



Exploring L2 learners' engagement and attitude in an intercultural encounter

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Abstract

Following the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005), in particular the two discourse-semantic systems of Engagement and Attitude, this study examines the extent to which second language learners in a US-Spain telecollaborative project (a) engaged with their own ideas and those of their partners and (b) expressed their attitude towards their own and the second language culture. The results of the analysis suggest that learners reacted differently when discussing their own culture and that of their foreign language. The data collected provides evidence that learners avoided using monoglossic (i.e. bare) statements regarding both their L1 and L2 cultures, and fewer contracting statements for the latter. Overall, learners also presented a preference for positive Affective, Judgment, and Appreciation markers, which suggests their interest in creating an environment of solidarity and closeness with their telecollaborative partners. The results also indicated the value of discussing the topic in general, without particular reference to the first or the second culture, as a safe space to address conflicting issues that might result in communication breakdowns and move beyond personal, superficial, and anecdotal references.

Keywords: Intercultural Telecollaborative Encounter, Appraisal Framework, Engagement, Attitude

Language(s) Learned in This Study: English and Spanish

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Introduction

Intercultural dialogue, at the heart of intercultural communication, is a learner-centered collaborative approach toward “learning where knowledge and understanding are constructed through interaction and negotiation” (O’Dowd, 2016a, p. 292). By participating in international partnerships where, together with the instructor’s help, learners read, analyze, and reflect on specific topics, they are likely to develop intercultural awareness (Bauer, de Benedette, Furstenberg, Levet, & Waryn, 2006). Frequently, telecollaborative interactions “have been characterized primarily in alinguistic terms” (Belz, 2003, p. 69) and have been examined according to what learners say or perceive by analyzing the content of their production, by conducting interviews and surveys, or by examining the learners’ journal entries (Basharina, 2007; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Garrett-Rucks, 2013; Ware, 2005; Ware & Kramsch, 2005). However, there is an increasing interest in second language (L2) learning to examine not only what learners say, but also how they say it (Belz, 2003; Oskoz & Pérez-Broncano, 2016; Ryshina-Pankova, 2014, 2018; Vinagre & Corral, 2018). The present study follows this research approach. Taking the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005; White, 1998, 2015) as a starting point and examining the linguistic resources by which texts and speakers express, negotiate, and naturalize particular inter-subjective or ideological positions (White, 2015), and building upon current research in L2 learning underpinned by this framework, the study examines how L2 learners express, discuss and argue their viewpoints regarding their first culture (C1), their second culture (C2) and the topic (T) under discussion in general, as well as how they express their attitudes toward C1, C2, and T in their online discussions. To this end, *Engagement* and *Attitude*, two

discourse–semantic subsystems of the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005), provide a suitable framework to depict discourse strategies that are typical of online discussion forum entries (Coffin & Hewings, 2004).

Literature Review

The wealth of research currently available looking into learners' reflections on cultural issues in telecollaborative environments portrays an indisputable interest in intercultural (communicative) competence in L2 learning (Helm, 2013; O'Dowd, 2016a, b; Turula, 2017). By telecollaboration, we mean "internet-based intercultural exchange[s] between people of different cultural/national backgrounds, set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence (as defined by Byram, 1997) through structured tasks" (Guth & Helm, 2010, p. 14). Telecollaboration, however, is not devoid of problems. First, as O'Dowd (2016a) reminds us, because telecollaboration has become increasingly popular, it has shied away from controversial issues, avoiding all but its most superficial manifestations (Helm, 2013), thus, possibly preventing learners from gaining an understanding of the other culture and from critically reflecting about their own. Second, as Oskoz, Gimeno-Sanz, & Sevilla-Pavón (2018) pointed out, there is a tendency in online interactions for L2 learners to speak about their own culture, spending most of their time researching and addressing cultural issues pertaining to their L1. While researching and addressing their own C1 is a necessary condition to develop the awareness of one's own values that will allow for a conscious control of biased interpretation (Byram, 1997), one could still question the extent to which L2 learners engage in dialogic activity recreating different socio-semiotic voices regarding both C1 and C2. That is, while L2 learners in a telecollaborative exchange have the opportunity to reflect about their own culture and develop the ability to reflect upon the origins of their own beliefs and behaviors, it is nevertheless relevant to examine how L2 learners present and engage with the content provided and with their counterparts, in terms of C1, C2 or T.

A linguistically grounded analysis examining learners' interactions in telecollaborative environments presents itself as appropriate to investigate L2 learners' engagement with the content provided by fellow participants. The appraisal framework, an "approach to exploring, describing and explaining the way language is used to evaluate, to adopt stances, to construct textual personas and to manage interpersonal positionings and relationships" (White, 2015, n.p.) is being increasingly applied to the analysis of computer-mediated interaction in L2 language learning contexts (Belz, 2003; Oskoz & Pérez-Broncano, 2016; Oskoz et al. 2018; Ryshina-Pankova, 2014, 2018; Vinagre & Corral, 2018). Contrary to studies that focus on the content of student interaction, linguistic analyses "emphasiz[e] the social meanings of linguistic patterns, and emotions and evaluations are regarded as relation-building resources" (Vinagre & Corral, 2018, p. 5). That is, through "identifying the linguistic tokens used to evaluate situations, things, or people, appraisal aims to reveal how people position themselves in relation to certain discourses or communities" (ibidem).

The appraisal framework is divided into three different but interacting domains: Attitude, Engagement, and *Graduation*. Graduation, which provides a scaling for the values of judgment, has not been taken into account in this study because the focus is on how ideas are conveyed rather than the intensity of the learners' evaluative stances. Engagement, on the other hand, refers to "those resources by which a text references, invokes and negotiates with the various alternative social positions put at risk by a text's meanings" (White, 1998, p. 13). It reflects the writer's position as well as his or her willingness to recognize alternative socio-semiotic positions (White, 2015). Engagement is, in turn, divided into monoglossic statements, or bare assertions, (Martin & White, 2005), which present propositions as facts hindering dialogistic alternatives, and heteroglossic statements, which enable different opinions. In a telecollaborative encounter between the US and Spain, Oskoz et al. (2018) found a higher presence of heteroglossic discourse strategies compared to monoglossic strategies in telecollaborative online forums, which discloses the openness of L2 learners toward participating in a dialogic space that brings different opinions and perspectives. However, following Kozar (2014), Oskoz et al. (2018) also cautioned that the low presence of monoglossic statements might indicate that learners had not established full solidarity with their international audience. Furthermore, L2

learners wrote fewer monoglossic statements when talking about C2 than C1, which suggests that learners might not feel that it is their place to provide strong or conflicting statements about their C2.

Additionally, Martin and White (2005) distinguish two broad categories within heteroglossic strategies (see [Appendix A](#)) depending on whether they are “dialogically expansive,” (“the degree to which an utterance, by dint of one or more of these locutions, actively makes allowances for dialogically alternative positions and voices”; p. 102), or “dialogically contractive”, (i.e. the extent to which an utterance “acts to challenge, fend off or restrict the scope of such (dialogic contraction)”; p. 102). Ryshina-Pankova (2014) suggests the need for a balance between contracting; Proclaim (Concur, Pronounce and Endorse) and Disclaim (Deny and Counter-expectation) and expanding strategies; Expand, Attribute (Acknowledge and Distance) for learners to engage in argument development. Likewise, Oskoz et al. (2018) suggest that L2 learners in telecollaborative environments may present more expanding strategies and be more prone to avoiding dialogically contractive resources because these limit the negotiation space (Mei & Allison, 2005) in the open environment of an online forum. Furthermore, the frequent use of attributions (i.e. “formulations which disassociate the proposition from the text’s internal authorial voice by attributing it to some external source”; Martin & White, 2005, p. 111), may reflect L2 learners’ desire to bring outside information into the online interaction in order to support their opinions with “objective” information, as well as referring to their counterparts’ comments to create a dialogic space that recognizes different socio-semiotic alternative realities (White, 1998).

