

Online Language Tandem: Focusing on Intercultural Communication Competence and Non-Verbal Cues

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Abstract : Communication presents the channel by which humankind create and maintain their relationship with others, express themselves, exchange information, learn and teach etc. The context of communication plays a distinctive role in deciding about the language to be used. The term context is mainly used to refer to the interlocutors, their cultures, languages, relationship, physical surrounding that is the communication setting, type of the information to be transmitted, the topic etc. Cultures, on one hand, impose on humans certain behaviours, attitudes, gestures and beliefs. On the other hand, the focus on language is inevitable as it is with its verbal and non-verbal components, a key tool in and for communication. Moreover, each language has its particularity in how people voice, address and express their thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Being in the same setting with people from different cultures and languages and having conversations with them would call upon the intercultural communicative competence. This latter would promote the success of their conversations. Additionally, this competence could manifest in several ways during their interactions, to the extent that no one can predict when and how the interlocutors would use it. The only thing probably that could be confirmed is that the setting and culture would in a way or another intervene and often shape the flow of their communication, if not the whole communication. Therefore, this paper will look at the intercultural communicative competence of language learners when introducing their cultures to each other in an online language tandem (henceforth OLT) using their second and/or foreign language with the L1 language speakers. The participants of this study are Algerian (use L2: French, FL: English), British (L1: English, L2/FL: French). In other words, this current paper will provide a qualitative analysis of the OLT experiment by emphasising how language learners can overcome the cultural differences in an intercultural setting while communicating online using Skype (video conversations) with people from different countries, cultures and L1. The non-verbal cues will have the lion share in the analysis by focusing on how they have been used to maintain this intercultural communication or hinder it through the misinterpretation of gestures, head movements, grimaces etc.

Keywords : intercultural communicative competence, non-verbal cues, online language tandem, Skype

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