Telecollaboration for content and language learning: A Genre-based approach

D. Joseph Cunningham, Georgetown University

Abstract

While many studies have documented the growth of second language abilities and intercultural knowledge as a result of participating in telecollaboration, research has not sufficiently investigated the development of content knowledge in this learning context. In response, this study explores content learning in a university-level, genre-based business German course. Two dyads and two triads of students conducted synchronous audiovisual interviews with Berlin-based entrepreneurs in order to expand upon their existing knowledge of German business culture. The study examines the extent to which L2 German learners were able to perform the genre ‘oral interview’ via synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) and whether performance afforded learners the opportunity to: 1) display previously acquired content knowledge and 2) acquire new content knowledge. Discourse analysis of four hours of transcribed speech shows that all groups were able to navigate the generic stages of the oral interview. Furthermore, participants used both explicit and implicit means to refer to knowledge gained prior to the exchange and during the exchange. These results provide evidence that genre-based pedagogy can foster integrated content and language learning in SCMC-based telecollaboration by helping learners demonstrate attention, link existing knowledge to new knowledge, and create meaningful connections between different topical areas.

Keywords: Telecollaboration, Content-Based Instruction, Genre-Based Pedagogy

Language(s) Learned in This Study: German


Introduction

In the context of intercultural language learning, virtual exchange “involves the engagement of groups of learners in extended periods of online intercultural interaction and collaboration with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational programmes and under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators” (O’Dowd, 2018, p. 5). While a variety of terms have been used to describe the various forms that virtual exchange can take (e.g., E-Tandem, Teletandem, Online Intercultural Exchange, Network-Based Language Teaching, etc.), the present study utilizes the term telecollaboration, which is understood as a form of collective inquiry (Lewis & O’Dowd, 2016) that enables content and language novices (i.e., learners) to benefit from the content and language expertise of their first language (L1) speaking partners. That is to say, unlike most virtual exchange projects that involve sustained interaction between partner classes, the research reported here documents a set of one-time synchronous interactions between groups of learners in the US and expert participants in Germany; however, as these interactions represent the culmination of several weeks of careful task preparation under the guidance of an educator, they can still provide a rich forum for learners to demonstrate and further develop linguistic and content knowledge, even if the exchange configuration differs from the traditional class-class pairing.

Research on telecollaboration has now entered its third decade, and a substantial body of literature documents the benefits of participation in this learning context, especially as regards the development of
intercultural and linguistic knowledge. With the maturation of the field, a number of special journal issues devoted to the topic have been published, including no less than three issues of *Language Learning & Technology* (2003, 2011, and the present issue). The sustained interest in virtual exchange is further evidenced by several review articles that describe the evolving state of telecollaborative research and practice (e.g., Akiyama & Cunningham, 2018; Belz, 2007; Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2004). Additionally, a number of book-length volumes on the topic have explored such issues as foreign language education (Belz & Thorne, 2006), literacies in multimodal collaborative environments (Guth & Helm, 2010), and virtual internationalization (O’Dowd & Lewis, 2016).

Despite this rich body of research, little work to date has been done regarding the intersection of telecollaboration and content-based instruction. Indeed, Akiyama and Cunningham’s (2018) scoping review of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) based telecollaboration revealed that only one of the 55 exchanges reviewed had an integrated language and content focus (i.e., Lindner, 2011).

Bearing in mind that genre-based pedagogy may enhance the linkage between content and language learning outcomes (Byrnes, 2005) and in order to determine the extent to which participation in SCMC-based exchange affords opportunity to demonstrate this linkage, the present study qualitatively analyzes discourse produced during the performance of the oral interview genre by advanced-level learners in a genre-based business German course.

**Literature Review**

The following review of the literature will first consider the state of telecollaboration research, beginning with key studies pertaining to the development of cultural knowledge; it then details the main findings regarding second language (L2) development in telecollaborative contexts. Last, as this study explicitly links content knowledge to genre, the review concludes with a discussion of these two related notions, including a detailed description of the generic features of oral interviews.

**Telecollaboration for Intercultural Learning**

Telecollaboration inherently involves intercultural contact, and the development of intercultural knowledge has, to a large degree, driven the research agenda of the previous decades. Just as a physical presence in the target culture can be an enriching experience, intercultural contact through Internet-based communication tools may foster a higher level of interest in the target culture (Donaldson & Kötter, 1999; Lomicka, 2009), or, in cases where the interest level is already high, help to maintain it (Schenker, 2012; 2013). Telecollaboration may also lead to increased cultural knowledge and sensitivity (Canto, Jauregi, & van den Bergh, 2013; Jin & Erben, 2007), especially in cases where it serves as a forum in which to question previously held beliefs and develop more complex views of both the home and target culture (Fürstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillot, 2001; Itakura, 2004; Lomicka, 2009; O’Dowd, 2003; Schneider & von der Emde, 2006). The process of cultural (re)negotiation is not without the potential for conflict, however, and studies have documented reinforcement of cultural stereotypes (Itakura, 2004; O’Dowd, 2003), divergent discourse styles (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Thorne, 2003; Ware & Kramsch, 2005), and discrepant socio-institutional contexts (Belz & Müller-Hartmann, 2003; O’Dowd, 2005).

