Social Media and Language Learning: Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence

Author: Florence Le Baron-Earle

Thesis presented to the University of Limerick for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisors:
Professor Angela Chambers
Dr Liam Murray

Submitted to the University of Limerick, November 2013
Abstract

Florence Le Baron-Earle

Social media and language learning: Enhancing intercultural communicative competence

Researchers have established that cultural openness is essential in language teaching. Indeed, it is believed that languages cannot be appropriately understood without appreciating the culture in which they are developed, and empathising with the people who communicate through them. However questions have been raised as to how to enhance awareness of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) most effectively. Teachers have implemented a number of educational methods with the aim to promote best practice in language and culture teaching. In recent years, practitioners have increasingly availed of the advances in social media. Besides their easy access, Internet technologies have been proven to improve users’ learning experience via community building, information exchange, collaborative knowledge creation and negotiation of meaning, all of which are requisite in acquiring an intercultural stance.

This doctoral dissertation brings together two areas of research, namely the integration of online tools in an educational setting and the intercultural dimension of foreign language learning and teaching. It investigates the role of social media in the development of intercultural sensitivity of a cohort of students of French as a foreign language. This thesis is composed of two main parts – the first focusing on the research context of the study and the second concentrating on an empirical study. The initial part examines theoretical frameworks in language and culture, and computer-assisted language learning as well as some fundamental concepts in education, i.e. teacher roles, student autonomy and motivation. The empirical study describes the implementation of intercultural-oriented tasks carried out in an online discussion forum, a blog, and a wiki. It also outlines how students reacted to social media, how they interacted through each medium with their peers and tutor, and if the online tools contributed to the development of their ICC. This thesis concludes by outlining the benefits and challenges of using online collaborative tools and provides guidance for researchers and practitioners already using or considering using Web 2.0 technologies in the context of language learning and teaching.
List of publications and public talks

List of publications, conference papers and posters which originated in the research carried out for this thesis.

Book chapters


Book review


Conference papers and posters


Declaration

I declare that the work presented herein is original and a result of my own work.

____________________________________

Florence Le Baron-Earle
Acknowledgments

During the many years it took me to complete this doctoral dissertation, many people have supported me and encouraged me. I would like to acknowledge and express my heartfelt gratitude to them.

First of all, my deepest thanks go to Professor Angela Chambers and Dr Liam Murray, my two supervisors, who showed enthusiasm for my research from day one. Thank you for your invaluable guidance and expert comments offered during our many meetings in LC1-018. Your wisdom, patience and dedication throughout this project will not be forgotten.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP) funded by the Higher Education Authority under the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions, Cycle 4 which provided me with a four-year scholarship. Without this financial help, I would never have been able to undertake this academic achievement. In addition to support my basic daily needs, the ISSP scholarship covered the cost of a nifty netbook and funded many informative and network-building international conferences.

My grateful thanks to my students at the University of Limerick who took part in the project and provided me with the precious data needed to complete this research. Thank you also for the occasional words of encouragement expressed in the comment box at the end of the questionnaires or when you met me several years later and enquired about the progress of my work.

I am also thankful to my friends and colleagues from the Centre of Applied Language Studies and the School of Languages, Literature, Culture and Communication for their support and stimulating discussions.
Thank you to my fellow PhD mates for providing a friendly and motivating environment to study in. Our chatty lunches at the Paddocks, nights out and celebrations were a great way to relax before returning to the Foundation Building.

I am most grateful to my friends and family who never failed to show me their love and encouragement throughout the years.

Finally, I would like to give special thanks to Tom, my best friend, husband and partner in crime who probably did not expect to be acknowledged in this section. Of course you are in it, you silly! Merci, merci, merci… for providing me with the life-balance I so desperately need and for making intercultural experiences more fun.
Table of contents

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... II
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLIC TALKS ............................................................. III
DECLARATION ..................................................................................................................... V
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ....................................................................................................... VI
TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................................................... VIII
LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................ XII
LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................................. XIV
ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................................................................... XV
INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................ 1

RESEARCH BACKGROUND ............................................................................................ 1
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY .......................................................................................... 5
THESIS OUTLINE ............................................................................................................... 6

CHAPTER 1 – INTERCULTURAL COMMunicative COMPetence AND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING ................................................................. 9