Lastly, Attitude refers to the linguistic resources by which a speaker attaches intersubjective values to participants and processes by referencing emotional responses. Attitude can be further divided into Affect (i.e. evaluation by means of the writer or speaker inviting their “audience to share that emotional response, or at least to see that response as appropriate and well motivated, or; ... as understandable”; White, 1998, p. 145-146), Judgment (“the evaluation of human behaviour with respect to social norms”; White, 2015, n.p.), and Appreciation (“the evaluation of objects and products (rather than human behaviour) by reference to aesthetic principles and other systems of social value”; White, 2015, n.p.). The difference between Judgment and Appreciation, White (2015) continues, is that, while Judgment is focused on evaluations of human behavior, Appreciation is concerned with the evaluation of artefacts, states of affairs, and entities. All of these categories can convey positive and negative values and are, subsequently, further subdivided. For instance, Affect differentiates between un/happiness, in/security, dis/satisfaction, and dis/inclination. Judgment distinguishes between social esteem (normality, capacity, and tenacity) and social sanction (veracity and propriety); Appreciation is concerned with impact and quality (reaction), balance and complexity (composition), and valuation (social value).

In what is probably the first study to apply the Appraisal framework in telecollaborative environments, Belz (2003) found that while her US-based learners tended to present negative Judgment and Appreciation comments regarding their own culture, her English-language German learners tended to judge their own cultural behaviors positively in contrast to the US cultural behaviors. However, in the telecollaborative encounter between US and Spanish university students, Vinagre and Corral (2018) found that their learners “were more eager to express their own feelings and emotions than to judge their partners’ behaviour and opinions or evaluate phenomena” (p. 10). Contrary to Belz’s (2003) study, L2 learners from both countries preferred using positive values in all three systems (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation), perhaps as Vinagre and Corral suggest, due to an “attempt to portray an attractive personal identity that engages their partners’ trust and confidence in order to collaborate together” (p. 11). Moreover, given that Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation “constitute an interconnected and interactive system of evaluation” (White, 1998, p. 153), it does not come as a surprise that Vinagre and Corral’s learners’ presented positive markers in all three categories. However, although the study was not carried out in an international telecollaborative environment, one of the reasons Oskoz and Pérez-Broncano (2016) failed to find an interconnection between Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation when learners addressed their C2 was probably because, instead of conveying what they thought about their C2 counterparts, they expressed how the members of the C2 may have felt as a result of C1 behaviours, thus criticizing their own C1. This in turn led to a higher presence of negative Affect markers and a higher presence of positive Judgment markers.

Therefore, given the growing presence of telecollaborative projects and the need to examine the extent to which L2 learners engage in critical interaction regarding their own culture and the target culture, this study addresses the following questions:

1. How do L2 learners negotiate their ideological positions (Engagement) when discussing their C1, the C2, and T in telecollaborative asynchronous interactions?
2. How do L2 learners deploy attitudinal markers (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) when discussing their C1, the C2, and T in telecollaborative asynchronous interactions?
3. How are L2 learners' attitudinal markers (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) framed within the Engagement strategies employed when discussing their C1, the C2, and T under discussion in telecollaborative asynchronous interactions?

Methodology

Background of the Study

Two groups of learners, one from a technical university in Spain and the other from a mid-sized Atlantic coast university in the US engaged in a telecollaborative encounter during one semester. There were 12 Spanish students, all of whom were majoring in aerospace engineering, who had enrolled in an optional third-year, six-credit, higher intermediate English-language class, and 12 North American students enrolled in a third-year three-credit Spanish history and culture class as a requirement for their major or minor in Spanish. The Spanish students' level of English ranged between B2 and C2, while the US-based students' level ranged between B2 and C1, all according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). These levels were determined by each instructor after conducting an in-house proficiency assignment. The higher intermediate English-language class focused on the development of English language skills, with an emphasis on developing learners' grammatical accuracy and fluency in their conversations. The culture and history class focused on the history and culture of Spain. Each class, therefore, had its own set program to address the different pedagogical and curricular objectives. Yet, because both courses also focused on addressing issues of social justice from a historical, political, and economic perspective, the instructors deemed it appropriate to connect their learners so they could discuss the selected topics from different cultural perspectives.

Organized into six groups, each with two participants from the US and two participants from Spain, the learners completed a number of collaborative tasks, which included three two-week online forum discussions in a private Google+ community related to different cultural topics. To conclude the two-week written interaction in the online forums, students were also requested to engage in 30-minute synchronous sessions using Skype. Afterwards, each pair of students in each group from the same country was requested to collaboratively prepare a sound-enhanced PowerPoint or Prezi presentation which, after being uploaded to Google+, was peer-assessed by their counterparts, taking into account fluency, appropriateness of cultural content, and style. At the end of the semester, each pair of students chose one of the topics (or subtopics) discussed in the online forums and created a podcast using Audacity. The podcasts were also uploaded to Google+ for the final assessment. Only the Google+ online discussions will be analyzed in this study.

Procedures

After preliminary introductions, the six groups of students participated in three two-week long discussions in Google+. Since it was a closed community, this safeguarded the learners' privacy and, in some cases, unwillingness to share their profile with the outside world. The asynchronous nature of the postings was also a feature that the instructors sought in order to allow students time to think out and plan their responses (Guth & Thomas, 2010).

The first online forum focused on the discussion of the YouTube video *The Danger of a Single Story* (Adichie, 2009). This discussion was not analyzed in the study because it was used as a way for the learners

to get used to participating in the telecollaborative discussions and for the instructors to address any type of glitches that could interfere with the online communication. The second and third discussions (analyzed in this study) focused on (1) immigration and (2) nationalism and patriotism. To give all the learners the opportunity to interact in their target language, the discussion on immigration took place entirely in Spanish, whilst the discussion on nationalism took place entirely in English. The three online forums took place between the end of September and the end of November. This schedule gave learners an opportunity (a) to become acquainted with their fellow classmates and their respective academic programs before starting the telecollaboration project, and (b) to wrap up the project two weeks before the end of the semester.

The cultural discussions were always initiated in class under the guidance of the instructors, who also provided links and articles to scaffold the conversation. Both groups used the same links and articles as a starting point. After the initial in-class conversation, learners continued the online discussion in their respective groups for two weeks. The two discussions analyzed in this study, immigration and nationalism or patriotism, addressed topics that were very significant at the time of the study, having significant reporting in the news in both countries. Discussions continued throughout the two weeks in student-led teams. Following Arnold and Ducate (2006), Oskoz (2009, 2013), and Weasenforth, Biesenbach-Lucas, and Meloni (2002), each group was assigned a leader per topic whose mission was to initiate, maintain and close each of the discussions and summarize the comments posted by all of the other group members. All of the group members were also required to provide personal opinions and share personal experiences, integrate ideas from their classmates' contributions into their own comments, search for additional information, and ask questions that would help maintain the conversation. All of the learners were required to post a minimum of four comments on each topic. Following Oskoz and Pérez-Broncano's (2016) advice, the instructors discretely participated in the online discussions in order to encourage exchanges when any of the groups kept silent for too long and to bring different perspectives into the discussion. Because this study focused on the L2 learners' interactions, the instructors' online exchanges were excluded from the analysis.

Data Analysis

Learners' postings were subjected to a quantitative analysis using the Appraisal model (Martin & White, 2005). To examine Engagement (see [Appendix A](#)) and Attitude (see [Appendix B](#)), the researchers used the T-unit, that is, a "main clause with all subordinate clauses attached to it" (Hunt, 1965, p. 20), as the element of analysis. The T-unit was selected because "these units are the shortest grammatically allowable sentences into which the theme could be segmented" (Hunt, 1965, p. 21).

To start with, the researchers categorized a T-unit according to its primary focus, C1, C2, general statements referring to the topic under discussion (T) without focusing on either C1 or C2, and dynamics (D) for instances such as salutations, closing statements or management of discussion ("Hey guys thanks for your responses!"). All D utterances were excluded from the study. In those instances in which a single utterance simultaneously referred to C1, C2, or T, it was counted two or three times, as appropriate. Consider, for example, the following sentence where both C1 and C2 are referred to:

Here in Spain (C1) the number of people who consider themselves patriots is significantly less than in the USA. (C2). (Paco, Spain, Online forum 2)

It should be taken into account that C1 referred to the US culture for the US students whilst C2 referred to Spanish culture and vice-versa for Spanish students. Yet, there were two participants, one from the US and one from Spain, who made references to belonging to two different cultures. In those cases, references to both their cultures counted as C1.