**Telecollaboration for Language Learning**

In addition to the growth of cultural knowledge, researchers of telecollaboration have invested considerable effort in determining the extent to which this practice impacts the development of L2 abilities. Whereas a small set of studies has investigated the effect of telecollaboration compared to a control group (Bueno-Alastuey, 2011; Canto et al., 2013; Dussias, 2006; Moreno-Lopez & Miranda-Aldaco, 2013), the majority of research has examined interaction in virtual spaces and how expert feedback from first language (L1) speakers may enhance the learning process.

Kötter (2001) reported that interaction in a text-based virtual environment enabled the provision of instant linguistic feedback. Research has further identified specific areas that may benefit from interactional
feedback, including vocabulary and grammar (Chen & Eslami, 2011; Kabata & Edasawa, 2011), pronunciation (Bueno-Alastuey, 2013; Kabata & Edasawa, 2011), and quantity of production (Jin, 2013). However, the provision of feedback is not such a straightforward affair. When engaged in meaning-based communication, learners may find it difficult to attend continuously to linguistic errors (Lee, 2008) or they may perceive the immediate provision of feedback as potentially face-threatening (Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011; Ware & O’Dowd, 2008). Conversely, partners who were able to provide linguistic feedback after-the-fact (Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011) and through asynchronous means (Vinagre & Muñoz, 2011) could mitigate potential face threats. Type and quality of feedback may also be a consideration: Chen and Eslami (2011) found that direct and explicit feedback during synchronous, text-based chat most strongly predicted subsequent language development, whereas Bueno-Alastuey (2013) determined that the L1 or L2 status of the interlocutors factored into the effectiveness of interactional feedback.

The effect of interactional feedback in telecollaboration has also been studied as regards interlanguage pragmatic development (ILP). Multiple studies (Belz & Kinginger, 2002, 2003; González-Lloret, 2008) documented improvement in the ability of learners to discern and produce appropriate pronouns of address (e.g., tu versus vous; du versus Sie, etc.) when interacting with similarly aged peers. When threats to social face were at stake and censure could have resulted from pragmatic failure, learners readily attended to linguistic feedback and adjusted their production accordingly. Focusing on voice-based interaction, Barron and Black (2015) argue that telecollaboration provides an opportunity for increased language production in conversational registers, a necessary precondition for pragmatic development.

Recognizing the value of interaction for developing L2 pragmatic competence, researchers have become increasingly interested in the role of instruction. Belz and Vyatkina (2008) determined that the use of a learner corpus could enhance pragmatic instruction. Drawing on the notion of data-driven learning, the researchers created pedagogical materials based on the learners’ telecollaborative interactions in order to contrast their production of German modal particles with L1 speakers’ production. Following instruction, the learners used a wider range and greater frequency of the focal structures compared to the pre-treatment condition. Similarly, Cunningham and Vyatkina (2012) showed that L2 German learners improved their ability to use the subjunctive mood and modal verbs to formulate appropriate requests, while Cunningham (2016) found that instruction led to increased production of syntactic and lexical modification in pre-request strategies. Regarding sociopragmatic awareness, Morollón Martí and Fernández (2016) found that mediation through learners’ L1 (Danish) helped them to recognize and respond more appropriately to a range of speech acts encountered during subsequent SCMC sessions in the L2 (Spanish).

**Telecollaboration for Content Learning**

Despite evidence of intercultural development and language learning associated with participation in telecollaboration, research to date has not given sufficient consideration to how such exchanges may promote the integrated learning of language and content. Indeed, Deutscher’s (2016) survey of the German educational context revealed instances of geography-themed, content-based projects, but none of them fulfilled the criteria of a telecollaboration. If the German context is indicative of the wider field, there is an urgent need for more projects integrating content-based learning objectives and telecollaboration. One such project is reported in Loranc-Paszyłk (2016), who analyzed action research data from of a Spanish-Polish exchange among pre-service teachers. Drawing on the *four Cs* of content- and language-integrated learning (CLIL), participants reported substantive gains in the Culture and Cognition categories and modest gains in Content and Communication.

Traditionally, two terms have been used to describe the dual learning of content and language: content-based instruction (CBI) and CLIL. Whereas Stoller (2002) sees CBI as “language as a medium for learning content and content as a resource for learning and improving language” (p. 109), Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) define CLIL as an “educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (p. 1; emphasis in the original). The use of different terms would seem to imply distinct approaches or underlying principles, but with their common goal of integrating language and content learning outcomes, “both terms can be considered umbrella labels for the
same reality” (de Zarobe & Cenoz, 2015, p. 90). While acknowledging the unique history that both terms can claim in their respective geographic and socio-institutional contexts, the essential principle underlying both CBI and CLIL—and that which undergirds this study—is that languages are not learned first and then used, but rather languages are learned as they are used. In order to avoid privileging one term over another, the present study will henceforth refer to this teaching approach as CBI/CLIL.

With its dual focus on language and content learning outcomes, CBI/CLIL responds to a number of educational challenges. In the postsecondary setting, it is seen as a way to acquire advanced disciplinary and linguistic knowledge through engagement with particular text types and genres (Byrnes, 2005). In other words, the progression from primary discourses (i.e., interaction with family in the home) to secondary discourses (i.e., engagement beyond the home in diverse institutional spaces) as described by Gee (1998) can be realized within the context of CBI/CLIL. In this regard, genre can serve as a critical link between the acquisition of content knowledge and advanced language abilities, thereby facilitating the process of socialization into secondary discourses.

