

Discourse moves and intercultural communicative competence in telecollaborative chats

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Abstract

With a shift toward understanding the goals of foreign language learning as development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC; Thorne, 2010), telecollaborative interaction with geographically distant partners has been seen both as a pedagogical tool that can play a significant role in promoting intercultural negotiation abilities and attitudes and as a felicitous context for assessing these abilities. Addressing the assessment task through a linguistically-grounded investigation of telecollaborative chats, this exploratory study aims to demonstrate how abstract aspects of ICC can be operationalized as deployment of particular discourse structuring and linguistic resources. Drawing on the systemic-functional approach to discourse analysis (Eggins & Slade, 1997) and Byram's (1997) framework of ICC, this study examines written synchronous chats created throughout a 7-week telecollaborative activity by advanced American learners of German at a private US University and by German University students, future FL teachers. The quantitative and qualitative results demonstrate what precise discursive moves and language resources that realize them characterize ICC and at the same time enable it. Implications of the use of the methodological framework for further research of ICC in telecollaborative discourse, as well as some applications of the findings to pedagogy, conclude the study.

Language(s) Learned in this Study: German

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Introduction

In the past 20 years, the field of foreign language (FL) education has seen a shift toward conceptualizing language learning as development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC; see Byram, 1997; Modern Language Association, 2007; Thorne, 2010). Furthermore, the increased importance of intercultural communication abilities has been evident in FL teaching, learning, and assessment (e.g., Council of Europe, 2001; National Standards Collaborative Board, 2006), where researchers and practitioners seek to understand how intercultural competence can be operationalized and evaluated (e.g., Scarino, 2010; Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). In light of these changes, telecollaboration as a computer-mediated exchange with geographically distant partners has been seen both as a pedagogical approach that helps promote intercultural negotiation abilities and as a felicitous context for assessing these abilities.

A growing number of investigations of telecollaborative exchanges have attempted to address the assessment challenge by describing and evaluating the nature of ICC as well as the intercultural miscommunication that may occur in telecollaborative exchanges (e.g., O'Dowd, 2003; Ware & Kramsch, 2005). Methodologically, two types of data have been used in these mixed-method quantitative and qualitative analyses: student questionnaires or interviews and student online interactive discourse (e.g., chats, emails, online forum entries). With regard to the latter, the linguistically-grounded investigations that aim to demonstrate how abstract aspects of ICC can be operationalized as use of specific linguistic resources such as pronouns (e.g., Belz, 2003; Kinginger & Belz, 2005; Menard-

Warwick, 2009) and particular discourse structuring strategies such as initiating moves (e.g., Belz, 2005; Kitade, 2012) are of particular importance to FL educators.

Representing the approach to language as playing a constructivist role in shaping of social reality (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1989) and the sociocultural approach to learning (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978), these linguistically-grounded studies share two important assumptions. First, they follow the research strand that views culture and intercultural competence in dynamic terms as discursive, and thus linguistically-based, practices (e.g., Kramsch, 1998; Martin & Rose, 2008). And second, they utilize an argument made in conversation analytical (e.g., Mackey, 2007) and socio-culturally-oriented studies (e.g., Lantolf, 2000) that learning is connected to engagement in interactional contexts as environments in which cognitive and linguistic development can be supported. Drawing on the same assumptions, the current study contributes to the understanding of intercultural learning through telecollaboration by examining telecollaborative chats with a focus on what precise discursive moves and what language resources that realize these moves exemplify ICC, at the same time enabling its further development.

As argued below, this study offers some new insights to the field of ICC through telecollaboration in the following way: It investigates features of telecollaborative discourse in the context of advanced content-based language learning through a methodological approach to the analysis of the written chat data that is based on the theory of systemic-functional linguistics (SFL; Eggins & Slade, 1997). This approach makes it possible to systematically connect the discourse-semantic aspects of telecollaborative exchanges with their realizations through particular linguistic resources (e.g., a disagreement can be realized as a declarative or as an interrogative, with different communicative effects). In this regard, the study proposes an analytical framework that can be instrumental for linking the focus on the macro semantic features of telecollaborative discourse (i.e., initiating moves) to the interest in use of specific language forms (i.e., interrogatives, declaratives) that enable particular types of meaning-making (cf. Möllering & Levy, 2012, p. 253).

I start with a section dedicated to the discussion of how the findings of the linguistically-based studies of online exchanges contribute to our understanding of ICC. Building on the insights from these investigations, I present the research questions for the current study as well as the methodological framework for analysis that can enhance the exploration of communicative strategies used in telecollaborative discourse. The description of the context of the study, its participants, and its design is followed by the report and discussion of the quantitative and qualitative results of the analysis that connect the discourse strategies used by the exchange partners both to the linguistic forms that realize them and to the aspects of ICC, as laid out in Byram's framework (1997). Observations on the research and pedagogical implications of the study conclude the article.

ICC Manifested Through a Choice of Particular Language Forms and Discourse Strategies in a Telecollaborative Exchange

The point of departure for the majority of linguistically-grounded studies of ICC in the context of telecollaborative exchanges is Byram's (1997) framework in which he proposes to view the construct less in terms of discrete and static knowledge or facts and more as behaviors—verbal behaviors in particular. A view of ICC that is based on the understanding of culture being discourse-based puts dialogic interaction between intercultural partners, like in telecollaborative encounters, into the research focus. Within this framework, of particular importance to this study is the *skill of discovery and interaction*, spelled out as the “ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real time communication” (p. 61). Focusing on the features of dialogic interaction through which these abilities can be displayed enables discourse analysts to draw a link between more abstract components of intercultural learning—such as “the attitudes of curiosity and openness” (Byram, 1997, p. 50)—and specific features of language use that actually help construct these attitudes. The findings of these discourse analytical studies help us understand ICC in terms of two aspects of telecollaborative activity: (a) the use of particular linguistic forms by the participants and (b) the overall structuring of their discourse.

Use of Particular Linguistic Forms in Telecollaborative Exchanges

Focusing on linguistic forms, Belz's (2003) seminal study of the email exchanges between an American learner, a native speaker of English, and two German partners revealed important trends in the deployment of two types of linguistic resources. The first type was comprised of linguistic forms that realized different types of attitude: affect (e.g., *happy*), judgment (e.g., *fair*), and appreciation (e.g., *interesting*). The second type included markers of epistemic modality that referred to the degree of confidence in the truth value of a proposition, thus serving to either open or close the dialogic space (mitigation vs. intensifying strategies; e.g., *probably* vs. *naturally*). Belz's detailed analysis demonstrated that despite the same rate of use of all attitudinal resources by the partners, the American learner preferred expressions of positive appreciation and hedged his assertions, while the German partners preferred expressions of negative judgment and boosted their propositions. These opposing linguistic realizations of stance were linked by Belz to the disappointment felt by the participants in the exchange, as well as to the missed opportunity for building a positive relationship and developing ICC.

Another prominent language feature singled out by linguistically-based investigations is questions that help enact the skill of discovery as manifestation of ICC (Byram, 1997, p. 62). O'Dowd (2003), in his study of emails between Spanish and British university students, noted how emails from a more successful¹ intercultural engagement displayed a greater number of questions posed to the telecollaborative partners than the less successful ones. Ware (2005), in her study of the German-American telecollaborative exchange, pointed out that it was not only the quantity of questions, but also the balance in the use of questions by the participants on both sides of the exchange and other interactional features (e.g., forms of address) that opened more opportunities for intercultural learning and relationship building. Ware's more recent investigation (2013) of the email interactions between adolescents in Spain and the US corroborate the findings of the earlier study, as it singles out a high number of questions from partners on both sides of the exchange and other interactional features (e.g., use of emoticons) as factors that contribute to successful intercultural exchange and development of ICC.

Providing further insight into the role of questioning techniques, Belz (2005) expands her quantitative analysis with an in-depth investigation of the type and function of questions in a telecollaborative exchange. While the quantitative description revealed that German partners in a particular telecollaborative group asked a greater number of questions that could point to successful intercultural engagement, the qualitative examination showed that it was really the number of particular types of questions that were connected to ICC gain: *Wh-interrogatives* that elicited most information, *yes-or-no questions* that limited the potential for expressing one's opinion, or *either/or questions* that framed the interlocutor's answer in terms of only two predetermined options.