Secondly, the researchers examined whether the T-units were monoglossic or heteroglossic. In the case of the latter, statements were also analyzed for whether they could be imbued with the voices of others, either through an expansion strategy that considered the perspectives of others as legitimate or supporting one's own, or through a contraction strategy that was an active challenge of the views of others. Vinagre and

Corral (2018) counted lexical items such as “I believe,” “I think,” and “in my opinion,” as part of Attitude (Judgment + > Veracity +). However, in this study, these markers were considered to indicate the learners’ engagement and ideological position towards their own statements. Thus, these markers counted as belonging to Expanding strategies, and more specifically to the sub-category of Entertain. It must be noted that, as illustrated in Example 1, an utterance could present more than one engagement marker. Notice that in this study the sub-categories of Attribute, Acknowledge and Distance were further subdivided into Acknowledge external sources, Acknowledge classmates, Distance external sources, and Distance classmates (see Appendix A for examples). Similarly, Counter-expectation was further divided into Counter-expectation of external sources and Counter-expectation of classmates and Endorse was divided into Endorse external sources and Endorse classmates (see Appendix A for examples). These divisions were implemented to examine the extent to which learners developed their arguments based on external sources and on the comments from their classmates.

Example 1

And in response to your question (Expand > Attribute > Acknowledge classmate), I think that (T > Expand > Entertain) NGOs and overcoming the worldwide financial crisis could improve the immigration situation. (Pedro, Spain, Online forum 1)

Thirdly, to examine Attitude, the T-units were coded as either expressing positive or negative emotions or values. Within each T-unit, the researchers looked for lexico-grammatical items (adverbs, adjectives, verbs, and nominalizations), that is, a single word, a part of a word, or a chain of words that form the basic elements of a language lexicon. In such cases where there was no inherently positive or negative lexical item, decisions about Affect and Judgment were made based on the context of the conversation. Fourthly, the researchers decided whether each T-unit represented Affect, Judgment or Appreciation. Note that, as Iedema, Feez and White (1994) pointed out, the subcategories of Judgment and Appreciation can be *inscribed* in texts when the evaluation is explicitly stated by means of a lexical item carrying a Judgment value such as *huge*, in “I feel as though here, in the US the flag is a huge symbol that represents the patriotism and the national identity,” or can appear as *tokens* when Judgment is evoked by superficially neutral ideational meanings such as “I mean, we have our current flag and it is in every government building but we don’t do anything like the pledging allegiance to the flag,” which evoke Judgmental responses from the reader. This implies that these tokens “assume shared social norms” (White, 1998, p. 35), which the reader will interpret according to their own cultural and ideological positioning. Each T-unit can represent more than one attitudinal marker. For example:

Perhaps you don’t know these words (C2 > Judgment –, capacity –) (which is good (C2 > Judgment + > Valuation +) given that they are very offensive words) (C2 > Judgment – > Valuation –) but they are very commonly used (C2 > Judgment + > Normality +) to call some immigrant groups (C2 > Judgment – > Propriety –).

(Quizás estas palabras no las conocéis (lo cual es bueno, ya que son palabras muy ofensivas) pero son utilizadas muy comúnmente aquí para llamar a algunos colectivos inmigrantes). (Laura, Spain, Online forum 1)

The following example illustrates how two T-units were analyzed combining both Attitude and Engagement systems.

I see that Anastasia (T > Expand > Attribute > Acknowledge classmate) defined “nationalism”; however (T > Contract > Disclaim > Counter), I believe she left out (T > Expand > Attribute > Acknowledge classmate) a key part (T > Appreciation + > Valuation +; Appreciation – > Balance –) of that definition given by the Oxford dictionary (T > Expand > Attribute > Acknowledge reading), which includes a belief that one’s country is better (T > Appreciation + > Quality +) than others (T > Judgment – > Propriety –). (David, US, Online forum 2)

In the first stages of data analysis, inter-rater reliability was sought first by discussing the framework and then coding 20% of the data (from the Spanish and the English participants), comparing results, and discussing inconsistencies. Subsequently, once the categories had been agreed upon, one of the researchers coded both the Spanish and the English data. Two weeks later, the same researcher again coded 20% of the data. The intra-rater reliability analysis (Cohen's k) indicated a significantly high consistency of the rater ($k = .865$, $p < .000$). Pearson correlations, one-way ANOVAs and Tukey post hoc tests were utilized to analyze the data. This study only reports on the significant results.

Results

The first research question examined how L2 learners negotiate their ideological positions (Engagement) when discussing their own culture, the L2 culture, and the topic under discussion in telecollaborative asynchronous interactions. The researchers examined the presence of monoglossic and heteroglossic statements (see Figure 1). Results show that learners produced a total of 2,136 T-units that were either monoglossic or heteroglossic for C1, C2, and T. This featured a considerably higher number of heteroglossic statements (1,920; 89.89%) compared to monoglossic statements (216; 10.11%). Between C1, C2, and T, the learners focused more on C1 (1,335 instances; 62.50%), followed by T (449 instances; 21.02%) and, lastly, C2 (352 instances; 16.48%). The researchers addressed the extent to which there was a correlation between the frequency of reference to C1, C2, and T, and the frequency of monoglossic or heteroglossic statements. The Pearson correlations indicated that C1 positively correlated to monoglossic statements ($r = .164$, $n = 2,136$, $p = .000$), which implies that learners were more likely to use monoglossic statements to talk about C1. In addition, there were positive correlations between heteroglossic statements and C2 ($r = .101$, $n = 2136$, $p = .000$) and T ($r = .101$, $n = 2136$, $p = .000$) indicating that L2 learners are more likely to use heteroglossic statements when addressing C2 or T.

Within heteroglossic statements, learners presented higher numbers of expanding (1,112; 57.92%) than contracting (808; 42.08%) statements. Learners used more expanding statements (see Figure 1) when addressing C1 (601; 31.30%), followed by C2 (273; 14.22%) and T (238; 12.40%). With regard to contracting statements, learners employed them more frequently to address C1 (547; 28.49%) than T (193; 10.05%) or C2 (68; 3.54%). When comparing C1, C2, and T, there was a statistically significant difference regarding the use of expanding and contracting statements ($F_{1,1917} = 43.934$, $p = .000$). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that learners employed significantly fewer expanding statements when talking about C1 ($M = .5235$, $SD = .49$, $p = .000$) and T ($M = .5535$, $SD = .49$, $p = .000$) than about C2 ($M = .8006$, $SD = .40$, $p > .05$).

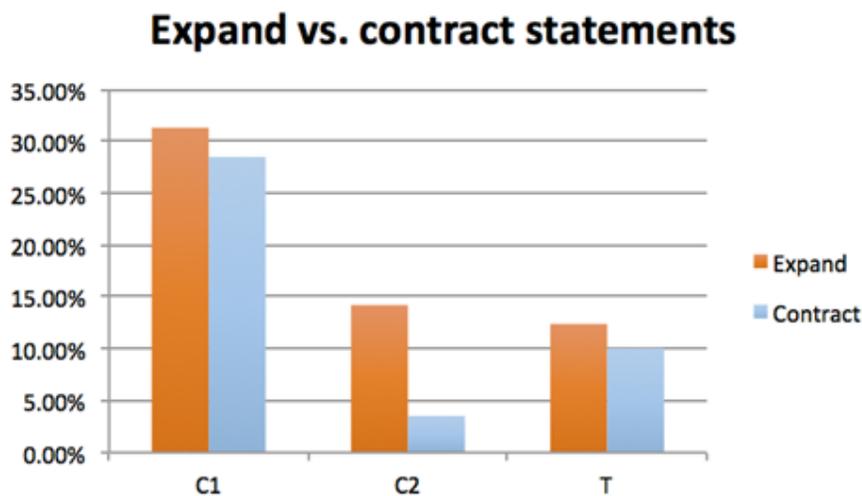


Figure 1. Expanding vs. contractive statements in C1, C2, and T.

