Telecollaboration through inquiry: how evidence-based intra-cultural learning promotes intercultural communicative competence

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Message from Editors

On behalf of the editorial board, we would like to express my greatest gratitude to all the people to have contributed to the publication of the second volume of "Data Science and Collaboration (DaSiC) Volume 4". The main purpose of this series is to break through a barrier, which impede collaborations among research fields or even within a single research field, as well as broaden our perspectives of linguistic research.

Prior to this publication, the Data Science in Collaboration conference (DaSiC 2020) was held as a sub-workshop of the Tsukuba Global Science Week (TGSW) 2020. DaSiC 2020 was composed of two independent sessions: SESSION 1 Poster presentation (October 8, 2020) and SESSION 2 Keynote Speech (December 10, 2020). Both sessions were conducted online due to the spared of COVID-19.

In SESSION 1, Poster presentation, we had a total of 15 presentations. For all the presentations, lightening talks were video-recorded and Q-A session were conducted realtime on Zoom. There were heated discussions after each presentation and also more than 300 views were counted for video or audio links in total.

The keynote session was held online on Zoom. The main theme of this session was "Lexical Transition from interdisciplinary perspectives". We welcomed three honorable keynote speakers. Firstly, Takeshi Obayasi from Tohoku University discussed abstraction of historical information from the viewpoint of big data. Secondly, Ritsuko Kikusawa from National Museum of Ethnology talked about the diversity of lexicon from a historical linguistic point of view. And lastly, Akiko Nagano from University of Shizuoka discussed the potential of discussing morphological theories and contrastive studies of lexicon. All the three presentations attracted heated discussion from the audience and we were running out of time to cover all the questions. A total of 58 researchers, graduate and undergraduate students attended the session on Zoom.

In addition, Prof. Obayashi and Prof. Nagano comfortably agreed to our invitation for including their papers in this volume. We really appreciate their contributions.

This book is a collection of such inspiring and pioneering papers that were presented at the conference with a slight modification or extension depending on author's purpose. We hope that this volume will be a beneficial data resource for future research development.

February 7, 2021.

Editors:
Yuichi ONO
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Invited Paper

Regular Paper

Telecollaboration through inquiry: how evidence-based *intra*-cultural learning promotes intercultural communicative competence

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Abstract: With the advances of the Internet technologies, online international exchanges are becoming an essential element of teaching and learning communication and collaboration. Some online exchanges known as telecollaboration focus especially on developing learners' intercultural communicative competence. One of the main challenges for learners engaged in this form of virtual exchanges is that not all participants may be familiar with specific aspects of *their own lingua-culture.* This conceptual study attempts to develop an inquiry-based model of telecollaboration by incorporating the 5E Learning Cycle Model which includes learning stages, such as engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration, and evaluation. We argue that the combination of online intercultural learning and inquiry-based learning could help facilitate critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997) leading to a more authentic lingua-cultural knowledge exchange between online partners. Also, the inclusion of the elements of inquiry-based learning in online international collaborative projects might have a positive impact on promoting informed intercultural exchange.

Keywords: Telecollaboration, intercultural communication, inquiry-based learning.

1. Introduction

The main objective of telecollaboration is not merely to provide a platform for language practice, but to promote the development of intercultural communicative competence among learners (Byram 1997) through interaction, exchange (Belz and Thorne 2006), and structured tasks (O'Dowd and Waire 2009). In other words, the aim of telecollaborative exchanges and, more broadly, foreign language instruction, is no longer to produce near-native speakers but, in the words of Byram (1997, 12), intercultural speakers who can 'see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviors, and meanings [...] and those of their interlocutors. However, our examination of existing online intercultural exchanges suggests that the intra-cultural learning aspect of telecollaboration is the least academically researched.

Telecollaborative exchanges place greater emphasis on the development of intercultural communicative competence but, in the majority of the works reviewed, rarely takes into account *the possibility that learners engaged in telecollaborative exchanges may not have sufficient awareness of their own lingua-culture.* Research in telecollaboration reveals that many teachers and facilitators continue to 'teach the same thing in a different way' (Kern, Ware, and Warschauer 2004) failing to help learners revisit the cultural precepts and phenomena within their own cultures. In this paper, we will address this conceptual problem by developing a model which incorporates inquiry-based learning into telecollaboration.