The focus on questions as a resource for signaling curiosity and enacting the skill of discovery was also central in Chun's (2011) study of German-American telecollaborative asynchronous forum discussions and synchronous chats. On the one hand, Chun found that the American students connected the smaller quantity of questions posed to the lack of success of telecollaborative chats. On the other hand, the discourse analysis of the data led her to suggest that "simple question-simple answer" (p. 416) sequences do not really contribute to ICC gain. Chun concluded that it was not so much the quantity of questions posed but the ability to engage in longer exchanges by "contributing unsolicited thoughts" (p. 416) and expanding one's opinions through statements that resulted in interculturally substantive interactions.

Discourse Structuring in Telecollaborative Exchanges

While the studies outlined above primarily focus on particular linguistic resources of the exchange (e.g., interrogatives vs. declaratives), investigations in a second strand reveal a different emphasis in the discourse analytic approach to online interactions. Rather than examining specific linguistic resources, they focus on the discourse-semantic function of interactional moves that help us see what roles participants take on to shape the intercultural interaction and to what degree these roles are conducive to fostering ICC development. Methodologically, these studies not only consider particular types of

discursive moves in an exchange, but importantly also their sequencing. This approach enables us to examine in a more precise way the manifestation of ICC by looking at interactivity, topic development, interactional balance, and reciprocity, emphasized as important by Ware (2005, 2013) and Chun (2011).

For example, Kitade (2012), in a study of asynchronous online forum discussions among Japanese students and Japanese language learners, used the adapted exchange structure framework (e.g., Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) to reveal various patterns of exchanges and participant roles associated with them and related these patterns and roles to intercultural learning. Kitade (2012) identified 5 types of interactional moves and argument roles associated with them. Focusing on two groups that exhibited the highest levels of interactivity (defined as the percentage of initiating moves with follow-ups), Kitade demonstrated how interactivity in these exchanges was maintained through different types of follow-up moves that might have contributed to different degrees of ICC development.

A similar methodological approach was used by Leone (2012) in her study of video telecollaborative chats in a teletandem exchange between Italian- and English-speaking university students. While in this study Leone does not explicitly connect discourse structural moves to aspects of ICC, her investigation is relevant to the current discussion as it uses a methodology that allows us to describe conversations in terms of participant engagement level (e.g., controlling vs. non-controlling moves) and degree of reciprocity in a co-constructed communicative event—arguably significant contributing factors for intercultural learning.

Finally, Tudini (2007) offers a detailed examination of a particular type of discourse structure (i.e., meaning-negotiation episodes) that she identifies as promoting intercultural engagement in a synchronous written chat exchange between Australian learners of Italian and native Italian speakers. Tudini investigated negotiation of meaning related to intercultural content as opposed to lexis, grammar, and syntax. She demonstrated that this type of negotiation was an important part of online chats and that learners were more active than native speakers with regard to reacting through questions to the culture-related triggers, thus using the opportunity for intercultural learning afforded by the telecollaborative context.

Juxtaposing the two types of studies discussed above leads to the following conclusion: The investigations that focus on linguistic forms somewhat leave the global discourse functioning of these forms in the background. For example, considering the use of interrogatives as a manifestation of intercultural curiosity may miss the fact that statements may also function as initiating moves. At the same time, not all question types (i.e., Wh- interrogatives vs. polar interrogatives) are good for fostering intercultural engagement, as pointed out by Belz (2005). Conversely, the studies that investigate global discourse structuring leave out the issue of specific linguistic realizations. For example, Tudini's intercultural socio-historical negotiation moves (2007, p. 592) can be analyzed further for the salient linguistic forms that enable such negotiation. Most of the moves that elicit cultural information appear to be realized as Wh-interrogatives. Furthermore, Kitade points out that consideration of specific ways various argument roles are linguistically carried out can be instrumental in determining what these roles really are (2012, p. 82). And finally, in Leone's (2012) study, the analytical framework could potentially be even more helpful if it incorporated a discussion of the linguistic make-up of controlling versus non-controlling moves.

Drawing on the insights of the above-described research, the current investigation has three foci. It aims to examine the synchronous written course-based and thematically-oriented chats between American advanced L2 learners of German and L1 German users in terms of discourse structure, its salient linguistic realizations, and aspects of ICC. In particular, the study poses three research questions:

RQ1: What are the discourse semantic moves American (LL) and German (GS) partners use in the telecollaborative chats?

RQ2: How are some of these discourse-semantic moves realized linguistically? What patterns can be identified?

RQ3: How can some aspects of ICC identified in Byram's (1997) framework: the skill of discovery and interaction (p. 52), the attitude of openness and curiosity (p. 50), and the ability to change perspectives (p. 50, 108) be linked to the identified discourse semantic moves?

Analytical Framework: The SFL Approach to Discourse Analysis

While there are a number of approaches that aim to describe interactional exchanges either in terms of linguistic features (i.e., use of pronouns) or discourse structural patterns (i.e., initiation or response moves), the SFL approach to conversation analysis² (Egins & Slade, 1997) was used in the study for two reasons. First, in line with the constructivist approach, this framework offered a comprehensive model of language as a strategic resource for shaping social context that accounted for the links between discourse structure, linguistic form, and contextual variables of interaction. In particular, the SFL theory of language conceptualizes language production in terms of three interrelated strata connected to each other through the principle of realization: context that is constructed through discourse-semantics realized through linguistic forms. In this study, the contextual stratum was seen as comprised of the overarching communicative goals of task-based intercultural exchange. These communicative goals were related, in line with the SFL model of language, to the particular discourse-structural patterns or moves that represented how interlocutors chose to initiate, steer, and develop an interaction. The discourse-structural moves were further connected to their various grammatical realizations. The second reason for using the SFL approach was the extended taxonomy of moves developed in this framework that could capture elusive semantic differences between move types and thus allow a rich description of the participant roles as reflected in the data.

The Contextual Level: Communicative Goals of the Intercultural Exchanges

The overarching communicative goals were identified as exchange of cultural information and perspectives and related to the three aspects of Byram's (1997) framework: the skill of discovery and interaction, the attitude of openness and curiosity, and the ability to change perspectives.

The Discourse-Semantic Level: Types of Moves in Interactional Exchanges

The discourse-semantic model of interaction used in this study is based on Egins and Slade's (1997) elaboration of Halliday's (1994) approach to dialogue and adapted to the analysis of the telecollaborative chats. The four types of discourse-functional moves relevant for the current analysis are described below and exemplified throughout the article.

The first type of moves is *initiating moves* that "initiate talk around a proposition, ... [and] are generally assertive moves to make, indicating a claim to a degree of control over the interaction" (Egins & Slade, 1997, p. 194). From the grammatical perspective, these moves "are not elliptically dependent on prior moves" but "are cohesive in other non-structural ways, such as through lexical or referential cohesion" (p. 193). The initiating moves found in the chat data include commands, statements as facts, statements as opinions, open questions as facts or opinions, and closed questions as facts or opinions. Facts and opinions were distinguished in line with Egins and Slade (p. 193) by considering expressions of modality and evaluative lexis when coding opinions.

The second category of moves includes *responding moves* as reactions to the moves produced by the interlocutor. This category consists of the interaction supporting respond-answer, respond-agree, respond-register, and respond-acknowledge moves, as well as the confronting respond-contradict and respond-withhold moves. Respond-elaborate, respond-extend, and respond-enhance moves further develop the interlocutor's propositions beyond giving an answer or agreement to them and occur immediately following the interlocutor's move.

The third class of moves is *continuing moves* that elaborate (continue-elaborate); extend (continue-extend) or enhance (continue-enhance) the interlocutor's original move, whether it is an initiating or responding move; or check or monitor if the interlocutor understands or follows the turn (continue-

monitor). Additionally, two new moves, not present in the framework by Eggins and Slade (1997), were introduced to account for the current data: continue-evaluate and respond-evaluate. Both moves provide an evaluative meta-comment or reaction to interaction itself (rather than its ideational content), either following one's own prior move (continue-evaluate) or the interlocutor's prior move (respond-evaluate).

