



Review of *Understanding attitude in intercultural virtual communication*

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Understanding attitude in intercultural virtual communication

Oskoz, A., & Vinagre, M. (Eds.)

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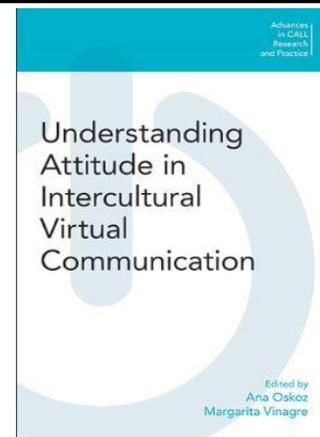
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As an innovative online pedagogy used for connecting learners across cultures and geographic boundaries, telecollaboration (also known as online intercultural exchange) has gained increasing popularity among teachers, teacher educators, and institutions in the field of foreign language education over the past two decades (Guth & Helm, 2010; O’Dowd & Lewis, 2016). A majority of research in the field focuses on the impact of telecollaboration on learners’ linguistic and pragmatic development (e.g., Chun, 2011; Guth & Helm, 2010; Ware & O’Dowd, 2008), intercultural learning (e.g., Fuchs, 2007, 2010, 2019), technology integration (e.g., Dooly, 2009; Dooly & Sadler, 2013), and the integration of telecollaboration in classroom practices (e.g., Dooly & O’Dowd, 2018; Dooly & Sadler, 2019). Yet, few studies have examined the attitudinal component of telecollaborative learning. As a timely and essential contribution that addresses the issues of this underexplored dimension, the book *Understanding Attitude in Intercultural Virtual Communication* edited by Oskoz and Vinagre contains theoretical frameworks and empirical studies to help shed light upon the development of learners’ attitudes in the context of intercultural telecollaboration.

The book comprises seven chapters and an introduction. Although the seven chapters are not divided into sections, the first chapter is theoretical and focuses on the conceptual aspect of attitude, while the remaining six chapters report on six empirical studies. Out of these six empirical studies, the first three studies (Chapters 2–4) examine foreign or second language learners’ development of language and culture, whereas the last three studies (Chapters 5–7) focus on teacher education, namely, the attitudes of pre-service and in-service teacher learners in telecollaborative projects designed for their professional development.

In the Introduction, Oskoz and Vinagre briefly set the context for telecollaborative projects, discuss the prevalent use of Byram’s (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in telecollaborative studies, and identify attitudinal component of the ICC as an underexplored area for the field. The editors then define the construct of attitude and provide a brief overview of all chapters, highlighting each chapter’s unique contribution to the exploration of attitude. They conclude the introductory chapter with a positive note on the usefulness of the volume for examining attitude in telecollaborative projects.

In Chapter 1, Abrams brings unique insights into the conceptualization of attitude by re-defining it as a relational and socially negotiated experience. She challenges the conventional notion of attitude as a static,

individual variable and, instead, connects it to the social context of learner interactions, the task, and communication tools. The author posits that by taking into the consideration these contextual factors, the examinations of attitude can better reflect its relational, dynamic nature and complexity within the context of telecollaborative learning. What makes this chapter particularly valuable is the specific, practical guidelines based on the broader, socially situated view of attitude for task design in telecollaboration. Specifically, Abrams offers guidelines on the timing, task content, and task format that explicitly incorporate the attitudinal component of Byram's (1997) ICC model. Overall, readers who wish to support learners' positive attitudes towards telecollaboration via effective task design will find the chapter helpful with its conceptual richness and easy-to-follow practical guidelines.

Echoing Abrams' call for viewing learners' attitudes as a socially constructed and contextually situated construct, the authors of Chapter 2, Klimanova and Vinokurova, relate the attitudes and perceptions of beginning-level language learners to their intercultural engagement activities with other language learners and native speakers. By making a comparison of the attitudes and perceptions of students from two project contexts (i.e., a cross-institutional context and a cross-cultural context), the authors report on both personal and interactional factors that discouraged the beginners from sustained engagement and led to a negative change in their perceptions of the usefulness of online engagement activities for breaking their language barriers. For example, most beginning learners from both projects tended to have unrealistic expectations with regard to the project outcomes and get concerned and anxious about their low-level language skills, whereas their native speaking partners tended to be unaware of the need to adapt their language for their beginning-level partners. Readers interested in developing a telecollaborative project for beginning language learners or learners with mixed language proficiencies may benefit from the implications for practice (e.g., realistic goal setting, explicit class discussion, and clarification) provided in this chapter.

Similar to Chapter 2, which compares findings from two telecollaborative projects, Chapter 3 examines attitude in two unrelated projects that involved participants in two similar contexts (undergraduate students in Spain and in the US) but with differences in task designs (e.g., tasks and topics and task completion time). To explore the similarities and differences in the use of attitude by participants both within and across projects, Vinagre and Oskoz use Martin and White's (2005) appraisal framework that provides a linguistic perspective to analyze data in order to unpack the patterns in the participants' use of three attitudinal components (i.e., affect, judgement, and appreciation). They report on the use of the appraisal framework as being successful for capturing observable differences in cultural discourse between participants from different countries. The authors further stress the important role of task design and topic selection in learners' attitudes and discourse patterns because participants from both projects showed discourse differences due to the different task designs and topics.

In Chapter 4, which reports on the attitudes of university students in Germany and Hong Kong, Fuchs, Lo, and Thapa examine what types of attitude-related linguistic choices (e.g., language use and communication styles) and non-linguistic choices (e.g., emoticons and Facebook "likes") the participants tended to make and how these choices might facilitate or hinder their task negotiations. Readers will likely find the results informative and useful for their future projects because they essentially shed light upon the multimodal features of online communication that have become increasingly important for successful telecollaborative learning. For instance, the students' frequent use of smiley emoticons supported their team negotiations, but their frequent use of the Facebook "likes" did not facilitate the process because it tended to undermine the elaborative levels of their asynchronous interactions.