2. Literature review

The introduction of the concept of intercultural communicative competence has led to a focus on raising learners' awareness of how their own cultural background and assumptions may impact their attitudes towards and communication with people from other cultures (Alred, Byram, and Fleming 2003; Corbett, 2003). A key characteristic of intercultural communicative competence is the fact that it prepares learners for exposure to all cultures, including their own (Mughan 1999, 64). This is where the notion of intra-cultural communication gains prominence; thus, at least in theory, it should emerge as a crucial component in online intercultural exchange projects.

Learners acquire knowledge of their own language and culture dynamically, and the search for new knowledge stems from their motivation, expertise, and future career choices, especially among professional

linguists and public speakers (Breen 1985). This is also true with regard to telecollaboration from which participants gain original insights of not only their peers' language – manifested in the way they speak, pronounce words, and form expressions –but also their culture – the way they live, do things, articulate ideas, and understand concepts (Lamy and Goodfellow 2010). Many participants of online lingua-cultural exchanges share information about their language and culture based on their pre-existing, often limited, lingua-cultural knowledge.

Paradoxically, the abundance of highly specialized but easily searchable knowledge on the Internet (Jones and Kucker 2001) for anyone possessing a smartphone or computer may be the reason for Internet-mediated language exchanges eventually turning into a demotivating activity in which participants' expectations of new cultural and linguistic knowledge are not met during online intercultural exchanges. Thus, online language and intercultural exchanges should be designed considering learners' awareness of their own culture and language, its uniqueness and originality and, importantly, the level of knowledge credibility to be shared between online exchange partners. Byram (1997, 53) proposed the concept of 'critical cultural awareness', defined as an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspective, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries. Similarly, Risager (2007) suggested that intercultural competence comprises knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the interface between several cultural areas, including the students' own culture and a target culture.

Our review of the literature showed that telecollaboration to date have been extensively studied in relation to intercultural communication, but no major studies have been carried out to explore a systematic connection between online exchange and intra-cultural communication and learning. In the next section, we introduce the inquiry-based model of online intercultural exchanges aimed at filling this gap, thus yielding both conceptual and practical implications for designing online intercultural exchanges.

3. Incorporating Inquiry-based learning into telecollaboration

Existing cases reveal that online intercultural exchange necessitates the presence of two or more linguistically and culturally distinct groups of individuals whose goal is to learn about each other's language and culture through various Internet-mediated activities, such as information exchange, comparison and analysis, and collaboration and product creation (See, Figure 1).
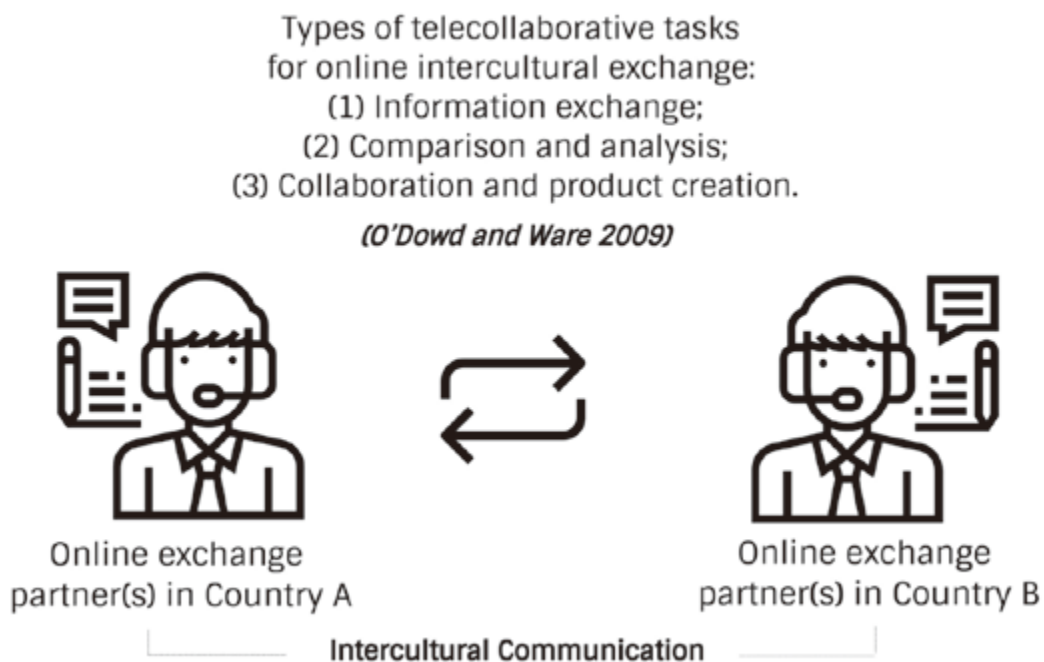

Figure 1. Conventional telecollaboration and telecollaborative tasks (created by author).