Finally, the fourth class of moves is comprised of *rejoinder moves* that function to deepen the conversation even further through alignment and disalignment strategies. The alignment strategies include eliciting additional information (rejoinder-clarify), verifying the information (rejoinder-confirm), volunteering further information for confirmation (rejoinder-probe), and providing clarifications (rejoinder-resolve). The disalignment rejoinder strategies, while not seen as openly confrontational in this analysis, challenge the position of the interlocutor by dismissing the addressee's right to his or her position through a rejoinder-challenge moves, by questioning the relevance and legitimacy of a prior move through a rejoinder-rebound move, by contradicting the significance of a challenge through a rejoinder-refute move; or by offering an alternative position through a rejoinder-rechallenge move.

The Linguistic Level: Mood Types

To identify patterns in the linguistic realization of moves, the analysis draws on the grammatical system of mood (Halliday, 1994) and differentiates between the following mood types presented and exemplified in Table 1.

Table 1. *Mood Types*

Mood Type	Example
Full declarative	GS: To tell you the truth, I don't like them. ³
Elliptical declarative	LL: or in the USA
Tagged declarative	GS: it is really quite sad, don't you think?
Tagged elliptical declarative	LL: especially when the majority of Germans were excited about the success of the German team, no?
Full polar interrogative	LL: Do you think that only about German national anthems?
Elliptical polar interrogative	LL: Did the neo-Nazis play a particular role during the world championship? LL: in terms of politics or sport?
Full Wh-interrogative	GS: What do you think about national anthems?
Elliptical Wh-interrogative	GS: how come not simply make an effort to make everyone happy
Imperative	GS: Tell me!
Minor	LL2: Yes, exactly.

Context of the Study

Participants and Data

The study reported here draws on part of the data of a larger data set that consists of seven one-to-one weekly synchronous written chat sessions, two of which were held at home and five during class time; blog entries; website pages; and student questionnaires used within a telecollaborative exchange between 13 American learners of German at Georgetown University and 13 students at the Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg, Germany. On the American side, students engaged in the telecollaborative tasks that were integrated into the second thematic unit within an advanced-level class (after approximately 265 hours of instruction), *Issues and Trends*. The course was a Level 4 course in a 5-tier content- and language-integrated curriculum in the German undergraduate program at Georgetown. On the German side, students were taking a course on computer-mediated FL learning as part of the German as a Foreign

Language (Deutsch als Fremdsprache) teacher education certificate. Both groups of participants read journalistic articles and watched movies on the topic of *Soccer Patriotism and National Identity*, the focus of the second unit in the *Issues and Trends* course. In their chat conversations, both American and German students were asked to draw on the detailed weekly prompts that contextualized the topic for discussion and questions related both to the weekly readings and to their personal experiences and dispositions toward national identity, national symbols, and sports. The chat tasks were not conceptualized as an interviewer–interviewee set up. Whereas the primary goal of the telecollaboration activities for both groups was engagement with content and intercultural exchange, the differences in the instructional contexts yielded slightly different motivations for the participants in the project. For the American students, the project primarily meant an opportunity to enhance their language and culture learning. For the German students, learning to conduct a telecollaborative exchange was an equally important aspect of the project. Instructors of both courses discussed the chats and the chatting experience with the students throughout the telecollaboration exchange.

Study Design and Method

Two chat groups, Group 6 and Group 8, were identified as focal groups for the purposes of the current study for the following reasons: The two groups displayed contrasting levels of engagement in the telecollaborative activity. Group 8 was considered a more engaged partnership because both partners were present for all seven chats of the telecollaborative exchange. Conversely, Group 6 was considered a less engaged partnership because the participants conducted only four out of seven telecollaborative chats. At the same time, the American partners in these two groups displayed the same level of language proficiency as measured by the internally developed C-test scores (Mozgalina & Ryshina-Pankova, 2015) before the course started.

To investigate the research questions listed above, a mixed-methods research design was used, whereby the chat files and the end-of-the semester questionnaires (completed only by the US group) were collected and analyzed. The chats were examined quantitatively and qualitatively for moves and mood structure and the results were compared to the student answers in the end-of-the semester questionnaire and interpreted in terms of emerging aspects of ICC. To conduct the moves and mood analysis, all chat files were transferred into the CHILDES⁴ format. The consecutive chat entries (defined as *turns*) of each participant were divided into moves defined as independent clauses with their dependent, embedded (i.e., noun modification through relative clauses), or quoting clauses that were coded in terms of the framework of structural moves and mood types described above.

The author and a graduate student research assistant, Julia Goetze, coded all the chats from Group 6 and Group 8 separately and then met to compare the results of the coding process. The inter-rater reliability was 76% for the first 3 chats and 89% for the remaining chats, with most disagreements being on the difference between the continue-elaborate and continue-extend moves. All disagreements were resolved.

Results

The results of the study are presented in line with the first two research questions. The results for Group 6 are always presented first.

Discourse-Semantic Structure

RQ1: What are the discourse semantic moves used by American (LL) and German (GS) partners in the telecollaborative chats?

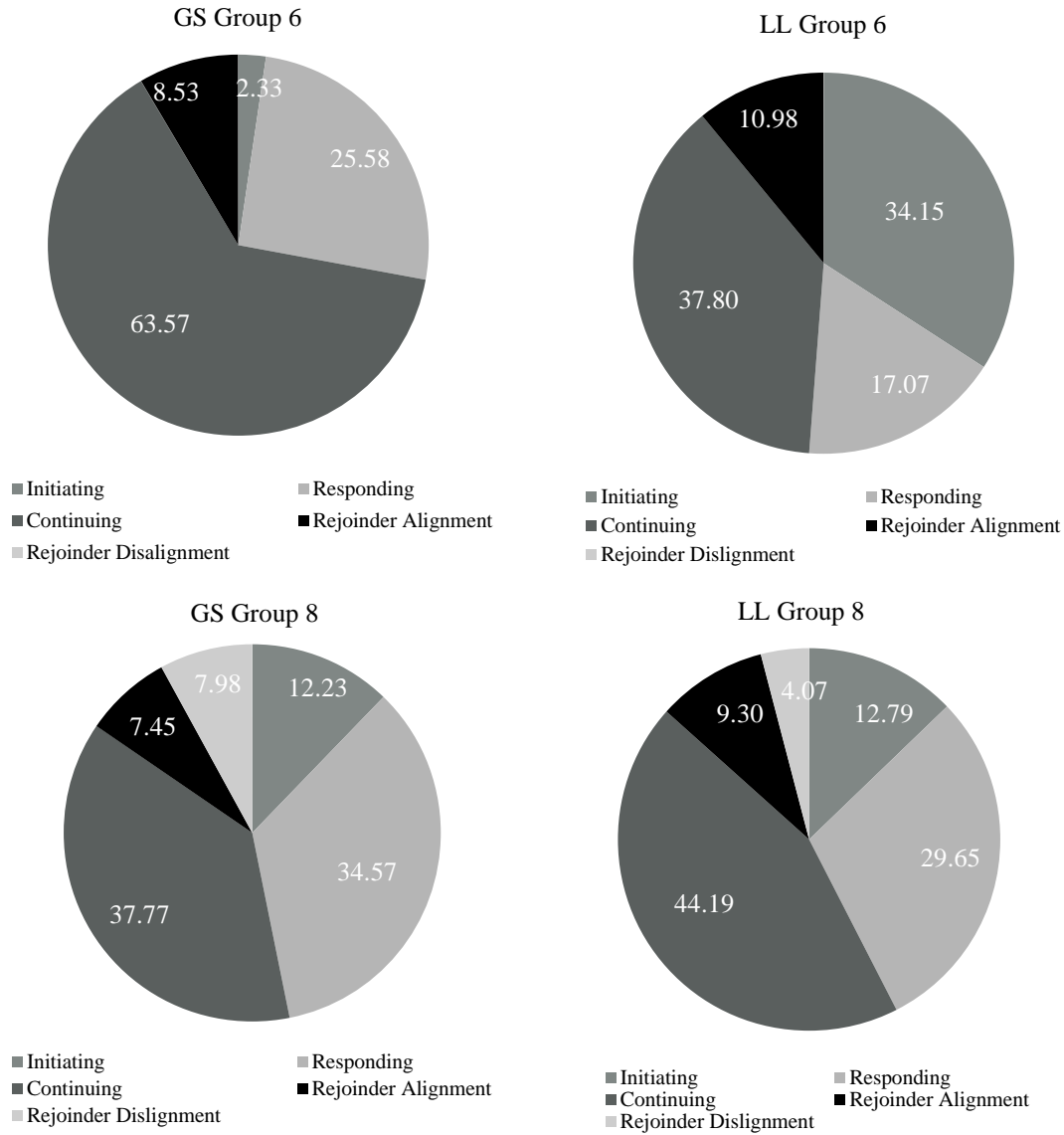


Figure 1. Types of moves in % by LL and GS in the two groups.