Within expanding statements, learners employed more Entertain than Attribute statements (634; 33.01% and 478; 24.90%, respectively), which suggests that, while taking into account their counterparts' views or outside sources to keep the conversation going, they presented their own opinions, albeit in a somewhat mitigated way. A closer look at the data (see Figure 2) suggests that learners showed a slight preference for Entertain, particularly for C1 (311; 16.20%), followed by T (163; 8.49%), and C2 (160; 8.33%) over Attribute statements C1 (290; 15.10%), C2 (113; 5.89%) and T (75; 3.91%). The preference for Entertain statements was shown to be statistically significant through a post-hoc Tukey test when compared to C2 ($M=.3151$, $SD = .47$, $p = .000$) and T ($M=.6456$, $SD = .47$, $p = .001$) on a one-way ANOVA ($F_{2,631} = 8.950$, $p = .000$). Within Attribute, learners relied on outside information resulting from readings, videos, or external voices (265; 13.80%), and also constructed the conversation by acknowledging their classmates' contributions (132; 6.88%). The results of the post-hoc Tukey test from a one-way ANOVA ($F_{2,474} = 31.34$, $p = .000$) indicate that learners acknowledged their classmates' contributions significantly more when discussing C2 ($M=.5310$) than when discussing C1 ($M=.1644$, $SD = 37$, $p = .000$) or T ($.3158$, $SD = 46$, $p = .002$).

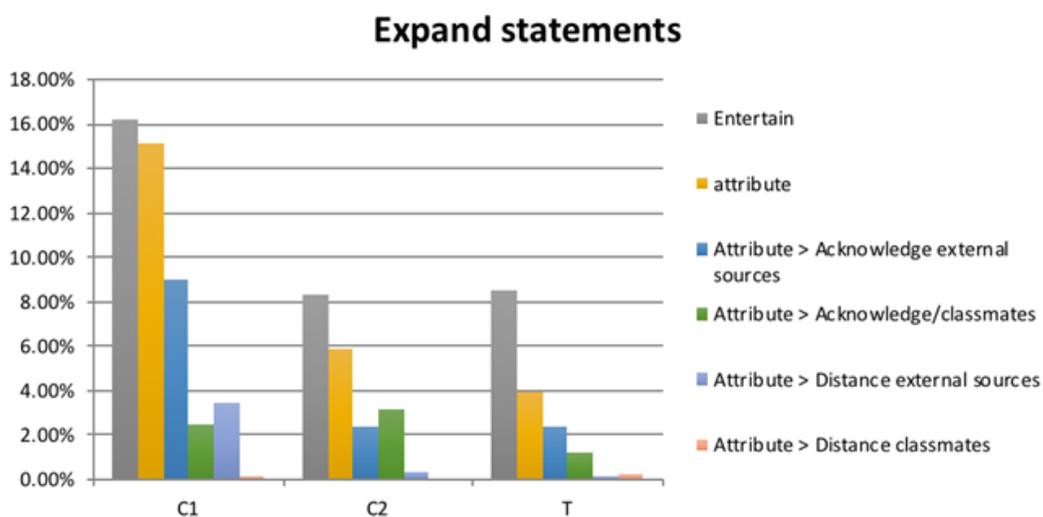


Figure 2. Presence of expanding statements in C1, C2, and T.

Within contracting statements, learners employed more Proclaim discourse markers (597; 31.09%) than Disclaim (211; 10.99%). This pattern (see Figure 3) was followed for C1 (402; 20.94% vs. 145; 7.55%), C2 (45; 2.34% vs. 23; 1.20%), and T (150; 7.81% vs. 43; 2.24%). Within the Proclaim categories, the most common subcategory was Pronounce (486; 25.31%), followed by Counter external (130; 6.77%). The least common discourse markers were Endorse, either external sources or classmates (23; 1.20% and 35; 1.82%, respectively), and Counter classmates (12; 0.63%). With regard to C1, the most common subcategory was Pronounce (396; 16.98%), followed by Counter external (95; 4.95%). For T, the most common category was Pronounce (396; 6.51%), followed by Counter external (95; 1.35%). ANOVA results were not significant and so are not provided.

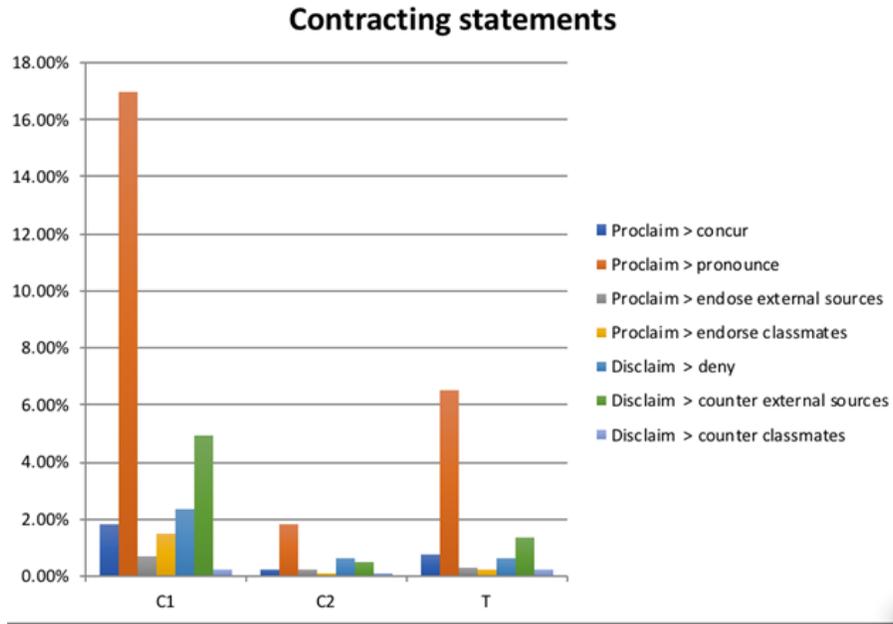


Figure 3. Presence of contractive statements in C1, C2, and T.

The second research question examined how L2 learners deployed attitudinal markers (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) when discussing their own culture, the L2 culture and the topic under discussion in telecollaborative asynchronous interactions. Within the 1,923 heteroglossic statements, the researchers found 1,666 instances of attitude. The most common attitudinal markers were Appreciation (794; 47.66%), followed by Judgment (638; 38.40%) and Affect (234; 14.05%). When looking at these categories in relation to C1, C2, and T (see Figure 4), both for C1 and C2 there was a higher presence of Appreciation– than Appreciation+ (273; 16.39% and 205; 12.30% and 75; 4.50% and 56; 3.36%), respectively; for T, however, there was a higher presence of Appreciation+ (110; 6.60%) than Appreciation– (75; 4.56%). A one-way ANOVA indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between how this was used when referring to C1 and C2 ($F_{2,791} = 7.185, p = .001$). The Tukey post-hoc test revealed that learners employed significantly more negative Appreciation markers when talking about C1 ($M = .4292, SD = .4954, p = .001$) and C2 ($M = .4331, SD = .4974, p = .017$) compared to T ($M = .5909, SD = .4930, p > .05$).

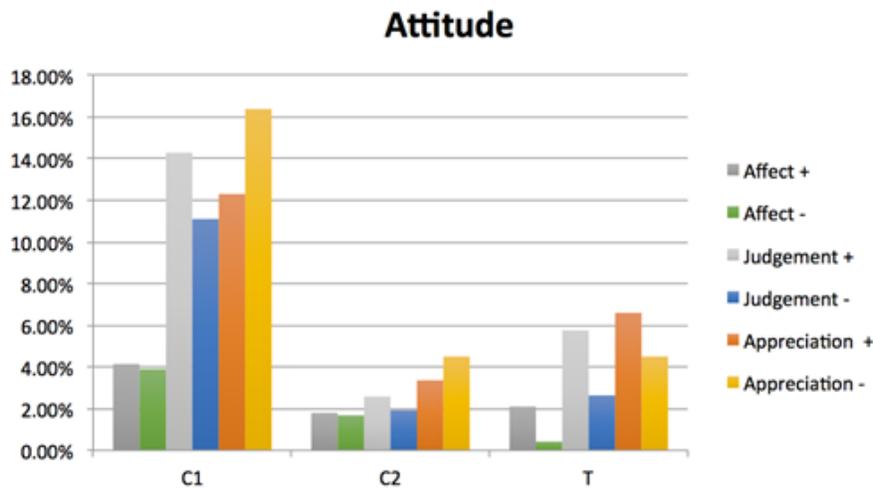


Figure 4. Presence of Attitude markers in C1, C2, and T.