In this conventional form, learners on both sides consider themselves representatives of their culture and native speakers of their language, viewing each other as possessors of authentic cultural and linguistic knowledge. We encounter four problems related to this approach (see Figure 2).
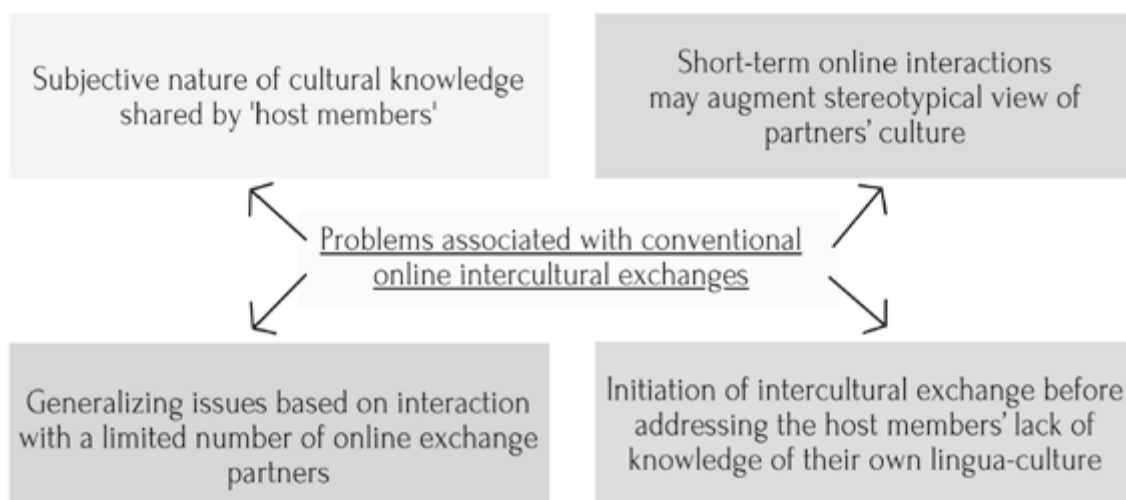
Figure 2. Problems associated with conventional online intercultural exchanges
(conceptualized and designed by author).

These combined problems present a challenge in the effective use of Internet-mediated tools for developing intercultural communicative competence. The modern multimedia-rich Internet offers enough terabytes of knowledge on any of the world's cultures and languages to render the whole idea of online intercultural exchanges more burdensome to some learners, unless there is a framework that could help online exchanges pro-actively develop intercultural communicative competence. Addressing this question brings us to intra-cultural communication and learning, or to be exact, their paucity in the design of most contemporary online intercultural exchange projects.