**Genre-based Pedagogy**

The construct of genre spans a range of understandings, including typification of rhetorical action; regularity of staged, goal-oriented processes; and consistency of communicative purposes (Byrnes, 2005). The central feature of such definitions—and that which potentially makes genre so valuable for L2 education—is conventionalization. Put another way, individual genres call for the use of textual and grammatical features that convey specific content in a form both recognizable and associated with particular settings and actors. Additionally, genre provides a means by which to structure a curriculum that links language and content, while also providing for principled task design and assessment in that curricular framework (Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010). Lastly, and in reference to the previously articulated understanding of CBI/CLIL as rooted in language use, genre-based pedagogical tasks make possible a linkage between cultural content and language, as well as language use and language acquisition over time (Byrnes, 2005).

Although genre has yet to be fully investigated in telecollaboration, a number of studies have examined the intersection of genre-based instruction and technology. As pertains to writing instruction, research has found that the use of corpora and data-driven learning approaches can facilitate the acquisition of genre-appropriate lexis (Ackerly, 2017; Cai, 2016), as well as recognition and application of conventionalized patterns of rhetorical composition (Cotos, Link, & Huffman, 2017). Corpus-based approaches are also making their way into L2 speaking instruction. Noting the “context-sensitive features of academic speech” (p. 55), Pérez-Llantada (2009) found that examination of L1 speech transcripts encouraged students to integrate these features into their own production. Similarly, Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, and Su (2017) showed how students who worked with teacher-selected corpus excerpts improved the clarity of their speech act production, while those who conducted their own corpus searches were able to focus attention on pragmatic routines. Finally, it may be the case that technology can facilitate the extension of existing genres into new spaces. Oskoz and Elola (2016) argue that digital storytelling, with its integrated modalities of text, speech, and image, has the “potential to become an accessible platform for L2 and multiliteracy development” (p. 168).

**Genre: Oral Interview**

Historically, the interview genre is a relatively recent phenomenon in that it arose contemporaneously with the growth of the mass media in the United States and Europe around the middle of the 19th century (Johnson, 2003). While there are certain distinctions to be made between the news interview genre and oral interview genre performed in the course, it is nonetheless the case that they overlap in several important respects (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). First, they have distinct opening and closing practices that mark the interaction as something other than a casual conversation. Next, interaction in interviews is structured around the question-answer paradigm, with interactants generally constrained to act out particular roles as interviewers or interviewees. These role constraints mean that, as the questioner, the interviewer is firmly
in control of interactional management and topic selection. Additionally, there is often a form-function mismatch regarding the syntax of interview questions: declarative sentences may function as questions and interrogatives may function as statements. A final aspect of interviews, which is paramount for the present study, is that “the content of a news interview is thoroughly contingent on the generative process of interview interaction” (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 14; emphasis in the original).

Given this understanding of the oral interview, we can distinguish it from the kind of interview that is more typical of communicatively oriented language classrooms. The language-class interview is often characterized by a primary focus on language production (e.g., interview questions may cover content that is already known to both participants); a switching of roles (i.e., interactants play both the interviewee and interviewer); and the inclusion of only selected generic stages (e.g., no formal opening or closing stages, less work on transitioning between topics). So, while it is safe to presuppose that advanced-level language learners can perform the classroom-based interview with fellow students, it is by no means clear that they have the same degree of familiarity with oral interviews conducted independent of the classroom context, nor is it clear that they are able to conduct such interviews via SCMC. In order to extend research bridging technology and genre-based pedagogy into the telecollaborative sphere, the present study asks the following questions:

1. Does participation in SCMC-based telecollaboration enable learners to perform the oral interview genre?
2. To what extent does performance of SCMC-based oral interviews afford learners opportunities for:
   a. The demonstration of previously acquired content knowledge?
   b. The development of new content knowledge?

Methodology

Pedagogical Context

Data for the study were collected from students (n = 10) in an advanced-level Business German course at a medium-sized private university in the US. The course was structured around four thematic units (Germany as a location to do business, marketing, the stock market, and entrepreneurship), with each unit culminating in the completion of a genre-based task. In the final unit (entrepreneurship), student dyads and triads prepared for and conducted oral interviews with one of four L1 German speakers who had experience founding a company in Berlin, Germany (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Interviewers (German learners)</th>
<th>Interviewees (German speakers)</th>
<th>Product/Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dan, Sue</td>
<td>Jutta, Timo</td>
<td>Electronic entry systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brett, Jason, Jane</td>
<td>Carsten</td>
<td>Online automobile market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Owen, Zane, Harvey</td>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>Downloadable non-fiction summaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adam, Walter</td>
<td>Nikolas</td>
<td>Cleaning personnel in the sharing economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All participants have been assigned pseudonyms.