Regarding C1 (see Figure 5), the most common category was Quality- (149; 8.94%), followed by Quality+ (132; 7.92%), and Impact- (85; 5.10%). With regard to C2, the most common categories were Quality+ (42; 2.52%), closely followed by Quality- (39; 2.34%). With regard to T, Quality+ (56; 3.36%) and Quality- (37; 2.22%) were the most common ones, followed by Impact+ (29; 1.74%) and Impact- (27; 1.62%).

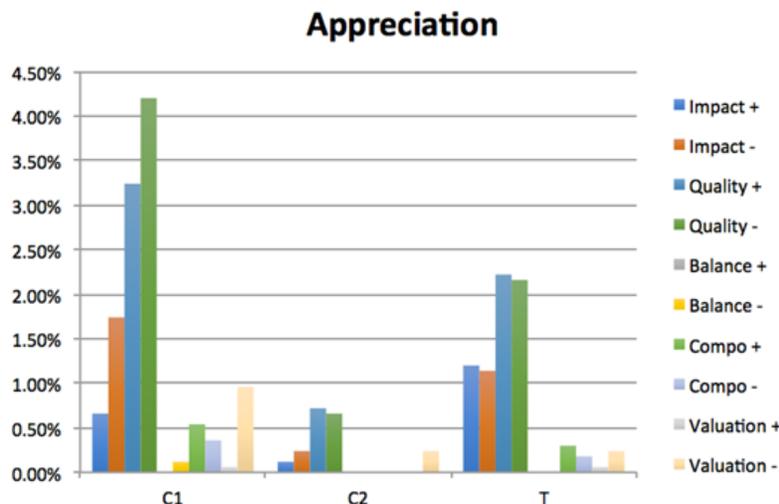


Figure 5. Presence of Appreciation markers in C1, C2 and T.

In terms of Judgment, learners presented higher values of Judgment+ than Judgment- for C1 (238; 14.29% and 185; 11.10% respectively), C2 (43; 2.58% and 32; 1.92%, respectively) and T (96; 7.76% and 44; 2.64%, respectively), which was statistically significant ($F_{2,635} = 5.399, p = .005$). The Tukey post-hoc test revealed that learners employed significantly more Judgment+ markers when talking about T ($M = .7181, SD = .4514, p = .004$) than when talking about C1 ($M = .5688, SD = .4958$). Concerning C1 (see Figure 6), the most frequent category was Normality+ (151; 9.06%), closely followed by Propriety- (91; 5.46%). In terms of C2, the most common categories were Normality+ and Normality- (32; 1.92% and 21; 1.26%), respectively. Regarding T, the most frequent category was Normality+ (48; 2.88%) followed by Propriety- (25; 1.50%) and Capacity+ (21; 1.26%).

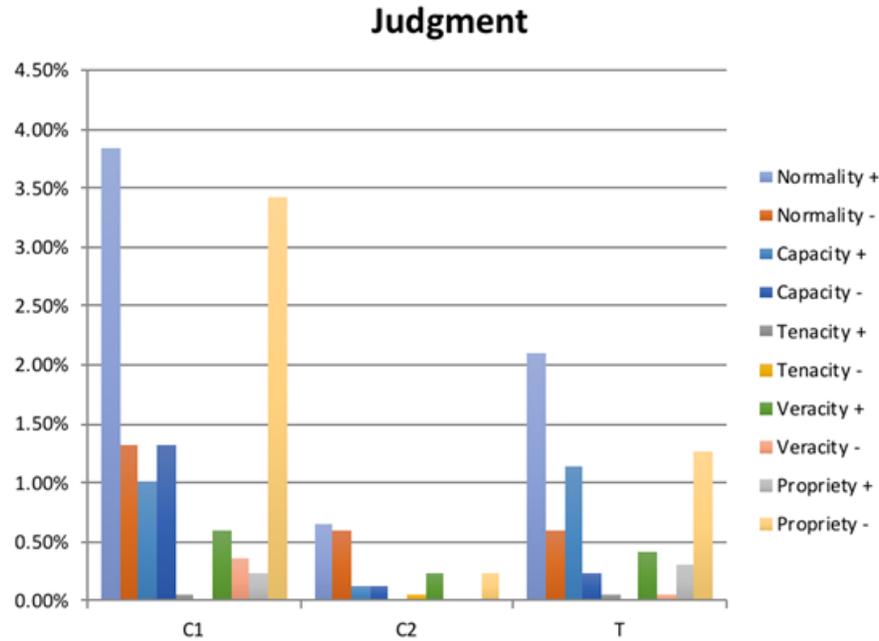


Figure 6. Presence of Judgment markers in C1, C2 and T.

Regarding Affect, learners presented more Affect+ than Affect- for C1 (69; 4.14% and 65; 3.90%, respectively), C2 (30; 1.80% and 28; 1.68%, respectively), and T (35; 2.10% and 7; 0.42%, respectively). There was a statistically significant difference between the use of this when referring to C1, C2 or T, as determined by a one-way ANOVA ($F_{2,231} = 7.28, p = .001$). A Tukey post hoc test revealed that learners employed significantly more Affect+ markers when talking about T ($M = .8095, SD = .39$) than when talking about either C1 ($M = .4981, SD = .50, p = .001$) or C2 ($M = .5085, SD = .50, p = .007$). Looking into the subcategories of affection (see [Figure 7](#)), the most common categories were Misery (40; 2.40%) and Desire (40; 2.40%). In terms of C1, the most frequent category was Misery (29; 1.74%), followed by Desire (15; 0.90%) while in terms of C2, Desire (15; 0.90%) was followed by Misery (9; 0.54%) and Surprise (9; 0.54%).

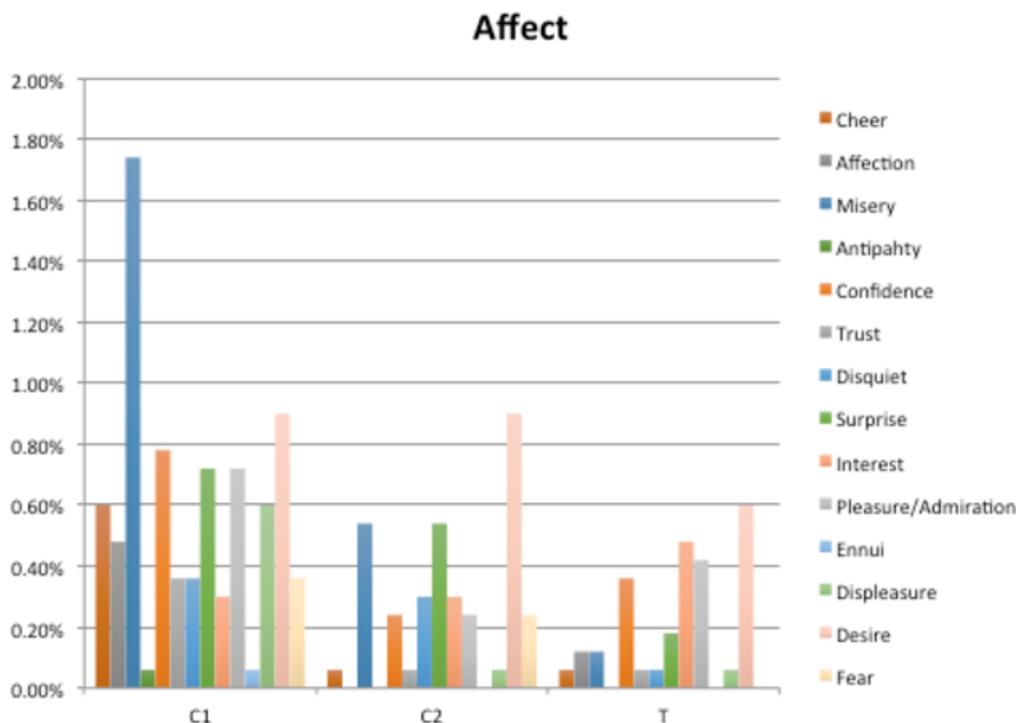


Figure 7. Presence of Affect markers in C1, C2, and T.

