6. The acquisition of pragmatic and intercultural communicative competence for global citizenship through telecollaboration

Sofia Di Sarno-García[1]

Abstract

This study presents the results obtained from three different telecollaboration projects, that aimed to develop Spanish-speaking students' use of apologies in English (pragmatic competence) and their intercultural communicative competence (ICC). In particular, this paper aims to demonstrate how pragmatic competence and ICC are inextricably interrelated, and how these two competences help students become intercultural/global citizens through telecollaboration. Data was collected from both synchronous and asynchronous tasks carried out by Spanish learners of English who engaged in telecollaborative projects with L1 or highly proficient English speakers. The quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed that there is an empirical relationship between the learners' use of apologies and the development of their ICC. Also, following Byram's (2008) principles of education for intercultural citizenship, the results demonstrate that telecollaboration can foster language learners' intercultural/global citizenship.

1. Introduction

Intercultural contact frequently takes place through the use of technology. It is therefore imperative to incorporate the teaching of intercultural norms in the second/foreign language (L2) classroom, with a special emphasis on technology-mediated interaction. For intercultural interaction to be successful, not only do students need to know their target language, but they also need to possess pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Even though the relationship between pragmatic competence and ICC has been acknowledged, studies aimed at demonstrating this relationship are still limited (Jackson, 2019). One of the most appropriate ways to implement the teaching of these two competences in the language classroom is telecollaboration, as previous research has shown (González-Lloret, 2022; Sykes, 2017).

The aims of this short paper are:

1. To analyse the extent to which the relationship between pragmatic competence and ICC can be empirically demonstrated and how telecollaboration can strengthen this connection.
2. To illustrate, following Byram's (2008) principles of education for intercultural citizenship (EIC), how engaging in intercultural telecollaboration projects can help learners become intercultural/global citizens.

---

[1]Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), Valencia, Spain; sodisar@doctor.upv.es

Although some researchers use intercultural and global citizenship to define two different concepts (Portera, 2021), in this work they will be used interchangeably following Trapè (2020).

2. Method

This paper describes the data collected and the results obtained from three different telecollaboration projects, which lasted six weeks each. The aims of these projects were to foster Spanish students' use of apologies in English and to develop their ICC.

Participants of this study were three different groups of aerospace engineering students from the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), in Spain. The first group was composed of 7 students enrolled on an optional 3rd-year B2 level (CEFR) English subject, who collaborated with the University of Bath (UK). The second group was constituted by 24 students enrolled on an optional 1st-year B2 level (CEFR) Technical English subject, who worked together with the University of Hawai'i (US), while those in the third group were 6 students enrolled on an optional 3rd-year B2 level (CEFR) English subject, who collaborated with Morgan State University (US). All students from the partner institutions were L1 or highly proficient speakers of English who studied L2 Spanish.

A consent form detailing the study's objectives and the intended use of the data it collected was signed by each participant in the study. Their anonymity is kept. The aims and the context of the study were discussed with the instructors of each institution prior the start of the project.

Spanish students completed a pre-test on apologies before the start of each project. The aim of the test was to measure the students' understanding of apologies in English before the intercultural exchange. After that, based on previous research (e.g. Alcón-Soler, 2007; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019) they received explicit instruction on pragmatics and apologies through audiovisual materials such as video extracts taken from TV series and films (the adequacy of these materials was previously tested in Di Sarno-García, 2018). This preparation was a relevant part of the study since when 'telecollaborative exchanges are combined with teacher mentoring before the exchanges take place, L2 learners' pragmatic competence […] will be enhanced' (Rezaeyan & Gimeno-Sanz, 2023). The third step was the telecollaboration project itself. Learners engaged in synchronous Zoom sessions with their counterparts, where they carried out open role-playing tasks to elicit their use of apologies and had also free time to practise oral conversation. Asynchronous cultural discussions were carried out through the MeWe platform, which is a free social network site that allows users to create a personal profile and to upload different file types such as pictures, videos, and PDFs, apart from posting comments (see Di Sarno-García, 2021, 2023). In addition, the researcher created a private group for each telecollaboration project that could be accessed only by the students and their teachers where the cultural discussions were carried out. Both types of activities were conducted on a weekly basis. At the end of each project, students from both sides co-created a sound-enhanced presentation (i.e. each slide contained an audio file recorded by the students) where they summarised the topics discussed, what they had learnt, and how they felt while dealing with

partners from other cultures. After that, Spanish students completed a post-test on apologies and a final project survey (see Appendix 1).