Several weeks prior to the oral interviews, dyads and triads of L2 learners were established and each group was assigned to interview one L1 speaker (Table 1). In order to become familiar with the genre and understand the stages by which it is performed, the class viewed and analyzed examples of oral interviews in German. These interviews came from various media sources and featured a variety of interviewer-interviewee pairings, but in each case the interviewee had some connection to the German entrepreneurial...
ecosystem, either as a founder, investor, or expert observer. In the end, the students were able to determine a generic structure for oral interviews and develop a corresponding template (Figure 1). This template was then used for in-group preparation, as the oral interview is an unscripted, but by no means unplanned genre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening</th>
<th>consisting of greeting and/or introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>to main part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main part</td>
<td>consisting of questions on various topics, with transitions between topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 1</td>
<td>Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 2</td>
<td>Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 3</td>
<td>Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic 4</td>
<td>Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>consisting of summative remarks and expression of gratitude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1.* Generic stages of German oral interviews

In addition to familiarizing themselves with the oral interview genre, the groups were responsible for conducting additional research about the company with whose representatives they would be speaking. Following their preparations, each group spoke for one hour with their assigned interviewee via Zoom, an Internet-based platform that supports synchronous audiovisual communication, resulting in a total of four interviews.

**Analytical Approach: Discourse Analysis**

Each interview was recorded and transcribed prior to performing a discourse analysis of the data (see Appendix for transcription conventions). CBI/CLIL discourse analysis generally investigates two interrelated perspectives: 1) processes of knowledge construction in and through L2; and 2) language use and social-interactional aspects of L2 language use (Dalton-Puffer, 2017). While these two foci are inextricably linked as part of the “lived experience” (Dalton-Puffer, 2017, p. 168) of the participants, for the purposes of the present study, the analysis concerns itself foremost with the first aspect, the demonstration and construction of content knowledge.

Given this understanding, and with reference to the generic structure of oral interviews as explained previously (Figure 1), the analysis will determine the extent to which the groups are able to move through the generic stages of an interview. The analysis will also explore the extent to which interaction with L1 speakers affords L2 learners opportunities to display previously known content and to acquire new content. Accordingly, the question-answer interaction in the main part of the interviews has been separated into smaller units labeled content-related episodes (CREs). Understanding that interview content is created through interaction (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), a CRE begins when an interviewer asks a question in the main part of the interview and ends when an answer has been given.

**Results**

All groups were able to perform the opening and closing stages of the interview and engage in content-related interactions with their respective interviewees. Bearing this in mind, the analysis now presents illustrative excerpts of opening sequences, closing sequences, and CREs. Understanding that opening and closing sequences are important for marking the oral interview as a genre distinct from casual conversation (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), it is the analysis of CREs that will bear most directly on the display of previous content knowledge and acquisition of new content knowledge.
Opening Sequences
The first minutes of the interview allow the participants to make introductions, thereby laying the groundwork for the interview to come (Excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1. Opening Sequence: Group 2

Jason: Ja, also herzliche virtuelle Willkommen äh an der ABC Uni ähm. Wir heiß– (Yes, so a heartfelt virtual welcome to ABC University um. We ar–)
Carsten: ( )
Brett: Können Sie hör– hören? (Can you hear?)
Carsten: Ja, ist ein biss– ist ein bisschen interrupted, aber alles gut sonst ja. (Yes, it is a little interrupted, but otherwise everything good yes)
Jason: Also ja, also ich heiße Jason. (So yes, so my name is Jason.)
Carsten: Ja, freut mich. (Yes, glad to meet you.)
Jane: Ich bin Jane. (I’m Jane.)
Brett: Und ich bin Brett (And I’m Brett)
Carsten: Okay, Jason, June, ja? (Okay, Jason, June, yes?)
Jane: Jane. (Jane) Jane.
Carsten: Jane okay. Und Brett. Alles klar. (Jane, okay. And Brett. Got it.)
Jason: Ähm ja, und wir freuen uns sehr, dass Sie hier mit uns äh sprechen können (. ähm ja und ähm (. äh wie geht es Ihnen? (Um yeah, and we are very glad that you are able to speak with us here (. um yes and um (. uh how are you?)
Carsten: Sehr gut danke. Bisschen müde. Ist gerade ( ) Phase (Very well thanks. Bit tired. It’s ( ) phase right now.)
Jason:((lacht)) ja (Ähm und ja bevor wir äh anfangen, äh können Sie sich äh vorstellen ein bisschen. Nur allgemein. ((laughs)) yes Um and yeah before we uh begin, uh can you introduce yourself a little bit. Just in general.)

Excerpt 1 begins with an explicit greeting of the interviewee by the learners (“herzliche virtuelle Willkommen”). This welcome is followed by introductions, with the learners using their first names to identify themselves. Last, and further reinforcing the interchange as an opening sequence, the learner Jason signals that the main part of the interview is to begin only after the interviewee, Carsten, has introduced himself.

Closing Sequences
Just as the opening stage marks the formal beginning of the interview, the closing stage marks its end. In all four interviews, such closings were present, as exemplified in Excerpt 2, below.