The third research question queried how the attitudinal markers learners used (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) were framed within the engagement strategies employed when addressing their own culture, the L2 culture, and the topic under discussion in telecollaborative asynchronous interactions. Overall, learners used more expanding (906; 54.38%) than contracting (760; 45.62%) statements to address Attitude for C1, C2 and T. When focusing on C1, learners employed a similar amount of expanding (517; 31.16%) and contracting statements (518; 31.10%). Within expanding strategies (See Figure 8), L2 learners mostly expressed Appreciation– (135; 8.10%), followed by Judgment+ (121; 7.26%), Judgment– (96; 5.76%) and Appreciation+ (97; 5.82%). In terms of contracting strategies, learners presented more instances of Appreciation– (138; 8.28%), followed by Judgment+ (117; 7.02%), Appreciation+ (108; 6.48%, and Judgment– (89; 5.34%). Regarding C2, learners employed more expanding (199; 11.94%) than contracting (65; 3.90%) statements to express Attitude. For C2, learners used expanding statements mostly for Appreciation– (59; 3.54%), followed by Appreciation+ (45; 1.86%). Regarding T, learners employed slightly more expanding (190; 11.40%) than contracting (177; 10.62%) statements. For T, learners used mostly expanding statements for Appreciation+ (67; 4.02%), followed by contracting statements for Judgment+ (53; 3.18%). These statements were followed by expanding statements for Judgment+ (43; 2.58%) and Appreciation– (34; 2.04%) and by contracting statements for Appreciation+ (43; 2.58%) and Appreciation– (41; 2.46%).

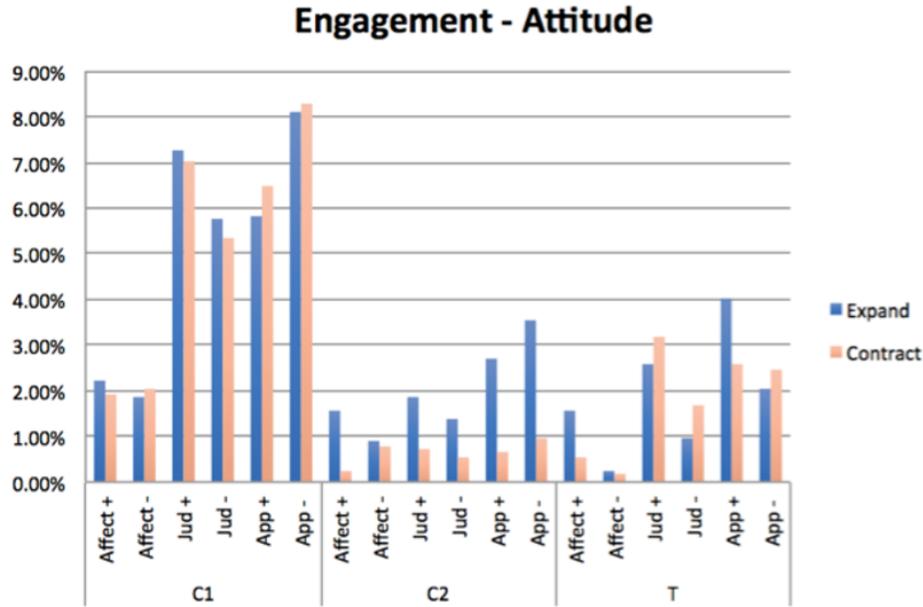


Figure 8. Presence of Engagement with Attitude in C1, C2, and T.

When looking at the subcategories within expanding statements (Entertain and Attribute, including Acknowledge external readings, Acknowledge classmate's argumentations, Distance external readings and Distance classmate's argumentations), regarding C1 (see [Figure 9](#)), the Pearson correlations indicated that Entertain showed a positive correlation with Judgment+ ($r = .124, n = 602, p = 0.002$) but a negative one with Judgment- ($r = -.081, n = 602, p = 0.047$). There was also a positive correlation between Attribute and Judgment- ($r = .081, n = 602, p = 0.047$) and a negative correlation between Attribute and Judgment+ ($r = -.124, n = 602, p = 0.002$). With regard to C2, there were positive correlations between Attribute and Judgment- ($r = .159, n = 273, p = .008$), with an emphasis on Acknowledge classmates' argumentations and Judgment- ($r = .179, n = 273, p = .003$). There was also a positive correlation between Acknowledge classmates and Appreciation+ ($r = .146, n = 273, p = 0.015$) and negative correlations between Entertain and Judgment- ($r = -.157, n = 273, p = .009$). Given these results, the correlations suggest that learners provided positive opinions but refrained from providing negative comments about their C1 behaviors and referred to their partners' opinions to express negative values regarding their C1, as well as positive and negative values with respect to their C2.

Expand statements -- Attitude

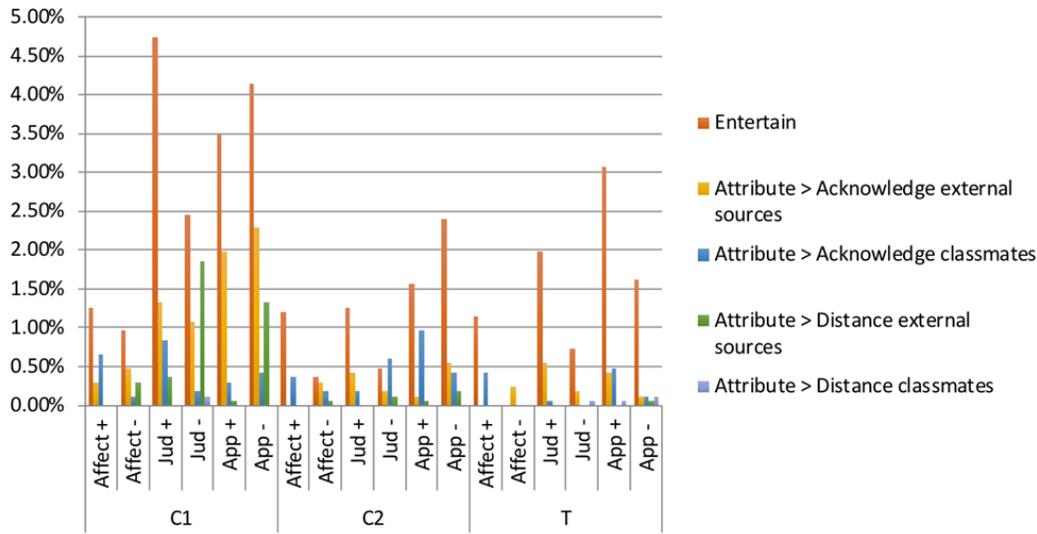


Figure 9. Presence of expanding strategies with Attitude markers for C1, C2, and T.

Within contracting statements (see Figure 10), in terms of C1, there was a significant positive correlation between Proclaim and Appreciation+ ($r = .112, n = 548, p = 0.008$), but a negative correlation between Proclaim and Judgment– ($r = .222, n = 548, p = 0.000$). These results support the idea that L2 learners avoid providing negative views and rather focus on the positive aspects of the state of affairs of the C1. In regards to C2, learners used very few Proclaim statements, but there was a positive correlation between Endorse external readings and Affect– ($r = .514, n = 68, p = 0.000$), which speaks again to the reliance of L2 learners on external sources to address their C2. Regarding T, there were positive correlations between Pronounce and Judgment+ ($r = .154, n = 195, p = 0.032$) and between Disclaim and Appreciation– ($r = .143, n = 195, p = 0.047$).