Data was collected through pre- and post-test, the role-plays, the MeWe discussions, the final presentation, and the final survey. The role-plays were recorded by the students themselves, who sent them to the researcher for their subsequent transcription and analysis. In terms of pragmatic competence, the strategies used to apologise by the participants were coded following a taxonomy based on those elaborated by Blum-Kulka and Olsthain (1984), Leech (2014) and Martínez-Flor (2016) through quantitative content analysis, while the responses obtained from pre- and post-test were analysed through descriptive statistics. In terms of ICC, based on previous research (Vinagre, 2016), instances or traces of Byram's (1997, 2021) five objectives of ICC were sought in the comments posted on MeWe, while the cultural topics discussed spontaneously on Zoom were categorised manually, both through quantitative content analysis. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to seek a relationship between pragmatic competence and ICC.

Byram's (2008) principles of EIC were followed to demonstrate how a telecollaboration project can help learners to become intercultural/global citizens.

3. Results and discussion

Regarding the first objective of this paper, the Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a statistically significant correlation between the number of comments on MeWe and the number of role-plays performed as $p=<.001$. This means that the more a student engaged in the cultural discussions on MeWe, the more they did the same with the role-playing tasks on Zoom, and vice versa. In line with this, the correlation between the number of MeWe comments and the number of strategies used during the role-plays showed a statistically significant correlation as $p=0.008$. This means that those students who participated more actively in the cultural discussions were also more prolific when apologising. Finally, a statistically significant correlation between the number of Zoom sessions and the number of sessions dealing with cultural topics was also found as $p=<.001$. This is especially relevant as those cultural topics were brought up in conversation spontaneously by students from both sides. Chun (2011) was the only similar previous study found. In her research, the students who showed L2 pragmatic abilities were the same who also demonstrated ICC and who discussed political and cultural topics. Therefore, the findings of the present study corroborate those by Chun (2011).

Regarding the second objective, telecollaboration has proved to be an adequate environment for the development of language learners' intercultural/global citizenship. The first principle of EIC (Byram, 2008, pp. 186-187) states that the 'intercultural experience takes place when people from different social groups with different values, beliefs and behaviours (cultures) meet'. In this sense, telecollaboration is a cost-effective way to meet culturally and geographically distant people, and it helps to overcome geographical and economic barriers. The second principle – 'being "intercultural" involves analysis and reflection about intercultural experience and acting on that reflection' – was also met as the students reflected on what they

had learnt and how they felt when they co-created the final product. This can be illustrated through the final slide of the students' presentations in Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 below.

Figure 1. Last slide of one of the groups from the first telecollaboration project (all text is *verbatim*)
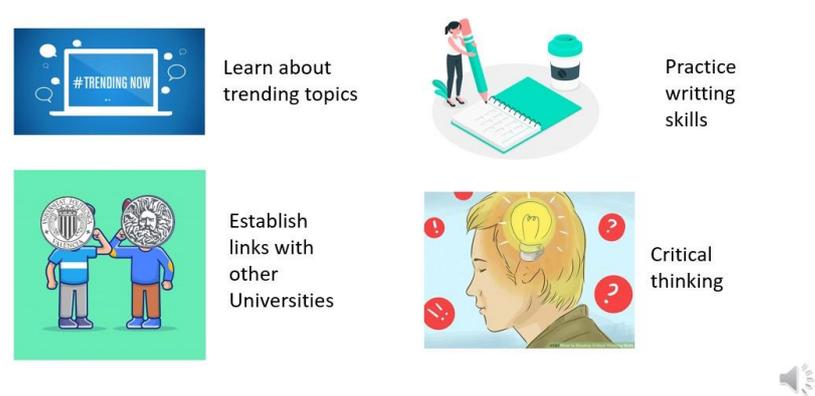
Figure 2. Last slide of one of the groups from the second telecollaboration project

Figure 3. Last slide of one of the groups from the third telecollaboration project

The third principle of EIC states as follows: 'intercultural citizenship experience takes place when people of different social groups and cultures engage in social and political activity.' This was achieved since students discussed sensitive topics such as the independence of Catalonia, immigration, and political borders (i.e., Mexico/US vs. Spain/Africa) on MeWe. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, cultural topics were brought up in conversation spontaneously. Those topics included *general aspects* (e.g., sense of culture, differences among countries, etc.) (24.82%), *sensitive topics* (e.g. Spanish civil war, World War II, etc.) (15.67%), *festivities and traditions* (13.87%), *education systems/university life* (13.14%), *food/timetables to eat* (10.95%), *languages* (9.49%), while other subcategories were also identified (e.g. notions of family). As previously mentioned, controversial issues were dealt with spontaneously, which reinforces the idea that sensitive topics should not be avoided in telecollaboration projects as it could hinder the intercultural experience (Godwin-Jones, 2019). Notwithstanding, cultural differences should always be taken into account since certain taboo topics cannot be discussed in some countries under any circumstances. For this reason, a robust ethical framework respecting differences should be followed.