Excerpt 2: Closing Sequence: Group 4

Walter: Hast du noch eine andere Fragen? (Do you have any other questions?)
Adam: Ich habe keine andere Fragen. (I don’t have any other questions.)
Walter: Äh okay, da können wir äh vielen Dank sagen, dass Sie un– uns gesprochen haben und wir wünschen Ihnen alles Gute für den Zukunft. (Uh okay, then we can say thank you very much for speaking with us– us and we wish you all the best for for the future.)
Nikolas: Ja vielen Dank euch (. äh viel Erfolg da bei eurer Arbeit und äh man sieht sich ja. Äh sag
Bescheid, wenn ihr in Berlin seid dann trinken wir mal ein Bier ((lacht)). (Yes thanks very much to you guys (.) uh much success with your assignment and uh I’ll see you around yeah. Uh let me know if you’re in Berlin and we’ll go have a beer ((laughs)).)

Walter: Okay gut. (Okay good.)

Nikolas: Alles klar. (Okay then.)

Adam: Danke, tschau. (Thanks, bye.)

Nikolas: Tschüß. (Bye.)

Walter: Tschüß. (Okay good.)

Nikolas: Ja tschau. (Yeah bye.)

To begin the closing sequence, the learner, Walter, asks another learner, Adam, if he has additional questions to pose. Since he does not, Walter thanks Nikolas for the interview and expresses good wishes for the future. There is then an extended round of goodbyes, including an invitation from Nikolas for the two learners to visit socially if they are ever in Berlin.

Content-Related Episodes

The majority of each interview was spent exploring different topical areas, including topics such as the initial founding of the company, the service the company performs, and plans for expansion in the future. By posing questions related to various topical areas, the learners were able to refer to content knowledge external to the interview (i.e., knowledge gained from previous research) and content knowledge internal to the interview (i.e., knowledge gained from the interviewee). Furthermore, the learners could signal content knowledge through explicit linguistic means (e.g., by using verbs of perception) and through implicit means (e.g., by simply stating relevant facts). Last, learners could ask a question without any clear reference to previous content. This resulted in five distinct categories, which are classified as:

- Explicit-External: Explicit reference to external content
- Implicit-External: Implicit reference to external content
- Explicit-Internal: Explicit reference to internal content
- Implicit-Internal: Implicit reference to internal content
- No Ref: No reference to previous content

The total number of CREs of each type are provided in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total CREs</th>
<th>Explicit-External</th>
<th>Implicit-External</th>
<th>Explicit-Internal</th>
<th>Implicit-Internal</th>
<th>No ref</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (dyad)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (triad)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (triad)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (dyad)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all groups</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the participants were able to demonstrate four kinds of content reference: Explicit-External (n = 16), Implicit-External (n = 6), Explicit-Internal (n = 18), and Implicit-Internal (n = 13). Groups 1 and 3 engaged in each kind of content reference, while Group 2 did not feature any Implicit-External content references and Group 4 did not feature any Implicit-Internal references. Additionally, there were more...
references to internal content than to external content and there were more instances of explicit reference than implicit reference. We now turn to selected discourse excerpts, which illustrate the various kinds of content reference present in the data set.

As stated previously, the oral interview is a genre in which participants play out distinct roles through the interactional pattern of questions and answers. As the interactant who poses the questions, the interviewer must be reasonably well informed about the interviewee’s area of expertise. One way for interviewers to signal knowledge of the interviewee’s subject expertise is through explicit linguistic means. There were 16 such instances in the data, as illustrated in Excerpt 3.

**Excerpt 3. Explicit Reference to External Content: Group 1**

Sue: Wir haben gelesen, dass Berlin ist besonders gut als Standort. Denken Sie, dass die skandinavischen Länder und die UK ist ähnlich wie Berlin in diesem Bereich? (We have read that Berlin is an especially good location to do business. Do you think that the Scandinavian countries and the UK are similar to Berlin in this area?)

Jutta: Ich weiß gar nicht, ob wir dann direkt dort auch einen Standort hätten. Also wir würden das vielleicht von Berlin aus alles steuern. Also der Standort Berlin ist eben gut, weil hier viele internationale Arbeitskräfte sind, weil Berlin halt ’nen Magnet ist für junge Leute grade aus der (. ) aus der technischen Szene. Und auch die Lebenshaltungskosten sind vergleichsweise gering und daher ist es hier gut für Mitarbeiter also neue Mitarbeiter zu finden. Und in den anderen Ländern denke ich mal würden wir vielleicht so keine Büros dann haben. (I don’t know at all whether we would actually have a location there. So we would perhaps operate everything from Berlin. So Berlin is a good place to do business because there are a lot of international workers because Berlin is like a magnet for young people especially from the (. ) from the tech scene. And also the cost of living is comparatively low and for that reason it’s good for employees that is to find new employees. And in the other countries I think we maybe wouldn’t have any offices.)

In Excerpt 3, Sue prefaches her question by stating explicitly that they have read (“wir haben gelesen”) about Berlin as a good place to do business. This statement has the dual effect of signaling to Jutta that Sue has made a good-faith effort to come to the interview prepared and of allowing Sue the opportunity to extend her knowledge of the European business landscape beyond Berlin. The interview question is phrased as a yes/no interrogative (“denken Sie…”) and Jutta’s response makes clear that she does not think it likely that the company would have a location in these other countries. However, because of Sue’s prefacing statement, Jutta is able to phrase her response as a confirmation of Sue’s original supposition of Berlin as a good place to do business rather than an outright rejection of the subsequent question about the UK and Scandinavia.