One important yet insufficiently explored area concerns the relationship between inquiry and the creation of a new lingua-cultural knowledge. In our proposed model (see, Figure 3), we closely examine inquiry-based learning because it represents a more systemic and scientific way of constructing new knowledge by following certain procedures, methods, and practices (Keselman 2003). Inquiry-based learning according to Pedaste et al. (2012) is a process of discovering new causal relations, with the learner formulating hypotheses and testing them by conducting experiments and/or making observations.
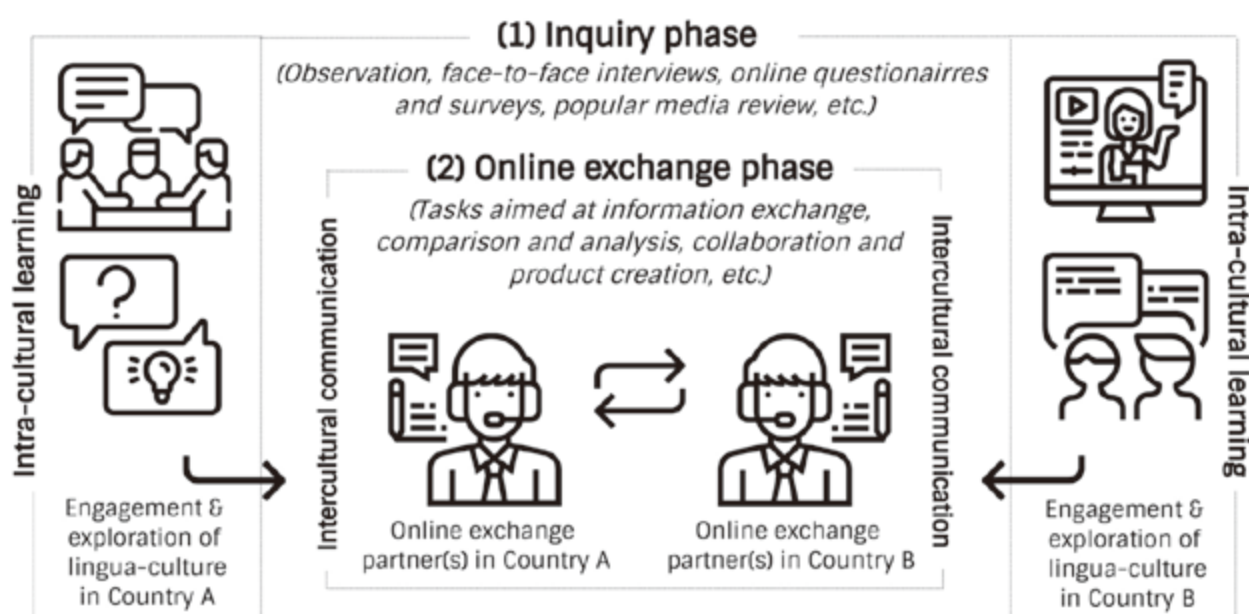

Figure 3. Inquiry-based model of telecollaboration
(conceptualized and designed by author).

Despite the numerous variations in learning cycles, the one used in this study is the 5E Learning Cycle Model (Bybee et al. 2006; Bybee 2009) in which each phase is highlighted using five words: engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration, and evaluation. This approach is useful for designing inquiry-based online intercultural exchanges because it provides a format that builds on what learners already know. Since the average host members already possess some knowledge of their lingua-culture, the 5E Learning Cycle Model helps them revisit that knowledge from other angles and find new patterns and relationships. Moreover, the experience of undergoing all five phases enables online exchange participants to develop their understanding of a concept across time. Below, we describe the five phases of inquiry-based online intercultural exchanges that have been modified from the 5E Instructional Model.

(1) *The engagement phase:* In this initial 'inquiry' phase, teachers work closely with their students to evaluate their prior knowledge and identify possible gaps in their current understanding of the topic. The key is that students at this phase are focused on the knowledge and knowledge gaps relating to their own culture and society, not those of their online partners.

(2) *The exploration phase:* The students now proceed to the 'core' inquiry phase, involving an active exploration of the issue in the context of their own culture. In other words, they begin building essential intra-cultural knowledge by searching for authentic information.

(3) *The explanation phase:* The explanation phase signals the beginning of the 'online exchange phase', in which learners from project countries (cultures) connect with the aim of explaining the results of their intra-cultural inquiry.

(4) *The elaboration phase:* The activities in this second 'online exchange' phase are designed to help exchange partners continue to collaborate in order to apply their new understanding of cultural concepts (similarities and differences in parenting cultures between two countries) shared by each country member. Students are encouraged to compare notes with their peers or formulate new observations of the concepts they have acquired.

(5) *The evaluation phase:* The evaluation phase may take different forms, it may continue as an 'online exchange' activity or students may return to their respective classrooms to assess the project's achieved objectives. The aim is to encourage students to reflect on what they have learnt about their own and their partners' culture, pose questions, and illustrate their knowledge (understanding) and skills (abilities).

4. Conclusions

These five phases of inquiry-based online intercultural exchange represent a holistic framework that can practically help foreign language learners gain in-depth knowledge of their own lingua-culture in order to support more engaging intercultural communication with peers on a global level, and develop essential skills of inquiry and evidence-based knowledge sharing. The future development of this model could demystify the image of 'inquiry-based learning' as a method used mainly in science labs, instead promoting it as a practical and effective learning method in social sciences and humanities.

Acknowledgments

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