Table 2. Average Number of Moves and Words per Chat in the Two Groups

	Average # of Moves per Chat	Average # of Words per Chat
Group 6	52.8	562.5
Group 8	60.0	511.5

While Table 2 shows that the averages for the number of moves and number of words in the chats of the two groups are not that dissimilar, a focus on the functional move types of each participant, Figure 1, reveals stark quantitative differences between the interactional patterns of the participants in the two groups. These differences are most apparent in four areas: the frequencies (in %)⁵ of initiating, respond-answer, continuing, and rejoinder disalignment moves.

Initiating Moves

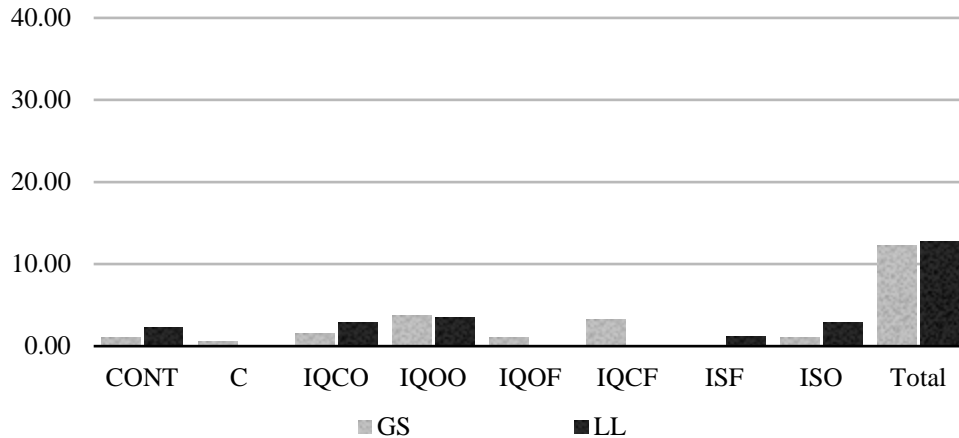


Figure 2. Types of initiating moves in % for Group 6.

CONT = contextualization, C = command, IQCO = initiation question closed opinion, IQOO = initiation question open opinion, IQOF = initiation question open fact, IQCF = initiation question closed fact, ISF = initiation statement fact, ISO = initiation statement opinion

The analysis of the move types for the chat interactions of Group 6 (see [Figure 2](#)) reveals that most initiating moves that aim to elicit intercultural information, as well as attitudes, values, and beliefs originate with the LL who devotes 34.15% of all of his moves to initiate intercultural exchanges in the chats, while the GS produces only 2.33% of the initiating moves throughout the entire telecollaborative activity. Most of the LL's initiating moves are closed (IQCO = 14.63%) and open opinion questions (IQOO = 6.10%).⁶

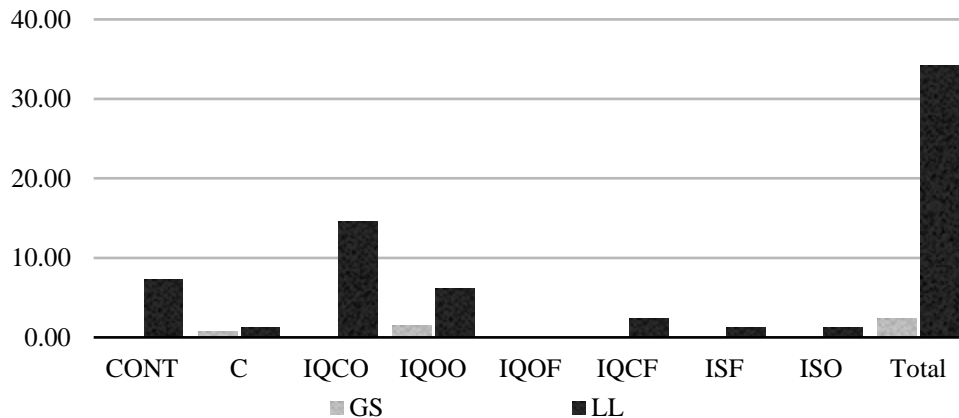


Figure 3. Types of initiating moves in % for Group 8.

CONT = contextualization, C = command, IQCO = initiation question closed opinion, IQOO = initiation question open opinion, IQOF = initiation question open fact, IQCF = initiation question closed fact, ISF = initiation statement fact, ISO = initiation statement opinion

By contrast, as evident from [Figure 3](#), the intercultural exchange of Group 8 is characterized by a much more even, in fact almost perfectly even, distribution of initiating moves between the two partners across all chats (12.23% and 12.79%). The most frequent type of initiating moves are open opinion questions (IQOO = 3.49% for LL and 3.72% for GS).

Responding Moves

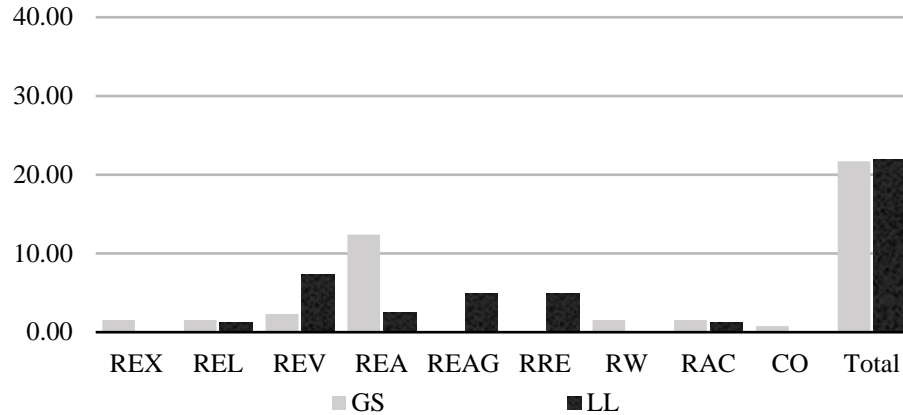


Figure 4. Types of responding moves in % for Group 6.

REX = respond-extend, REL = respond-elaborate, REV = respond-evaluate, REA = respond-answer, REAG = respond-agree, RRE = respond-register, RW = respond-withdraw, RAC = respond-acknowledge, CO = respond-comply

For Group 6, the biggest in-group difference concerns the rate of the respond-answer move (see [Figure 4](#)). The GS’s rate of answers is five times higher than that of the LL (12.40% vs. 2.44%). The two partners in this group also differ in the respond-evaluate strategy, in that the LL has a three-times higher rate of evaluations of the partner’s moves.

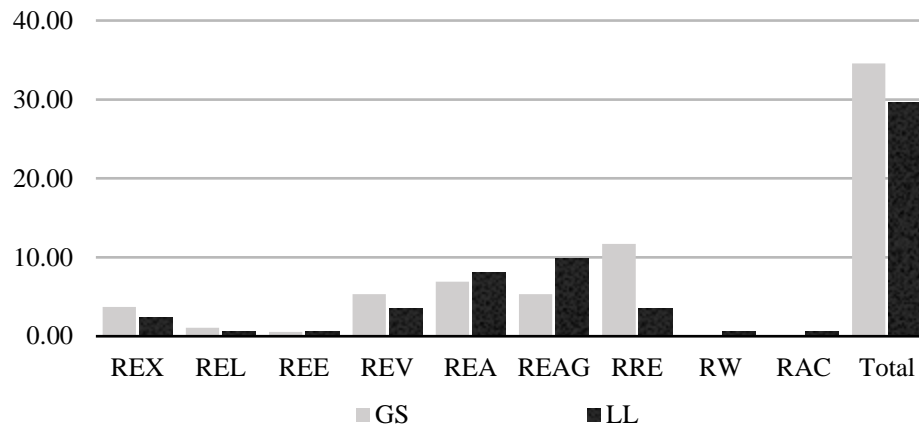


Figure 5. Types of responding moves in % for Group 8.