By adopting a multimodal perspective in Chapter 5, Liaw and Priego bring a unique contribution to the understanding of second language (L2) teachers' attitudes in their study. They explore the attitudes of L2 teachers in Canada and Taiwan via their use of multimodal resources and the extent to which their use facilitates the teachers' ability to "decenter" from their existing beliefs of language teaching and learning. Using the framework of a 4-level social semiotic discourse analysis, the authors analyze multiple data sources (e.g., written discussions in Google docs, Skype discussions, and joint written reflections) to demonstrate how teachers used multimodal resources for intercultural dialoguing of pedagogical issues.

The reported findings provide important implications for the multimodal design of future telecollaborative projects. For example, the opportunity for the teachers to apply multimodal resources during their intercultural engagement encouraged them to embrace different perspectives of teaching and learning that existed among their group members (e.g., the use of Google Docs allowed brainstorming and helped achieve a consensus easily).

In Chapter 6, Cunningham and Ryshina-Pankova also leverage Martin and White's (2005) appraisal framework used by Vinagre and Oskoz in Chapter 3, but because of their different focus on teacher learning, they connect teachers' attitudes to the discourse evidence of their pedagogical competences. Readers with an interest in exploring attitudinal resources on teachers' literacy-based instruction will especially benefit from this chapter because it addresses the development of teachers' specific pedagogical abilities related to materials and task development for a text-based and content- and language-integrated foreign language curriculum in the context of telecollaboration. According to the authors, when collaborating on materials selection, teachers in their project mostly drew on their appreciation and feelings during their decision-making process; however, when selecting materials development tasks, they frequently used the evaluation lens to evaluate multiple aspects of texts, such as their cultural and historical importance and the complexity of overarching themes in the texts. These findings offer insights into how the exploration of teachers' attitudes can contribute to an understanding of teacher competences within a particular subject area.

As the only large-scale study in this volume that draws on data sources from 17 teacher telecollaborative projects, Helm and Baroni in Chapter 7 examine the emotions and attitudes of teachers regarding their telecollaborative learning through the analyses of their open-ended interview reflections. In doing so, the authors address two research questions: How do student teachers experience telecollaboration in terms of emotions? and How do they express their attitudes towards difference between them and their international partners? To address these questions, Helm and Baroni collected participants' reflective journal entries at four different time points of the program (i.e., prior to the project and after each of the three task types) in order to capture the changes in the emotions and attitudes of the teachers. Interestingly, the same pattern emerged despite considerable variations in positive and negative emotions that existed among the teachers across the 17 projects: Initially, the teachers showed positive emotions and no negative emotions prior to their telecollaborative tasks; then they showed a decrease in their positive emotions after starting to collaborate on the telecollaborative tasks; yet later they showed a gradual rise in their positive and negative emotions. To explain these changes, the authors exposed four major challenges: teachers' high expectations and imagined selves, challenges during the telecollaboration, communication issues, and language issues.

This edited volume contributes to the field of telecollaboration through its high quality, wide scope of explorations, innovative application of analytic approaches, and practical value. First, this book is of high quality due to its well-organized structure and well-written individual chapters. It is organized into seven chapters progressing from a theoretical piece as the first chapter to six empirical studies that can be further grouped based on the participant populations (i.e., language learners or teacher learners). Written by distinguished and experienced researchers in the area of telecollaboration, all chapters provide in-depth discussions and unique insights into the examined dimensions of attitude. Second, a major strength of this volume lies in its breadth of covering not only language learners' attitudes, but also teacher learners' attitudes towards telecollaboration, thereby painting a more comprehensive picture of the development of attitudes in telecollaboration for all learner types. In addition, the book's wide scope and sophistication are also manifested in successful unpacking of a wide range of attitude-related dimensions (e.g., emotions/affect, judgment, and appreciation) and their connections to other key features of telecollaborative learning (e.g., multimodal communication resources and linguistic and non-linguistic choices). Third, the contributors to this volume elucidate the dynamic and relational nature and complexity of learner attitudes within telecollaboration by innovatively incorporating mixed frameworks into data analyses (e.g., a combination of the ICC model and the Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) and/or applying new approaches and perspectives (e.g., appraisal system, linguistic perspectives, and multimodal perspectives). Finally, all the authors provide important implications for future research and practical guidelines for task design and implementation of telecollaboration, which increases the practical value of this volume with regard to

leveraging the attitudinal resources of learners to maximize their telecollaborative learning.

Despite its strengths, this book has some limitations that warrant readers' attention. First of all, readers will likely notice an imbalance between the conceptual definition and empirical examinations of attitude in this volume because it includes only one chapter that focuses on the theoretical underpinning for the attitudinal component of telecollaboration. Moreover, readers may find some chapters easier to read than other chapters because of the differences in authors' writing styles and the complexities of studies. Third, although in general this book has clear practical value, some telecollaborative practitioners may find this book less useful or somewhat difficult to understand because of its heavy focus on empirical research that presupposes substantial prior knowledge of this topic.

Overall, Oskoz and Vinagre's *Understanding Attitude in Intercultural Virtual Communication* is a high-quality edited volume that makes a timely and important contribution to the area of telecollaborative learning by providing valuable insights into the attitudinal component of learners, which is an under-examined and difficult-to-assess construct. This book can serve as a valuable resource for foreign language teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators who are interested in integrating telecollaboration in their K-12 language classrooms or higher education, especially foreign teacher education.

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