In addition to explicit references to external content, the interviewers made implicit reference to content knowledge external to the interview. The data set showed six instances of implicit reference to external content, as illustrated in Excerpt 4.

**Excerpt 4. Implicit Reference to External Content: Group 4**

Walter: Äh ja dann können wir über ähm Ihre Geschäftsmodell ähm sprechen. Also eine Weile galt es als chic in die Startup-Szene als das neue Uber äh ( ) also bei Ihnen ähm waren Sie früh ähm als Nachahmen-Modell für das privaten Haushalts ähm bezeichnen aber heute ist es so Sie haben Ihre Strategie geändert (. ) ähm erklären Sie doch bitte warum Sie Ihre Strategie ähm dann geändert haben, eine Strategie Sie heute haben. (Uh yeah then we can speak um about your business model. So for a time it was considered chic in the start-up scene as the new Uber uh ( ) so in your case um you were labeled early on the copycat-model for the private home but today it is the case you have changed your strategy (. ) um please explain why you changed your strategy, a strategy you have today.)

Nikolas: Genau, also wir wollten ja im Prinzip ähm das Uber-Modell kopieren auf unseren Bereich, das habt ihr richtig gesagt. Ähm ähm ((hustet)) wir mussten dann aber feststellen, dass das Uber-Modell
für uns nicht funktioniert und es hat im Prinzip drei Gründe. (Exactly, so in principle we did want to copy the Uber model in our area, you guys got that right. Um um ((coughs)) we had to realize though that the Uber model doesn’t work for us and there are essentially three reasons.)

In Excerpt 4, Walter begins by identifying the new topic at large (“Geschäftsmodell”) and then indicating relevant facts pertaining to the topic: namely, that Nikolas’ company originally tried to position itself as a corollary to the ride-hailing service Uber, but this strategy has now been changed. Having provided this contextualization, Walter then asks Nikolas to explain the shift in strategy. The main question in this interchange is phrased as an imperative structure (“erklären Sie doch bitte”), not as an interrogative. Nikolas’ response (“genau…das habt ihr richtig gesagt”) serves to confirm the information shared by Walter and allows Nikolas to move into an explanation of those reasons, effectively providing the additional content sought after in Walter’s question.

While the preceding examples show how learners are able to integrate previously acquired content into their interview questions both explicitly and implicitly, it is also of interest to know the extent to which content from within the interview became part of the discourse. As with external content, learners were able to reference internal content both through explicit and implicit means. There were a total of 18 explicit references to internal content in the data, making it the most frequent kind of content reference in the data set (Excerpt 5 and Excerpt 6).

Excerpt 5. Explicit Reference to Internal Content: Group 1

Dan: Was denn (. ) zurück zu den Kunden. Sie haben gesagt, dass die erste Fokus liegt auf die Lieferungsfirmen und die Firmen generell. Wissen Sie, was die größten Teile Ihrer Kunden sind diese Lieferungsfirmen oder Familien oder wie ist das geteilt? (What then (. ) back to the customers. You said that the first focus is the delivery firms and companies in general. Do you know what the largest parts of your customers are they delivery companies or families or how is that divided?)

Timo: Gute Frage. Also der größte Umsatz aktuell kommt schon von den (. ) von den Lieferfirmen und (. ) auch aktuell von Entsorgungsfirmen und Lieferfirmen.

Dann auch von Hausverwaltungen, die das dann auch nutzen und einbauen. Aber zukünftig sollte der oder soll der größte Umsatz von den Bewohnern also den Anwohnern selbst kommen, weil das ist einfach auch die größte Gruppe. (Good question. So the largest sales currently come from the (. ) from the delivery companies and (. ) so currently from disposal companies and delivery companies. Then also from property managers who then use it and build it in. But in the future the largest sales are supposed to or should come from residents that is from the residents themselves because that is simply also the largest group.)

In Excerpt 5, Dan shifts back to an earlier topic (“zurück zu den Kunden”) and refers explicitly to information shared previously by Timo (“Sie haben gesagt”). The explicit reference has the dual effect of making the topic transition function smoothly, while also signaling to Timo that Dan is fulfilling an important function of the interviewer, careful listening. The interview question is phrased as an embedded WH-question (“Wissen Sie was...oder wie...?”). Timo’s response evaluates the quality of the question (“Gute Frage”) and provides the sought-after content information.

Excerpt 6. Explicit Reference to Internal Content: Group 3

Walter: Ja ja, Sie haben gesagt, dass äh Firma H eine der größte Konkurrent auf dem Markt ist und äh sie haben viel Geld und sie wollen äh unbeding– unbedingt ihre also ähm Markts (. ) ähm (. ) stelle konsolidieren. Haben Sie mit Ihrem Startup zu einem potenziellen Ankauf äh gesprochen? Also wollen Sie ähm sie ähm kaufen? (Yes yes, you said that uh Company H is one of the largest competitors in the market and uh they have a lot of money and uh they definit– definitely want to consolidate their market (. ) um (. ) position. Have you spoken with your start-up to a potential acquisition? That is do you want to buy them?)
Nikolas: Also wir wollen Firma H nicht kaufen ((lacht)) (So we don’t want to buy Company H ((laughs))).