REX = respond-extend, REL = respond-elaborate, REV = respond-evaluate, REA = respond-answer, REAG = respond-agree, RRE = respond-register, RW = respond-withdraw, RAC = respond-acknowledge, CO = respond-comply

For Group 8 (see [Figure 5](#)), the difference in the rates of respond-answer and respond-evaluate moves is much less noticeable. The rate for the GS’s respond-evaluate move is 1.5 times higher; and the rate for the LL’s respond-answer move is only 1.2 times higher. The biggest in-group difference for Group 8 has to do with the rate of the respond-register moves, with the GS frequency of use for this type of move being 3.4 times higher than that of the LL; and the respond-agree move, with the LL expressing explicit agreement more frequently than the GS.

Continuing Moves

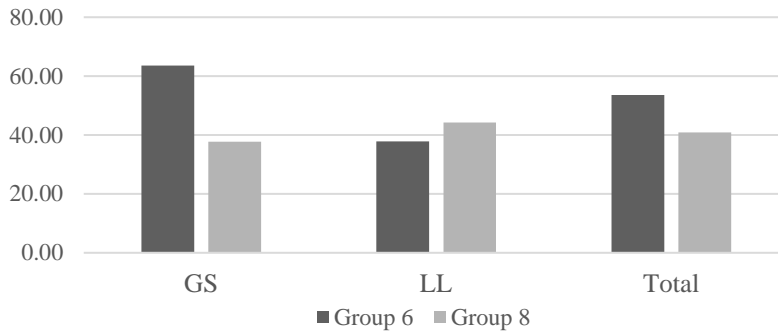


Figure 6. Continuing moves in % for the two groups.

Within Group 6, the LL and the GS display a significant difference in the rate of the continuing moves used, with the GS's rate being almost twice as high (1.7 times) as that of the LL (see [Figure 6](#)). Conversely, for Group 8, the difference in the rates of the continuing moves between the two partners is much smaller: only 1.2 times higher for the LL.

Rejoinder Moves

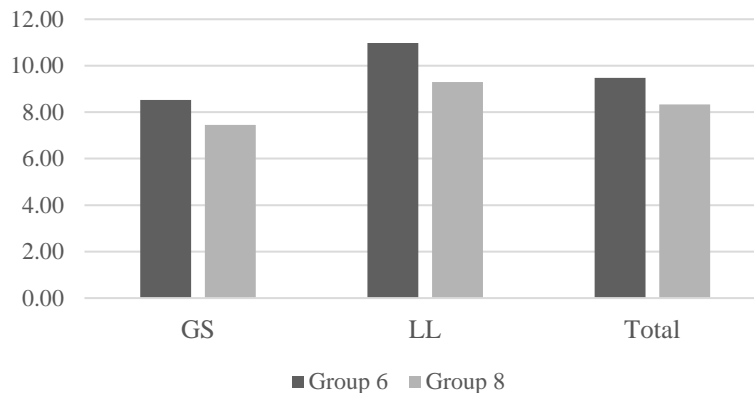


Figure 7. Rejoinder moves in % for the two groups.

Rejoinder moves signal the need for clarifications or for negotiation of disagreements. If both types of rejoinder moves (alignment and disalignment) are considered together, both the in-group and across-group differences in the interactional behavior of group partners are very slight (1.3 times the rate of rejoinder moves for the LL in Group 6 vs. 1.2 times the rate of rejoinder moves for the GS in Group 8; see [Figure 7](#)). However, if we consider only the rejoinder moves that negotiate disagreements, as in [Figure 8](#), then there is a more significant difference between the groups.

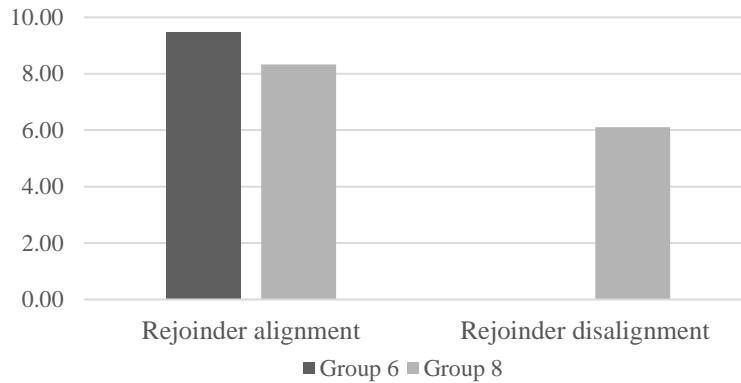


Figure 8. Rejoinder alignment and rejoinder disalignment in % for the two groups.

The partners in Group 6 are only engaged in the production of the rejoinder alignment moves, with the GS asking for clarifications and the LL providing them (7.50% of rejoinder-clarify by the GS vs. 9.76% of rejoinder-resolve by the LL). In contrast, in Group 8, the rejoinder disalignment moves are rather frequent (8.97% of all GS moves and 4.00% of all LL moves). The in-group dynamic (see [Figure 9](#)) shows that it is the GS in the group who more often challenges the LL (1.6% for the rejoinder-counter move and 5.85% for the rejoinder-rebound move), while the LL uses the rejoinder-rechallenge (2.91%) and the rejoinder-refute (0.58%) moves in response.

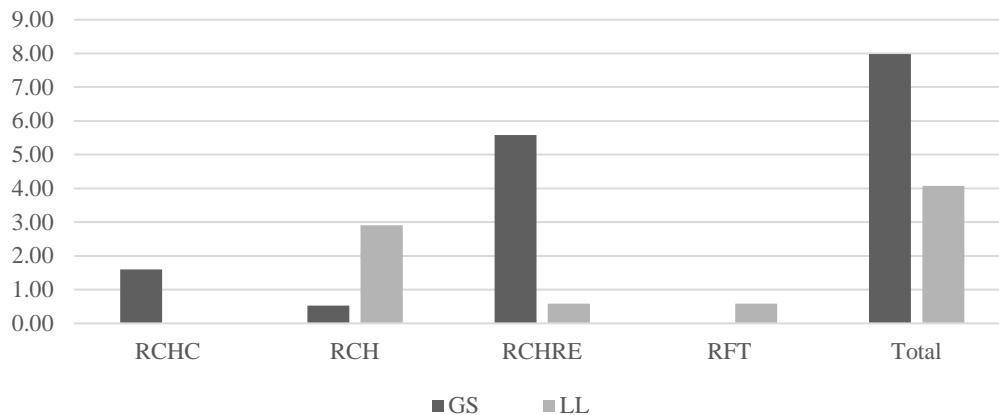


Figure 9. Types of rejoinder disalignment moves in % for Group 8.

RCHC = rejoinder-counter, RCH = rejoinder-rechallenge, RCHRE = rejoinder-rebound, RFT = rejoinder-refute

Linguistic Realizations

RQ2: How are some of these discourse-semantic moves realized linguistically? What patterns can be identified?

The mood analysis of the speech-functional moves provides evidence for the following patterns in linguistic realizations of the participants' turns. First, we can note a difference in the realization of the initiating moves across the two groups. [Figure 10](#) shows that in Group 6, the LL, who poses most initiating moves, realizes them predominantly as polar interrogatives (PI = 15) followed by declaratives (D = 8) and Wh-questions (WH = 5). By contrast, as seen in [Figure 11](#), in Group 8, the LL uses declaratives (D = 13) followed by Wh-interrogatives (WH = 5) and polar interrogatives (PI = 4) to initiate exchanges. The GS alternates between these three realization types, but gives most preference to Wh-

questions (D = 7; PI = 7; WH = 8).