Contract statements - Attitude

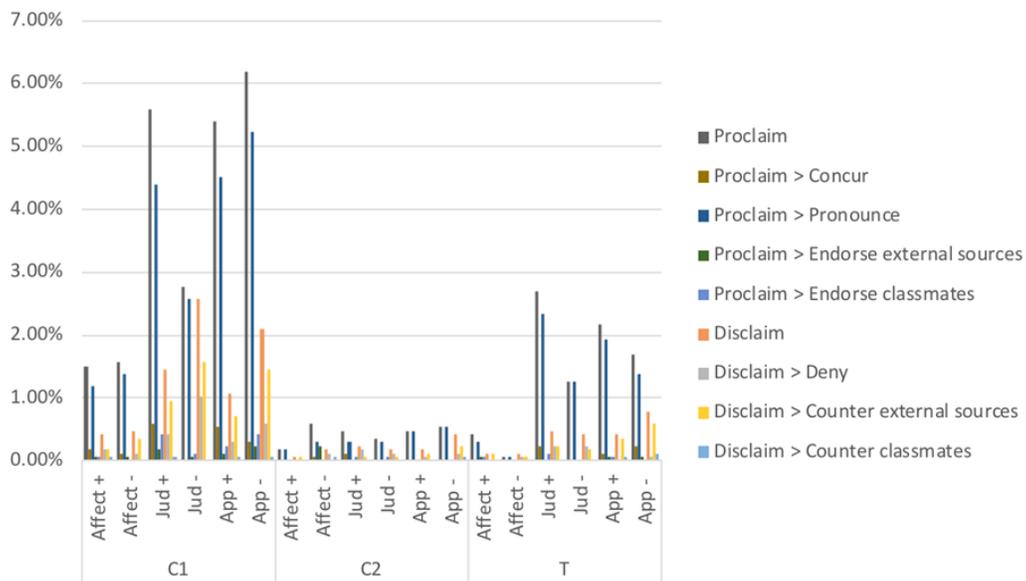


Figure 10. Presence of contracting strategies with Attitude markers for C1, C2 and T.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which L2 learners in an intercultural exchange between the US and Spain engaged in written dialogic activity. To answer the first question, how L2 learners negotiate their ideological positions when discussing their own culture, the L2 culture, and the topic under discussion in telecollaborative asynchronous interactions, the higher presence of heteroglossic than monoglossic statements suggests that online forums are indeed a place for dialogic interaction where learners are able to engage with their partners intersubjectively. Within heteroglossic statements, as previously argued by Oskoz and Pérez-Broncano (2016) and Oskoz et al., (2018), L2 learners preferred to use more expanding than contracting strategies. There was a difference, however, in the use of these statements depending on whether learners referred to C1, C2, or T. With regard to C1, the high frequency of Entertain and Pronounce markers illustrates that L2 learners felt confident presenting their own opinions and perspectives about their own culture. When referring to C2, however, learners employed more expanding strategies, mitigating their opinions or referring to others' content. Conversely, when referring to T, learners presented a more balanced use of expanding and contracting statements, which, according to Ryshina-Pankova (2014), is necessary to engage in argument development. What is more relevant from these findings is that the balanced use of contracting and expanding strategies when discussing T might suggest, following Mei (2006), that L2 learners use T to show the significance of the issues being discussed, by successfully moving from contractive statements (such as Pronounce to Counter) to expanding statements (such as Entertain and all subcategories of Attribute). These results may also suggest that discussing T—including definitions, explaining concepts, etc.—serves as a safe space where L2 learners can successfully address challenging topics and talk about concepts to support their own informed opinions about C1 and C2. The fact that students brought content from external sources, including their other classes, into the discussions reminds us, as O'Dowd (2016a), pointed out, of the need to include cross-disciplinary collaboration into the telecollaborative encounters. It also points to the necessity of organizing telecollaborative encounters within the framework of content-based instruction, where students focus on specific content (including the readings they have to do to expand their knowledge of the subject matter) rather than focusing on general topics such as their respective cultures.

The second research question queried how learners deployed attitudinal markers (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) when discussing their own culture, the L2 culture and the topic under discussion in telecollaborative asynchronous interactions. The higher presence of Appreciation markers confirms the L2 learners' preference to positively or negatively evaluate laws and policies rather than use Judgment markers to discuss C1 and C2 behaviors (Oskoz & Pérez-Broncano, 2016). These findings, however, differ from Vinagre and Corral (2018), who found that their learners in a US-Spanish telecollaborative environment presented more Affect than Appreciation and Judgment markers. There are three possible explanations for this. First, the topics selected for the study, immigration and nationalism or patriotism, differ from those in Vinagre and Corral's in which, despite discussing the health systems in both countries, their learners also engaged in tasks such as getting to know each other or festivities and celebrations, which might have encouraged learners to express more affective feelings. Secondly, following Derewianka (2007), it is possible that the tasks and instructions provided required different levels of literacy practices from these students. Learners in the current study had specific instructions that required them to look for additional information, provide evidence to support their points, and to some extent, be objective. It is likely that the perceived formality of the tasks discouraged learners from presenting a high number of affective markers, and alternatively, rely on judgment and appreciation markers to convey their meanings. Thirdly, this study only counted instances that referred to C1, C2 and T, and excluded those referring to the dynamics of the class, in which learners presented positive and negative affect markers regarding the conversation. Yet, similarly to Vinagre and Corral's findings, the most commonly used markers were Desire, within the subcategory of Inclination, and Misery, within the subcategory of Unhappiness, which illustrates L2 learners' eagerness to learn about their partners' opinions about both C1 and C2 and then expressing their discontent, mostly towards their own C1. In terms of Appreciation, comparably to Vinagre and Corral's conclusions (op. cit.), learners most frequently used Reaction (Impact and Quality) appraisals, which voices

the learners' frequent evaluation of the effect and value of the policies and practices conducted in the different cultures. In terms of Judgment, this study also corroborates Vinagre and Corral's findings in the sense that learners, overall, presented more instances of Social Esteem (Normality, Capacity, and Tenacity) than Social Sanction (Veracity and Propriety). Yet, the fact that there were more instances of Propriety than of Tenacity and Capacity speaks, again, to how the tasks (immigration and nationalism or patriotism) might have led L2 learners to provide more morally-inclined statements.

When focusing on the frequency of positive and negative values, the higher presence of negative Appreciation values for both C1 and C2, coupled with higher positive values for Judgment regarding C1 and C2 only partially concur with the findings of Oskoz and Pérez-Broncano (2016) and Belz (2003). Like these authors, this study found that learners tended to present negative Appreciation comments regarding their own C1, rejecting and criticizing the policies and practices of their own culture when talking about immigration or about the effects of nationalism. However, unlike Oskoz and Pérez-Broncano's and Belz's US-based learners but like Belz's English-language German learners and Vinagre and Corral's (2018) US and Spain-based learners, in the current study learners tended to judge their C1 cultural behaviors in a positive light and as normal. In fact, the high presence of normality instances might be the result of learners including and evaluating the regular practices that take place in their C1. Yet, contrary to Vinagre and Corral's study, learners in this study presented higher instances of negative Propriety than positive for C1, C2, and T. As previously mentioned, it is likely that the challenging and candent topics of this study appealed to the learners' sense of morality. Finally, given the interconnections between Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation (White, 1998), it was not surprising to find positive affect markers for T given that it had become a neutral space where learners freely engaged and provided their opinions about immigration and nationalism or patriotism. The alternate positive and negative factors among Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation for C1 and C2 might reflect the learners' openness to criticize states of affairs and avoidance of judging human behavior.