Walter: Ja ja genau. (Yes yes exactly.)

Nikolas: Ähm ähm und ähm ich glaube, dass Firma H uns sehr gerne kaufen möchte ((lacht)) (Um um and um I think that Company H would really like to buy us ((laughs))).

Walter: Okay

Nikolas: Ähm äh das wollen wir aber nicht. Ähm ich ähm möchte die Firma nicht verkaufen. Ähm wir hatten auch schon Angebote von ähm also Reinigungsfirmen ja also großen Facility-Management-Firmen. Nicht Firma H aber von andern und da haben wir auch immer abgelehnt, weil das ist noch viel zu früh es macht ja gar kein Sinn. Ich glaub total an diese Firma. Ähm ja. (Um uh but we don’t want that. Um I um don’t want to sell the company. Um we have already had offers from um so cleaning companies yeah so large facility management companies. Not Company H but from others and we have always rejected them because it is much too early it doesn’t make any sense. I totally believe in this company. Um yeah.)

In Excerpt 6, Walter summarizes his understanding of what Nikolas said in an earlier turn regarding potential acquisitions for the company using an explicit linguistic signal (“Sie haben gesagt”). Nikolas’ response contradicts Walter’s summary, but the use of a humorous tone may help to mitigate Walter’s potential embarrassment from having misstated Nikolas’ earlier comment. We thus see that reference to interview-internal content can provide interactants the opportunity to clarify or refine their understanding of previous statements.

The last category of CREs to be analyzed are instances in which internal content is referred to by implicit means. There were a total of 13 such cases in the data set, as seen in Excerpts 7 and Excerpt 8.

Excerpt 7. Implicit Reference to Internal Content: Group 1

Dan: Haben Sie eine bestimmte Ziel, die ihr gerne erreichen würden? Also ihr habt jetzt in ein Prozent von Berlin Firma K eingerichtet. Bevor Sie nach eine andere Stadt verbreiten, würden würden Sie lieber so fünfzehn Prozent (.) fünfzig Prozent von Berlin, die Sie eingerichtet haben? (Do you have a specific goal that you guys would like to achieve? So you guys now have set up Company K in one percent of Berlin. Before you would expand to another city would you prefer fifteen percent (.) fifty percent of Berlin that you have set up?)

Timo: Also so konkret..so konkret Step by Step haben wir keine Ziele. Das Ziel ist natürlich Berlin ein hundert Prozent zu haben so bald wie möglich. Aber das Ziel ist, dass wir Ende des Jahres in eine weitere Stadt gehen und auch dieses Jahr uns nicht nur auf Berlin fokussieren sondern auf ganz Deutschland. (So so concrete..so concrete step by step we don’t have any goals. The goal is of course to have Berlin one hundred percent as soon as possible. But the goal is that by the end of the year we go into another city and also that this year we focus not just on Berlin but on Germany as a whole.)

Excerpt 7 begins with the learner, Dan, posing a yes/no question (“Haben Sie…”) regarding goals for the company. In order to specify this rather general question, Dan refers to information that Timo provided earlier regarding the degree of market coverage that the company currently holds. By repeating this information, Dan is able to formulate a more specific question regarding the company’s goals for coverage of the Berlin market, which, in turn, allows Timo to offer a specific response regarding the company’s plans for the coming year.

Excerpt 8. Implicit Reference to Internal Content: Group 3

Zane: Äh und jetzt bieten Sie nur Sachbücher äh an und denken Sie, dass in der Zukunft Sie vielleicht ähm Fiction-Bücher oder anderen Typen von Bücher anbieten können? (Uh and now you only offer non-fiction books uh and do you think that in the future you will maybe be able to offer fictional books
or other types of books?)

Herbert: Nein, weil das macht für Fiction ähm wenig Sinn, weil da das Meiste will man ja lesen ähm um sich zu unterhalten, weil ist ja die Geschichte und die Länge der Geschichte der Zweck und ähm den wenigsten fällt es schwer Fiction anzufangen, weil es eben Spaß macht. Nonfiction is’n Thema da will man schau mal manchmal ( ), braucht man eben so ein ( ), um anzufangen weil es mit lernen verbunden ist und lernen ist manchmal langweilig und ähm Leute müssen sich mehr motivieren und da können wir helfen. (No because it makes little sense for fiction because there the majority just wants to read for entertainment because the point is the story and the length of the story and few people find it hard to start something fictional because it’s fun. Nonfiction is a topic, there you see sometimes you want ( ) you just need a ( ) to get started because it’s connected to learning and learning is sometimes boring and people have to motivate themselves more and that’s where we can help.)

In Excerpt 8, Zane references “Sachbücher” as a way of bridging to the topic of fictional works. The first mention of “Sachbücher” occurs much earlier in the conversation when Herbert shares information about the company’s origins. The next mention is when Herbert is explaining plans to internationalize the company. The topic is mentioned yet again when discussing product development. Given the numerous earlier statements, it is likely that Zane’s content reference can be traced to these earlier instances. Following this contextualizing statement, the main question is phrased as a yes/no interrogative (“denken Sie…”), which allows Herbert to give a direct answer (“nein”). However, as the interaction is part of an interview, Herbert understands that an extended answer is appropriate and provides further explanation without additional prompting from the interviewers.