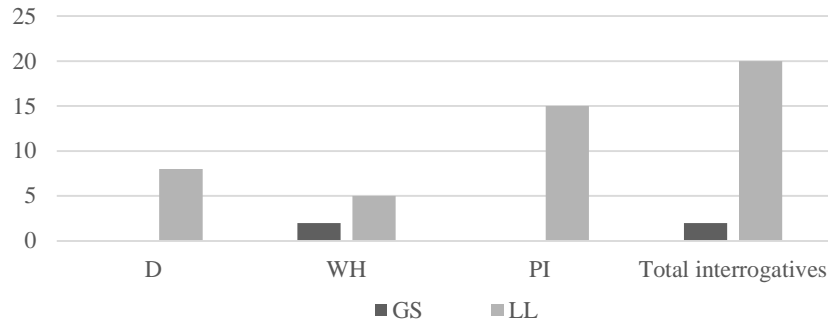


Figure 10. Mood realizations of initiating moves in raw numbers for Group 6. D = declaratives, WH = Wh-interrogatives, PI = polar interrogatives

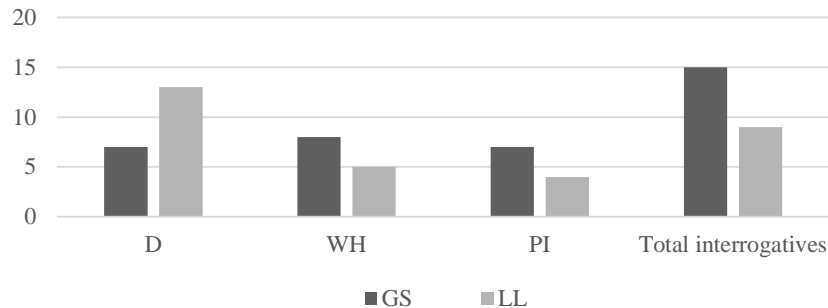


Figure 11. Mood realizations of initiating moves in raw numbers for Group 8. D = declaratives, WH = Wh-interrogatives, PI = polar interrogatives

A second observation arises from the analysis of the rejoinder moves that are realized using a variety of mood choices that include declaratives, interrogatives, and minor clauses. For the rejoinder-alignment moves in Group 6 (see [Figure 12](#)), the GS mostly uses interrogatives (polar and WH, 6 total) followed by declaratives for confirmation and clarification requests; while the LL mostly employs declaratives (6 total) to resolve clarifications.

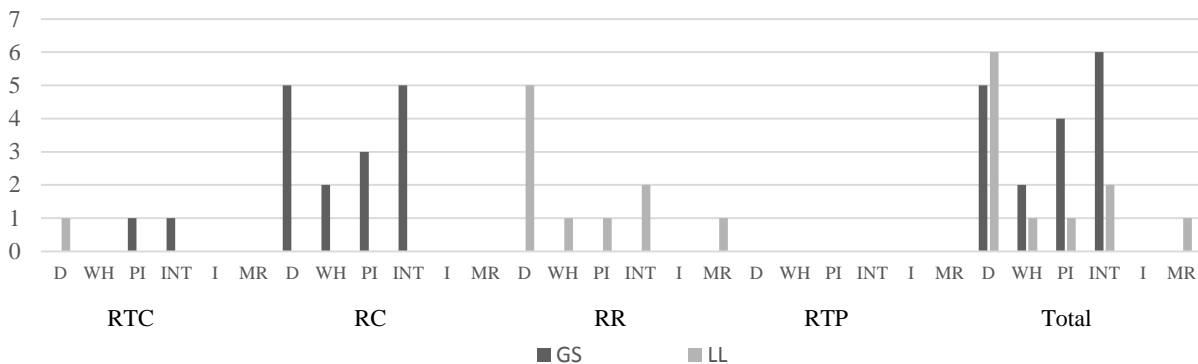


Figure 12. Mood realizations of rejoinder-alignment moves in raw numbers for Group 6. D = declaratives, WH = Wh-interrogatives, PI = polar interrogatives, INT = total interrogatives, I = imperatives, MR = minor, RTC = rejoinder-confirm, RC = rejoinder-clarify, RR = rejoinder-resolve, RTP = rejoinder-probe

In Group 8, the distribution of different mood realizations between the two participants is more balanced (see Figure 13). Requests for clarifications are realized mostly by interrogatives by the LL and a mix of interrogatives and declaratives by the GS. Both partners use declaratives to resolve clarifications. Declaratives, most of which are tagged, are also used both by the GS (2 tagged declaratives total) and the LL (3 tagged declaratives, 1 declarative; 4 total) to probe for the correctness of interpretation, a move that is absent altogether in the rejoinder-alignment moves in Group 6.

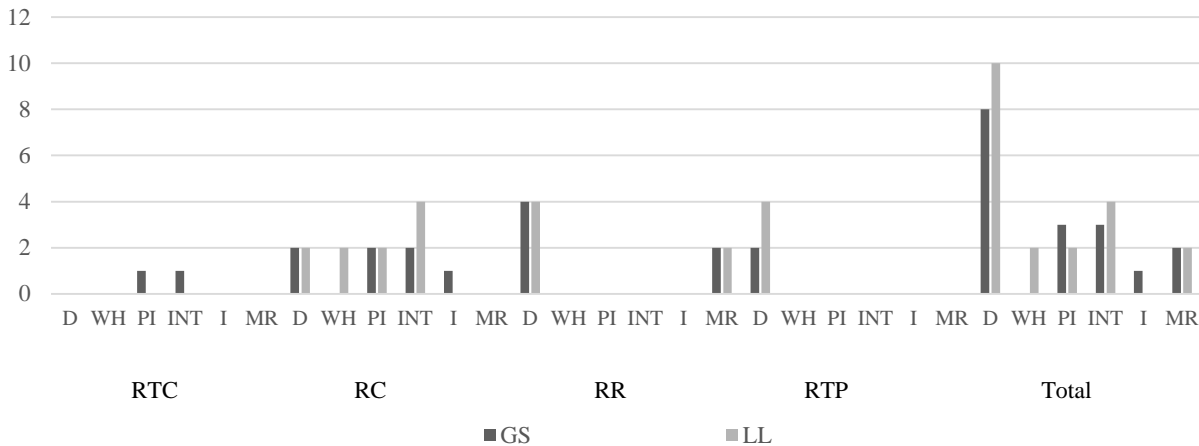


Figure 13. Mood realizations of rejoinder-alignment moves in raw numbers for Group 8. D = declaratives, WH = Wh-interrogatives, PI = polar interrogatives, INT = total interrogatives, I = imperatives, MR = minor, RTC = rejoinder-confirm, RC = rejoinder-clarify, RR = rejoinder-resolve, RTP = rejoinder-probe

Finally, Mood realizations for the rejoinder-disalignment moves in Group 8 also display a noteworthy pattern (see Figure 14).

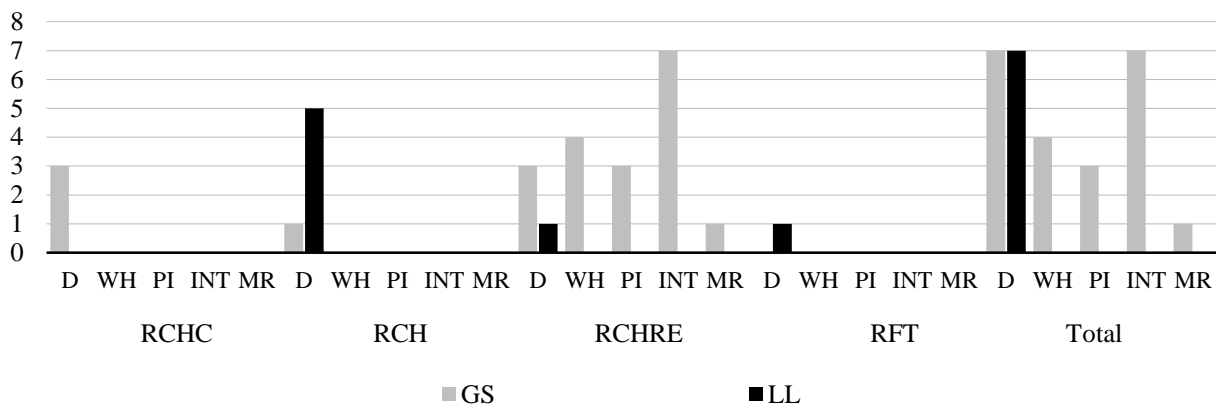


Figure 14. Mood realizations of Rejoinder-disalignment moves in raw numbers for Group 8. D = declaratives, WH = Wh-interrogatives, PI = polar interrogatives, INT = total interrogatives, MR = minor, RCHC = rejoinder-challenge, RCH = rejoinder-rechallenge, RCHRE = rejoinder-rebound, RFT = rejoinder-refute

The GS challenges (RCHC = 3) the LL as she counters her propositions by using declaratives. These contain a form of negation: *nicht* (to negate actions) or *kein* (to negate things), thus introducing disagreement into the dialogue. Furthermore, the GS uses mostly interrogatives (Int = 7) to realize the

rebound function to challenge her partner's assumptions through questions (RCHRE = 11). By contrast, the LL uses declaratives to refute a challenge (RFT = 2) and rechallenge the GS (RCH = 5). Almost all rechallenges contain *aber* (*but*) or *nur* (*only*) as a way of disclaiming the interlocutor's proposition by replacing it with a different one.