With regard to the third question, which queried how L2 learners' attitudes (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) were framed within the engagement strategies employed when discussing their own culture, the L2 culture and the topic under discussion in telecollaborative asynchronous interactions, learners presented different types of statements depending on whether they were expressing feelings (Affect) addressing behaviors (Judgment), or commenting on artefacts, states of affairs, and entities (Appreciation) of C1, C2, or T. When referring to C1, learners avoided criticizing—either directly or in a mitigated fashion—their own C1 behaviors, as seen by the negative correlations (e.g. between Attribute and Judgment or Proclaim and Judgment), but rather relied on either external sources or classmates (attribute) to criticize their own C1 behaviors. In terms of C2, L2 learners avoided providing even their own mitigated opinions about C2 behaviors and relied on their telecollaborative partners to address them. Indeed, the fact that learners also rested on either external sources or their classmates even to present negative feelings or a positive perspective of their C2 confirms L2 learners' reluctance to be critical and hurt their telecollaborative partners' feelings, which could potentially create a negative or threatening environment. This similar behavior between C1 and C2, together with the overall higher number of expanding over contracting statements, illustrates learners' preference to avoid confrontation with their telecollaborative partners and create a positive environment (Vinagre & Corral, 2018). Finally, the fact that when discussing T, L2 learners employed significantly more contracting than expanding statements for positive and negative Judgment and negative Appreciation confirms the position of T as the neutral space where learners felt more assertive about providing their opinions and introducing alternative positions into the conversation, often informed by their own readings and content from other classes, without confronting either C1 or C2's values and behaviors.

Conclusion

The question today is not whether we should engage our L2 learners in telecollaborative projects but how to make these interactions between two or more groups from different cultures successful. The results of

this study confirm that in the online forums in this telecollaborative environment, L2 learners had the opportunity of engaging in a dialogue that recognizes different socio-semiotic perspectives about both their C1, and C2, as well as the topic under discussion, in general. This study also supports the premise of including controversial topics which, when guided by external readings and the mediation of the instructor, deliberately address conflicting worldviews (Helm, 2013). This study also reinforces the potential of interdisciplinary collaboration with other subject areas, which will provide learners with the required knowledge to move beyond specific and sometimes anecdotal examples from C1 and C2.

The results obtained from the study have a number of pedagogical implications. On the one hand, teaming up with instructors from content classes that can provide additional readings pertaining to the discussion topics will, no doubt, enhance online discussions, moving them from a personal and anecdotal level to a more conceptual level. On the other hand, even though learners should be informed and discuss the content of their readings with their online group, they should also be required to present their own opinion as well as critically analyze and reflect on the topics in relation to C1 and C2. This would foreseeably lead to the transformative change all educational practitioners would like to see in telecollaborative encounters. Lastly, by providing learners with discourse strategies, not only to support but also to counteract the opinions and information presented in the online interactions, these discussions might become a truly dialogic space where learners discuss not only different views of their C1 but also their C2.

Notwithstanding these findings, there are a number of limitations to the study presented here. First, the small sample size prevents us from being able to extrapolate the results to a larger population. Second, the study did not examine how the L2 learners reacted to the different tasks. To this end, looking into how the topic on which the task was based influenced the learners' use of positive and negative markers (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) would shed further light on the influence of the topic over the learners' attitudes. Third, it would also be of interest to learn how L2 learners use attitude markers and engagement statements when discussing C1, C2, and T in their native language and their foreign language. Fourth, an exhaustive qualitative analysis of the learners' discursive practices during the online interactions would portray a far more detailed representation of the dialogic activity that took place in each of the groups. Scrutinizing how learners approached and drew upon each other's ideas, contributions, and questions regarding C1, C2, and T would help decipher the type of discursive strategies that are called for in order to achieve successful intercultural discussions (Belz & Vyatkina, 2005, 2008; Ryshina-Pankova, 2018). A qualitative study would also offer information regarding the connection between Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation markers that a quantitative study cannot provide. Without a doubt, telecollaboration in the L2 classroom is here to stay. At this point, it is a matter of finding the best way to create a dialogic space that allows and encourages different socio-semiotic perspectives.

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Appendix A. Examples of expanding and contracting statements

ENGAGEMENT		
Expanding statements		Examples
Attribute	Acknowledge	<i>Also, relating to what you said about regional identity being stronger than national identity (Acknowledge > classmate)</i> <i>In some of my other global studies and political science classes, this was something that came up quite frequently (Acknowledge > external sources)</i>
	Distance	<i>Siempre existirá una parte retrograda de la población que defenderá la “pureza” de su país a capa y espada (Distance > external sources)</i> <i>(There will always be a retrograde part of the population which will defend the “purity” of their country no matter what)</i> <i>I believe she left out a key part of that definition (Distance > classmate)</i>
Entertain	Entertain	<i>We have the best weather of the country in my opinion, very sunny but also cold in winter.</i>
Contracting statements		
Disclaim	Deny	<i>I really have nothing against people that voted for him.</i>
	Counter-expectation	<i>there is not that big “Spanish identity”, thought you still love your country (Counter > people/external sources)</i> <i>but to keep the country on the same level of other countries does not make sense to me (Counter > classmate).</i>
Proclaim	Concur	<i>I agree that to move on and make the country better you need to remember the past</i>
	Pronounce	<i>Todo el mundo, sin importar su estatus legal, debe tener acceso a la atención médica cuando la necesitan.</i> <i>(Everyone, regardless of their legal status, should have access to medical care when they need it)</i>
	Endorse	<i>En verdad que es alarmante el número (Endorse > external reading) (it is true that this number is alarming)</i> <i>como ha dicho Álvaro, el tema de la inmigración en España parece muy diferente al de Estados Unidos (Endorse > classmate).</i> <i>(As Álvaro said, the issue of immigration in Spain seems very different from that of the United States)</i>

Appendix B. Examples of attitude

ATTITUDE	
Affect	Examples

Happiness/unhappiness	<p><i>We are very happy (Happiness > Affection) [...] for the opportunities, the rights, and the freedoms that we are afforded by being United States citizens;</i></p> <p><i>You don't know how ashamed (Unhappiness > Misery) I feel knowing that such a cruel act as bull fighting is what crosses everyone's mind when they think about my country...</i></p>
Security/insecurity	<p><i>I'm sure (Security > Confidence) you may have some additional ideas of symbols and ideas for the concept of nationalism</i></p> <p><i>I am really surprised (Insecurity > Surprise) by the statistics that Paco gave with only 58% of Americans know the date of American Independence</i></p>
Satisfaction/dissatisfaction	<p><i>I'm more proud (Satisfaction > Pleasure/Admiration) to be a member of Earth Planet.</i></p> <p><i>I will never feel proud (Dissatisfaction > Displeasure) of my country until this changes...</i></p>
Inclination/disinclination	<p><i>There still are some people who have extreme southern pride that would want (Inclination > Desire) to become independent.</i></p> <p><i>I'm truly worried for our future here (Disinclination > Fear)</i></p>
Judgment	
Normality	<p><i>as for a main language I would say English is the major (Normality +)</i></p> <p><i>it kind of sounds like there is a very strong lack of unity among the country (Normality -)</i></p>
Capacity	<p><i>people definitely have the ability to move (Capacity +) if they wanted to.</i></p> <p><i>... that is not going to happen in the next years (Capacity -)</i></p>
Tenacity	<p><i>For a while now, they've been trying to claim (Tenacity +) their right to independence.</i></p> <p><i>The fact that many people in this country still think that way and have been waiting (Tenacity -) for someone to represent them</i></p>
Veracity	<p><i>I realized that I didn't really understand (Veracity +) what patriotism is</i></p> <p><i>they are just finally revealing (Veracity -) their real character, with all of the racist remarks</i></p>

Propriety *it is showing patriotism because he started doing to stand up for people who have been marginalized and overlooked in the country (Propriety +)*
We just can't go on without condemning what happened here just 50 years ago, which is absolutely nothing on an historical perspective (Propriety -).

Appreciation

Impact *we can see how being a multilingual country can change (Impact +) the sense of nationalism*

you can see how many people's sense of patriotism or nationalism has been skewed as a result of this election (Impact -)

Quality *I think it's [having different accent] something pretty cool (Quality +) at the same time.*

it kind of sounds like there is a very strong lack of unity (Quality -) among the country

Balance *I think that there is a fine line between patriotism and nationalism (Balance +)*

I believe she left out a key part (Balance -) of that definition given by the Oxford dictionary

Complexity *the lifestyle is so different from a region to another (Complexity +) that when you move it may seem that you are in other country*

so depending on where are you from inside Spain, you can find different opinions in this topic (Complexity -)

Valuation *Perhaps you don't know this word (which is good) (Valuation +), given that they are very offensive words (Valuation -).*

About the Authors

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