is a good method to develop your skills. The turn taking is a difficult activity. Sometimes we talked over us and we didn't understand each other.”
“I've never done this kind of change with a different country but I noticed is absolutely interesting, because it helps you to learn more not only improving your skills but also learn more about that culture.”

“In my opinion, I’m able to have a conversation in English but I have to improve many aspects of communication, like pronunciation, intonation and fluency; sometimes when I try to speak with fluency, I make some grammar mistakes or I don’t follow the right order of the sentences; if I pay more attention while I speak I can avoid doing these kind of mistakes.”
More comments

“The topic of this week was very interesting. We talked about our cities and analysed the contrasts between them.”
Research potential

- **CMC with Skype**
  - How do students experience these exchanges? (motivation, language learning, intercultural communication)
  - Can we have students do these tasks on their own? (time management, management of technology)
  - Analysis of interactional dynamics in video conferencing contexts (CA, DA)

- **Assessment with WebCEF**
  - How useful and useable is self-assessment in this context?
  - What combinations of self-assessment and other-assessment are useful?
  - Will there be differences in assessment by the same students across different tasks?
  - Will the annotations be specific and focused enough?
  - Will student assessment differ from teacher assessment?
  - How do student assess each other in relation to assessing themselves?

- **Further uses:**
  - Database for research on various aspects of online intercultural communication
  - Using these samples in standardization sessions with teachers
Technical / organisational issues

- Problems with audio / recording settings
- No webcams / audio only
- Recordings too long
- Video flaky or rendered with faults (HR-camera’s)
- Many steps from recording to publication in WebCEF
- No problems with Skype; overall experience positive
- More integrated solution: SpeakApps (Life-long Learning Programme EU, European project led by Open University Catalunia)
Thanks!

- Questions?
- Further information:
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  - Steve Thorne, stevenlthorne@gmail.com
Links

- Vodburner recording tool:
  - http://www.vodburner.com/

- WebCEF project:
  - http://www.webcef.eu

- WebCEF tool (login required):