Discussion

The discussion interprets the results by addressing the third research question. RQ3: How can some aspects of ICC identified in Byram's (1997) framework: the skill of discovery and interaction (p. 52), the attitude of openness and curiosity (p. 50), and the ability to change perspectives (p. 50, 108) be linked to the identified discourse semantic moves? To relate Byram's aspects of ICC to the results of the analysis, three overarching functions of the discourse-semantic moves were distinguished: those contributing to *interactivity*, *expanding cultural information*, and *negotiation of disalignment*.

Interactivity

Here, the skill of discovery and interaction and the attitude of openness and curiosity will be considered through the notion of interactivity as a balance in initiating and responding moves between the two exchange partners. The analysis of the chats demonstrated contrasting types of interactivity in the two partnerships. In Group 6, the LL and the GS engaged in an imbalanced exchange where the LL controlled the chat flow by producing the majority of initiating, registering, and response evaluating moves. Meanwhile, the GS took on the role of responding to the initiations and asking for clarifications of the questions the LL posed. The LL's initiating moves were linguistically enabled primarily through the use of polar interrogatives that elicited the partner's response to the suggested attitudinal values and judgments (in bold) associated with aspects of German culture (see [Excerpt 1](#) and [Excerpt 2](#)).

Excerpt 1.

LL: *Do you think that soccer played a **big** role during these times?*

Excerpt 2.

LL: *Do you think that the world championship really leads to **inclusion** of other nationalities or rather to the **dangerous** forms of nationalism?*

At the same time, these questions somewhat limited the dialogic space for a response as they determined the options for evaluating cultural phenomena instead of leaving it up to the interlocutor to share her own opinions. This applied even more to the polar either/or questions as in [Excerpt 2](#) (cf. Belz, 2005, p. 21).

The type of intercultural relationship that was constructed in the telecollaborative chats by Group 6 can be described as one between a non-expert (i.e., the LL) and an expert (i.e., the GS), or as between an interviewer and interviewee. From the perspective of ICC, the LL displayed an attitude of openness and curiosity as well as the skill of discovery and interaction as the ability to elicit rich factual and attitudinal information about the topic of national symbols and soccer patriotism from the GS. However, the interactions were asymmetrical and fell short of resulting in a true exchange of intercultural perspectives.

The LL's answers on the end-of-the semester questionnaire corroborated this interpretation. The LL found "the chats to be enlightening, pleasant, and enriching" and noted that they "brought to life" the course readings and "made it much easier to engage with the material." However, he also noted that it was difficult to "hit a true dialogue point" during these chats. The LL attributed this shortcoming to being "crunched for time" while conducting the chats in class⁷ and to the written communication channel that also made the communication slower: "we would have been able to discuss more if it was all verbal (skype)." The time and the channel could be relevant explanations. However, with regard to time, the results of the analysis for the first two chats in the group that lasted longer than 50 minutes of the class period (75 minutes for Group 6) displayed a low level of interactivity as well. This means that other

factors could have played a role, like the dispositions to the telecollaborative task and the interactive style of these partners that shaped the exchange in this way.

In contrast, Group 8 displayed a high level of interactivity and interactional balance, both in terms of initiating moves and respond-answer moves. This balance could be seen as a display of mutual and reciprocal curiosity and desire to be actively involved in the intercultural inquiry. The attitude of curiosity and the “willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality” (Byram, 1997, p. 50) demonstrated through this interactional balance was both a characteristic of a successful telecollaborative exchange and a condition for further development of intercultural competence, as noted by other researchers (e.g., O’Dowd, 2003; Ware, 2005, 2013). To achieve this balance, both the GS and the LL used primarily Wh-interrogatives to initiate elicitation of intercultural information and attitudes. This can be regarded as a successful strategy, as Wh-interrogatives allowed the interlocutor the most freedom to contribute to the exchange—or in Byram’s words “to elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events” (1997, p. 52). A relatively frequent use of declaratives to realize initiating moves by the LL helped this participant in two ways: Initiating moves as declaratives contextualized the interaction by making references to the readings, previous chats or class discussions (see [Excerpt 3](#)). Furthermore, the use of declaratives as initiating statements (e.g., initiating statement opinion) helped the LL to steer the discussion in the direction of explicit cultural comparisons (see [Excerpt 4](#)).

[Excerpt 3.](#)

LL: *So this week we talked a lot about the significance of the soccer world championship.*

[Excerpt 4.](#)

LL: *I think I am trying to make a comparison with Spain.*

The balanced and reciprocal nature of the telecollaborative activity in Group 8 was captured well by the use of the word *exchange* in the LL’s questionnaire response where this participant noted that the chats “encouraged ... the best exchange of ideas.”

Expanding Cultural Information

Whereas interactivity as a manifestation of the skill of discovery and interaction has been examined as the moves that follow the basic conversational initiation-response scheme, it is the additional elaborating, enhancing, extending, and rejoinder-clarify moves that expand this basic pattern. These moves deepen the negotiation, further enabling cultural discovery and contributing to ICC development. The two groups display major differences in the use of these additional moves, as well. In Group 6, it was mostly the GS who engaged in topic development by producing the majority of responding and continuing moves. These moves were mostly realized as declaratives. Most clarification requests realized primarily as interrogatives were posed by the GS and concerned the LL’s initiating moves.

In contrast to the interactional behavior in Group 6, the partners in Group 8 took turns expanding cultural information by offering their opinions and facts about cultural phenomena through continuing moves and by commenting on each other’s contributions through respond-elaborate, enhance, and extend moves that developed the conversation beyond respond-answer or respond-agree. There was also more balance in posing and satisfying clarification requests. The significance of such discourse behavior for intercultural learning was also noted in the LL’s questionnaire responses: “It was a very beneficial experience. I learned a lot over the course of the chats that I would not have otherwise. ... I learned a lot about the subject matter from the German perspective.” While the telecollaborative exchange was beneficial to both groups, the LL in Group 8 highlighted the intercultural learning aspect to a greater extent. [Excerpt 5](#), from Group 8, illustrates the dynamics of topic development through expanding and clarification moves in detail.

Excerpt 5.

GS: *That is why we have to convince people of beautiful concepts, I think.* (continue-enhance)

GS: *And it is not enough, only to abolish national anthems or renew them.* (continue-extend)

LL: *haha, yes the world needs people who believe in beautiful ideas.* (respond-elaborate of the interlocutor's move)

GS: *You think so?* (rejoinder-clarify)

GS: *I think in reality everyone wants a beautiful world.* (continue-extend)

GS: *but the majority believes that others will not play along.* (continue-extend)

LL: *I think that the world can only become a better place when people who believe in beautiful ideas want to introduce change.* (respond-enhance)

GS: *I think so too.* (respond-agree)

LL: *What you said about the others who do not play along is an important and famous problem in international affairs, haha.* (initiation statement opinion)

GS: *Do you have examples or concepts?* (rejoinder-clarify)

LL: *concepts.* (rejoinder-resolve)

LL: *it is called the "collective action problem."* (continue-elaborate)

LL: *I think it comes from the game theory.* (continue-extend)

Change of Perspective and Negotiation of Disalignment

One component of ICC that Byram (1997, pp. 50, 108) sees as most significant goes beyond the display of high interactivity and in-depth elaboration of the intercultural information and includes interactions that suggest a shift in one's cultural perspectives. This element of intercultural learning is hard to achieve and difficult to demonstrate. It is thus rarely reported in the studies of telecollaborative engagement (e.g., Liaw & Bunn-Le Master, 2010; Menard-Warwick, 2009). The telecollaborative chats of Group 8 seem to provide some evidence of how such a shift was incited through rejoinder-disalignment moves. [Excerpt 6](#) shows how the GS questioned the major assumption of the LL's initiation statement about the importance of national pride (Line ii). The LL resolved the query by providing a reason for her opinion statement (Line iii). The GS, however, did not stop questioning and continued to undermine the proposition about the importance of national pride and, by implication, the national anthems that embody it (Lines iv and v). The LL's response (Lines vi and vii), where she agreed with the GS's challenges, suggested a possibility of perspectival shift. In other words, whereas the LL first justified the importance of national pride as being based on supposedly unifying "memories and feelings for the home country," the GS's challenges helped the LL realize that not all of them are unifying or homogenous, which by implication could relativize the LL's opinion about national pride as necessary and important.