According to the fourth principle, EIC involves:

> Causing/facilitating intercultural citizenship experience, and analysis and reflection on it and on the possibility of further social and/or political activity– i.e., activity which involves working with others to achieve an agreed end; creating learning/change in the individual: cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural change; change in self-perception; change in relationships with Others (i.e., people of a different social group); change that is based in the particular but is related to the universal. (Byram, 2008, p. 187)

Learners critically reflected on the intercultural experience through the co-creation of a final product, as it can be observed from Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 above. The telecollaboration project also appeared to provide a transformational learning experience for the students and also affected their relationship with their partners, as illustrated by the results obtained from the final project survey (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4. Results from the final project survey
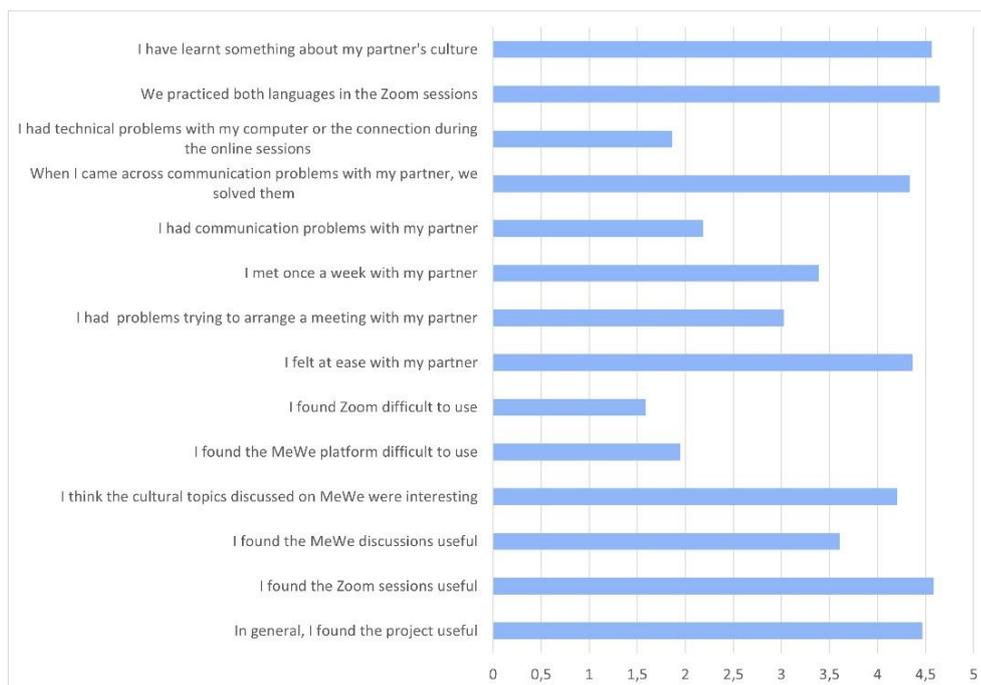
On a 5-point scale, where 1 was completely disagree and 5 was completely agree, the average response to the item *I have learnt something about my partner's culture* was 4.56 (Standard Deviation = 0.70). Moreover, most of the students were able to overcome communication problems with their partners, as the average response is 4.33 (SD = 0.82). This is in line with the responses obtained to the item *I felt at ease with my partner*, since the mean is 4.36 (SD = 0.74). This is especially relevant as one of the characteristics of the intercultural speaker is the ability to establish and maintain relationships with people from other cultures (Byram, 1997, 2021).

4. Conclusions

Despite the small sample size, this study has demonstrated how pragmatic competence and ICC are intertwined and how they can be developed through telecollaboration. Also, following Byram's (2008) principles of EIC, it has demonstrated that telecollaboration is a suitable approach for the development of language learners' intercultural/global citizenship. As claimed by Trapè (2020, p. 154), through telecollaboration 'young people are empowered to actively reflect on their role in a democratic society as active contributors: that is, as intercultural and global citizens'.

