The Adoption of Technology-Enhanced Project-Based Language Learning to Develop Learner's Interactional Competence in Secondary Education

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Abstract

Within the teaching community, it is broadly accepted that the command of language forms is not enough to ensure successful communication (Young, 2011). Technology-Enhanced Project-Based Language Learning (TEPBLL, Dooly & Sadler, 2016) engages the learners in exciting news ways to experiment, play, and explore the target language (Dooly & Masats, 2019), especially if the use of English goes beyond the classroom walls and becomes a lingua franca to conduct telecollaborative projects with peers from other countries. These initiatives create a 'space for learning' (Walsh, 2011), as they enhance communication in and outside the classroom and promote quality contact among students, which, in turn, enable them to develop their interactional and intercultural competence (Mont & Masats, 2018).

Within the framework of a project on research and innovation (2016ACUP-001 - LCF/PR/RC16/10100003), a group of Catalan secondary students at risk of social exclusion were teamed with a high school class in Greece with the objective to get to know each other and plan an exchange visit. This study aims at investigating how these learners develop their interactional competence (He & Young, 1998) in formal and non-formal face-to face and virtual encounters thanks to the use of technology. Our study analyses samples of various data sources: (a) classroom interactions recorded in the Catalan school during the preparation of the introductory videos the students were to send to their counterparts in Greece, (b) the virtual encounters, (c) face-to-face interaction during the actual trip to Greece, (d) informal non-teacher mediated spontaneous communication through social media (among students of both countries) and (e) face-to-face focus groups in which Catalan students and their teachers reflect upon the experience.

Our data suggest that authentic technology-mediated communication allows learners to put at play their strategic competence. That is, the use of technology in the classroom engineered situations where all learners were able to use the target language through consciously scaffolding their discourse with the support of their teachers, their peers, the multimodal resources offered by the online tools they were using and of their plurilingual repertoire.

Keywords: *peer interaction*, *interactional competence*, *social media, scaffolding, metalinguistic reflection*.

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