Excerpt 6.

- i. LL: *I think national anthems are important when there is a good connection between the music and national pride.* (initiation statement opinion)
- ii. GS: *Why do you find national pride important?* (Rejoinder-rebound, WH)
- iii. LL: *because it produces memories and feelings for the home country.* (rejoinder-resolve)
- iv. GS: *ok, but in a big country there are really very different feelings and memories about the home country.* (rejoinder-rebound, D)

- v. GS: *Can one summarize all of them in one song?* (rejoinder-rebound, PI)
- vi. LL: *yes, this is correct, it is difficult to summarize all of them.* (respond-agree)
- vii. LL: *yes, indeed.* (respond-agree)

As far as linguistic realizations are concerned, the GS's rejoinder-rebound challenges were not realized as negations but rather as a declarative (Line iv) and as interrogatives (Lines ii and v) as a less direct or threatening realization of confrontation. Such choice of linguistic resources helped counter the interlocutor's proposition without jeopardizing the dialogue, thus deepening the communication and, as a result, truly enhancing the intercultural exchange. The questionnaire responses by the LL further suggested that the telecollaborative chats in this group promoted the perspectival shift to some extent: "Some of my own views and opinions were challenged by this experience, as my partner asked some difficult questions that made me really think about my own beliefs."

Conclusions and Implications

The study demonstrates clear differences in the use of interactional strategies between two groups. While the learners in these chat groups were at the same level of proficiency as measured by a C-test and took part in the same activity within the same overall context, they used the opportunities associated with telecollaboration differently. These different approaches to the telecollaborative exchange were manifested through particular discourse-semantic structuring of chats and the linguistic resources used to realize it. The different strategies contributed to a greater or lesser display of ICC and at the same time enabled different opportunities for further development of the latter.

A range of factors could have impacted the different participation roles taken on by the partners in the two groups. In Group 8, the strong individual opinions of the GS (also very clearly expressed in the course blogs) could have contributed to the polemic and more engaged style of this exchange. In Group 6, the GS might not have had a clear understanding of the purpose of these telecollaborative chats that aimed at an exchange in which partners inquire about each other's culture and experiences. At the same time, the LL in Group 6 could have interpreted the activity as a unidirectional interview, whereby some of the questions from the chat prompts were posed by the LL verbatim to his German partner.

These potential explanations point to the following implications: In line with the well-documented insight in the literature, clear expectations about the goals of the exchange and the roles the partners are expected to play have to be communicated to both sides of the partnership. And the tasks or chat prompts themselves should be formulated in a way that helps avoid misleading interpretations of the telecollaborative activity. For example, one suggestion would be to avoid including explicit questions or interrogatives on the prompts. At the same time, even clear instructions are no guarantee that students will follow them exactly. In this study, personality and gender variables (in this case, male-female and female-female pairing in Group 6 and 8, respectively) could have led to the differences in the interactional styles of the participants. And thus, active guidance by the teacher who provides feedback on the exchange as it is occurring should be considered crucial for modifying and making the exchange more effective (cf. Ware, 2005; Ware & Kramsch, 2005).

No matter what the reasons for the differences are, the study shows how various discourse strategies and their linguistic realizations contributed to a greater or lesser extent to interactivity, expansion of cultural information, and negotiation of disalignment; thus enabling and at the same time embodying the crucial aspects of ICC. Such a detailed analysis of interactional behavior of telecollaborative partners could become a useful tool for explicating the nature of ICC in discourse-semantic and linguistic terms and thus contribute to its better understanding and fostering by FL teachers and learners.

Pedagogically, chat excerpts or even chat corpora (Belz & Vyatkina, 2005, 2008) can be used in class as materials for ICC training. These excerpts can be analyzed with learners for the discourse-functional participant roles, their linguistic realizations, and their function in enhancing ICC development. In a joint

analysis, the instructor could focus on the excerpts with the disalignment moves that often help deepen the exchange and alter cultural perspectives (for the importance of disalignment in the online forum discussions, see Coffin & O'Halloran, 2009). Specifically, teachers can demonstrate to students how disagreements can be realized through a range of language resources that help interlocutors manage direct confrontation (e.g., interrogatives, tagged declaratives, etc.). Another pedagogical exercise could involve manipulation of the chat excerpts where learners are asked to expand the exchanges beyond the initiation–response sequence or use alternative linguistic resources for fulfilling the same discourse function and discuss the impact of such substitution.

The study has important implications for the research of ICC in telecollaborative discourse. First, the SFL methodology used for the analysis made it possible to connect the focus on discourse function and the focus on linguistic form without conflating the two. Examination at each level (discourse and lexicogrammatical) revealed different aspects about the data, enhancing our understanding of intercultural communication. For example, this framework enabled us to see that steering of conversation occurred through a variety of linguistic resources beyond the use of interrogatives, while interrogatives fulfilled a greater range of functions that went beyond the initiation of exchange. Had we only considered linguistic realizations and focused on interrogative forms rather than on the discourse-semantic functions of the moves, the contrasting communicative roles performed in this telecollaboration would not have been as apparent. The GS in Group 6 also posed questions that were clarification interrogatives, they just did not serve the conversation steering function and did not elicit substantive information and opinions from the LL.

Second, the SFL-based framework that conceptualizes ICC in terms of utilization of particular discourse-semantic moves can also inform a contrastive study of different interactional contexts: synchronous text chats versus synchronous audio or video communication within the context of telecollaboration. Such an analysis can reveal specific opportunities for meaning making that each context offers, both quantitatively (in terms of the number of moves) and qualitatively (in terms of the types of semantic meanings and a variety of lexicogrammatical resources deployed by the students for their realization).

One limitation of the study is that some of the conclusions about the ICC in the exchange are based solely on the comments of the American partners in the end-of-course questionnaire and not on the opinions of the German participants who did not fill out the questionnaire. It would be important to avoid such imbalance in future research. Furthermore, the methodological approach used in the study to interpret and code the data required extensive time and training. This could make it difficult but not impossible to yield results that would help us reach conclusions about the patterns of discursive and linguistic resources used, for example, by the group of learners as contrasted with the group of native speakers. Conducting such coding for the discursive moves and their linguistic realizations, including other grammatical systems beyond that of mood (i.e., modality), for the entire data set will be the next step for the current project.

Finally, rather than privileging the native speaker as a communication expert, the approach taken by the study focused on how both parties gradually contributed to the intercultural exchange through various discursive strategies. Such an approach made it clear that native speakers, just like learners, needed to develop their ICC for intercultural mediation as they engaged in telecollaborative exchanges, even if they were held in their native language. This means that both the faculty facilitating the exchange as well as the participants on both sides of it should be prepared for the telecollaboration activities through intercultural mediation training prior to a telecollaboration initiative so that a more profound development of ICC is enabled.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Success in this and Ware's (2005) study was determined through the qualitative analysis of the discourse data, as well as student surveys and interviews.
2. While the synchronous written chats display features of both written and oral discourse, in their overarching discourse strategies they have been likened to oral conversations (Smith, 2003; Sotillo, 2000).
3. The data are presented in English to save space and maximize readability. The analysis was performed on the German data.
4. CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System) is a corpus tool developed for the study of language acquisition by MacWhinney (2000).
5. Percentages were calculated by dividing the number of moves of a particular category (i.e., respond-answer) by the total number of moves produced by each participant in the group throughout the chats in the telecollaboration project.
6. These percentages were calculated by dividing the number of moves within a subcategory (e.g., closed opinion questions) by the total number of moves in the category (e.g., initiating moves) used by each participant in the group.
7. Chatting outside of class was difficult due to scheduling issues (for example, the difference in time zones).

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