Discussion

This study investigated the extent to which learners of German: 1) were able to complete the genre-based task of conducting an oral interview in German using a synchronous Internet-based communication tool and, 2) demonstrate previous and new content knowledge of entrepreneurship in Germany. In regards to the first research question, the findings show that learners successfully navigated the generic stages of an oral interview, including greeting the interviewee, inquiring about various topics, transitioning between topics, and closing the interview with an expression of thanks. While the learners may have previously possessed intuitive knowledge about the communicative purpose and stages of an oral interview, the fact remains that each and every interview in the study followed the generic stages that were identified during the task preparation phase. Furthermore, the use of SCMC for direct contact with members of the start-up scene in Berlin afforded the learners an opportunity to perform in German the various discourse functions involved in an oral interview in a more immediate, extended, and authentic manner than simulated classroom-based interviews could have.

As for the second line of inquiry, it would seem that the enactment of oral interviews through telecollaboration holds great promise for CBI/CLIL. On a fundamental level, the use of Internet-based communications technology enabled learners to interact with German-speaking content experts in a way that would be difficult or impossible to achieve in a North American classroom context. Moreover, the question-and-answer format that characterizes this genre facilitated four distinct types of content knowledge demonstration: Explicit-Internal (n = 18), Explicit-External (n = 16), Implicit-Internal (n = 13), and Implicit-External content (n = 6). The preponderance of explicit content references may be due to the learners’ desire to be seen as knowledgeable interactants, capable of managing the complex task of interviewing someone in a second language—not only do the learners know what they need to know, they want to show that this is so! The large number of instances of interview-internal reference may contribute to maintenance of the interpersonal dimension of interviewing. By consistently referring to earlier statements, the interviewers demonstrated to the interviewees careful attention to the information provided. These interview-internal references further created a sense of cohesion between different topics and allowed the learners to steer the interview so that the interviewees were consistently able to perform their role in the interaction. Not only did the performance of oral interviews in a virtual exchange afford the opportunity to
practice advanced oral discourse, it also provided a context in which references to content were used to demonstrate attention, link existing knowledge to new knowledge, and create meaningful connections between different topics, thereby facilitating the learners’ continued socialization into secondary discourses (Byrnes, 2005; Gee, 1998).

**Conclusion**

As with any study featuring a limited number of participants, the findings presented here should not be considered widely generalizable. Indeed, they should prompt additional research to confirm and expand upon what has been reported. In particular, the content-language interface bears deeper scrutiny. As Ryshina-Pankova’s (2018) study of text chat discourse in telecollaboration showed, systemic functional linguistics provided a useful framework for understanding the linguistic realization of participants’ intercultural communicative competence. Extended to the current data set, an analysis of discourse-semantic moves (e.g., initiating, responding, continuing, and rejoinder moves) could shed light on how topics are jointly explored between L2 speakers and L1 content experts. The interpersonal dimension of the interview-based interaction was also not addressed in the current study. Although Clayman and Heritage (2002) characterize the interview as a relatively formal genre, there were indications in the data that informality was an important rapport-building strategy. Finally, although not an explicit focus of the study, it bears asking to what degree students could perform the oral interview genre prior to instruction and task preparation. In order to get at such findings, it would be necessary to collect data (i.e., have students conduct oral interviews) at least two distinct intervals, with genre-oriented task preparation only taking place after the first data collection point. As instructional intervention has previously been linked to interlanguage pragmatic development in telecollaboration (e.g., Belz & Vyatkina, 2008; Cunningham, 2016), it could be productive to extend the investigation to focus on the role of genre in task completion. Given the continued interest in virtual exchange, researchers will have ample opportunity to explore these issues.

**References**


Loranc-Paszylk, B. (2016). Incorporating cross-cultural videoconferencing to enhance Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at the tertiary level. In S. Jager, M. Kurek, & B. O’Rourke (Eds.), *New directions in telecollaborative research and practice: Selected papers from the second conference on telecollaboration in higher education* (pp. 131–137). Dublin, Ireland: Research-publishing.net.


Stoller, F. (2002). Promoting the acquisition of knowledge in a content based course. In J. Crandall & D. Kaufman (Eds.), *Content-based instruction in higher education settings* (pp. 109–123). Alexandria, VA: TESOL.


**Appendix. Transcription Conventions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>A period inside brackets denotes a micro pause, a notable pause but of no significant length.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.2)</td>
<td>A number inside brackets denotes a timed pause. This is a pause long enough to time and subsequently show in transcription.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>Square brackets denote a point where overlapping speech occurs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>A dash indicates truncated speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>When there is space between brackets, it denotes that the words spoken here were too unclear to transcribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(( ))</td>
<td>When double brackets appear with a description inserted, it denotes some contextual information where no symbol of representation was available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Underline</strong></td>
<td>When a word or part of a word is underlined, it denotes a raise in volume or emphasis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**About the Author**

Dr. Joseph Cunningham is Assistant Professor of German and Director of the undergraduate curriculum at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. In addition to studying the benefits of virtual exchange for second language learning and teacher education, Dr. Cunningham is interested in the role of telecollaboration at the curricular level.

**E-mail:** joe.cunningham@georgetown.edu