5. Acknowledgements

References

Alcón-Soler, E. (2007). Fostering EFL learners' awareness of requesting through explicit and implicit consciousness-raising tasks. In M. P. García Mayo (Ed.), *Investigating Tasks in Formal Language Learning* (pp. 221–241). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853599286-014

Blum-Kulka, S., and Olshtain, E. (1984). "Requests and Apologies: A Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP)1". *Applied Linguistics 5*(3). 196-213. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/5.3.196

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence.* Multilingual matters.

Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship: Essays and reflections.* Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: Revisited.* Multilingual matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800410251

Di Sarno-García, S. (2018). Teaching apologies through the use of audiovisual materials. *Fòrum de Recerca*, 23, 327–340. https://doi.org/10.6035/forumrecerca.2018.23.22

Di Sarno-García, S. (2021). Helping aerospace engineering students develop their intercultural communicative competence. In N. Zoghlami, C. Brudermann, C. Sarré, M. Grosbois, L. Bradley, & S. Thouësny (Eds), *CALL and professionalisation: short papers from EUROCALL 2021* (pp. 94-99). Research publishing.net. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2021.54.1315

Di Sarno-García, S. (2023). The Development of Foreign Language Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence through Telecollaboration. *The EuroCALL Review, 30*(1), 35-51. https://doi.org/10.4995/eurocall.2023.16693

Godwin-Jones, R. (2019). Telecollaboration as an approach to developing intercultural communication competence. *Language Learning & Technology, 23*(3), 8–28. http://hdl.handle.net/10125/44691

González-Lloret, M. (2022). Technology-mediated tasks for the development of L2 pragmatics. *Language Teaching Research, 26*(2), 173–189. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211064930

Jackson, J. (2019). Intercultural Competence and L2 Pragmatics. In N. Taguchi (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Pragmatics* (1st ed., pp. 479–494). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351164085-31

Leech, G. N. (2014). The pragmatics of politeness. Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics.

Martínez-Flor, A. (2016). La Enseñanza de Fórmulas de Disculpa a un Nivel Discursivo:¿ Se Mantienen los Efectos de la Instrucción a Largo Plazo?. ELIA: *Estudios de Lingüística Inglesa Aplicada*, (16), 13-48. https://doi.org/10.12795/elia.2016.i16.02

Plonsky, L., & Zhuang, J. (2019). A meta-analysis of L2 pragmatics instruction. In N. Taguchi (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and pragmatics* (pp. 287–307). Routledge.

Portera, A. (2021). Global versus intercultural citizenship education. *Prospects*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-021-09577-3

Rezaeyan, M., & Gimeno-Sanz, A. M. (2023). Teacher-Mentored Pre-Task Planning in Telecollaboration: The Impact of Task Design on L2 Learners' Pragmatic Competence and L2 Willingness to Communicate. In S. Di Sarno-García, S. Montaner-Villalba, & A. Gimeno-Sanz (Eds), *Telecollaboration Applications in Foreign Language Classrooms* (pp. 120-135). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-7080-0.ch006

Sykes, J. M. (2017). Technologies for Teaching and Learning Intercultural Competence and Interlanguage Pragmatics. In C. A. Chapelle & S. Sauro (Eds), *The handbook of technology*

and second language teaching and learning (pp. 118–133). Wiley Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118914069.ch9

Trapè, R. (2020). Developing global citizenship through real-world tasks – a virtual exchange between North American university students and Italian upper-secondary school students. In M. Hauck & A. Müller-Hartmann (Eds), *Virtual exchange and 21st century teacher education: short papers from the 2019 EVALUATE conference* (pp. 147-155). Research-publishing.net. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2020.46.1140

Vinagre, M. (2016). 2 Promoting intercultural competence in culture and language studies. *Technology-enhanced language learning for specialized domains: Practical applications and mobility*, 23.

Appendix 1 – final project survey

1) In general, I found the project useful.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

2) I found the Zoom sessions useful.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

3) I found the MeWe discussions useful.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

4) I think the cultural topics discussed on MeWe were interesting.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

5) I found the MeWe platform difficult to use.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

6) I found Zoom difficult to use.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

7) I felt at ease with my partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

8) I had problems trying to arrange a meeting with my partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

9) I met once a week with my partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

10) When I came across communication problems with my partner, we solved them.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

11) I had technical problems with my computer or the connection during the online sessions.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

12) We practiced both languages in the Zoom sessions.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

13) I have learnt something about my partner's culture.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

14) Would you like to keep on meeting with your partner after the end of the project?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

15) Do you have any comments or suggestions?