1.1 INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................... 9
1.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE .................................. 10
  1.2.1 Defining culture ................................................................................................. 10
  1.2.2 Linguistic relativity ........................................................................................... 17
1.3 FROM CULTURAL COMPETENCE TO INTERCULTURAL COMMunicative COMPetence ................................................................. 18
  1.3.1 Cultural and communicative competence ....................................................... 18
  1.3.2 Cross-cultural / intercultural / socio-cultural competence and other terms ... 20
1.4 MODELS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMunicative COMPETENCE .......................... 24
  1.4.1 Bennett’s model: Intercultural sensitivity ....................................................... 24
  1.4.2 Kramsch’s model: The third place ................................................................. 27
  1.4.3 Byram’s model: Intercultural mediator ............................................................ 29
  1.4.4 Deardorff’s model: Internal and external outcomes ....................................... 33
  1.4.5 Model developed for this research ................................................................. 37
1.5 THE CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMunicative COMPetence ................................................................. 40
  1.5.1 Changing culture, stereotypes, and mediators .............................................. 40
  1.5.2 Assessing intercultural communicative competence .................................... 42
1.6 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................ 46
# CHAPTER 2 – COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING: FROM THE COMPUTER AS TUTOR OR TOOL TO SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION .................................................. 47
2.2 COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: FROM CALL TO SMALL .................................................. 48
   2.2.1 1960s-1970s: Behaviouristic CALL ........................................ 51
   2.2.2 1980s: Communicative CALL .................................................. 51
   2.2.3 1990s: Integrative CALL ......................................................... 55
   2.2.4 The noughties: Web 2.0 and social media .................................. 58
2.3 CALL AND SMALL CHARACTERISTICS ........................................ 62
   2.3.1 Critical thinking and constructivism ......................................... 63
   2.3.2 Pedagogy 2.0 and Communities of Practice ............................. 67
   2.3.3 Teacher and student roles ....................................................... 70
   2.3.4 Learner motivation ................................................................. 75
   2.3.5 Learner autonomy ................................................................. 83
2.4 HIGHLIGHT ON THREE TOOLS: DISCUSSION FORUM, BLOG AND WIKI .................................................. 88
   2.4.1 Ease of use ............................................................................... 90
   2.4.2 Text-based interaction ............................................................. 90
   2.4.3 Flexible time and geographical features ................................... 91
   2.4.4 Synchronous and asynchronous features .................................. 92
   2.4.5 Private and collaborative features .......................................... 93
   2.4.6 Challenges in using new media .............................................. 96
2.5 CONCLUSION ........................................................................... 98

# CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH ON ICC AND CALL: SITUATING THE STUDY

3.1 – INTRODUCTION ....................................................................... 100
3.2 – PREVIOUS RESEARCH STUDIES ON CALL AND ICC .................... 101
   3.2.1 – Focusing on research from 2000 to 2012 ................................ 101
   3.2.2 – Task design and sequencing: Matching the properties of social media with the course’s objectives ........................................... 104
3.3 – THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH ........................................ 107
   3.3.1 – Location and language(s) studied: The promotion of ICC through French in an Irish university setting ........................................ 109
   3.3.2 – The variety of online tools: The combination of a discussion forum, a blog and a wiki .......................................................... 111
   3.3.3 – The study context: The examination of a standard Higher Education setting ................................................................. 114
3.4 - CONCLUSION ......................................................................... 116

# CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 – INTRODUCTION ....................................................................... 129
4.2 – RESEARCH INQUIRY TRADITIONS .......................................... 130
   4.2.1 – Quantitative versus qualitative: Understanding the dichotomy 130
   4.2.2 – The qualitative approach: Applying standards of quality .......... 134
4.3 – METHODOLOGY DESIGN AND RELEVANCE TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS ........................................... 137
   4.3.1 – Selecting the method of inquiry ............................................. 137
   4.3.1.1 – Action research .................................................................. 137
   4.3.1.2 – Case study ....................................................................... 142
CHAPTER 5 – DATA ANALYSIS: THE STUDENTS’ REACTION AND INTERACTION  ........................................................................................................ 187

5.1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 187
5.2 PROJECT CONTEXT ....................................................................................... 188
  5.2.1 Students’ participation ........................................................................... 190
  5.2.2 Students’ profile .................................................................................... 191
5.3 ACQUISITION OF ICC WITH SOCIAL MEDIA: THE STUDENTS’ REACTION .... 193
  5.3.1 Online activities for developing ICC: General comments ...................... 193
  5.3.2 Developing ICC with the discussion forum ........................................... 198
  5.3.3 Developing ICC with the blog ............................................................... 200
  5.3.4 Developing ICC with the wiki ............................................................... 203
5.4 REFLECTION ON ONLINE LEARNING ...................................................... 207
  5.4.1 Students’ comments on learning with social media ............................. 207
  5.4.2 Motivation: Prompting strategic students ............................................. 212
  5.4.3 Autonomy and tutor role ..................................................................... 213
  5.4.4 Reflection and deep learning in a Community of Practice .................. 215
5.5 ACQUISITION OF ICC WITH SOCIAL MEDIA: THE STUDENTS’ INTERACTION 216
  5.5.1 Analysis of students’ interaction in the discussion forum ..................... 216
  5.5.2 Analysis of students’ interaction in the blog ........................................ 219
  5.5.3 Analysis of students’ interaction in the wiki ........................................ 222
  5.5.4 Analysis of student’s messages throughout the study: Evidence of change 223
5.6 VALIDATION OF RESULTS .......................................................................... 231
5.7 CONCLUSION .............................................................................................. 233

CHAPTER 6 – DATA ANALYSIS: LINKING BACK TO THE THEORY ..... 236

6.1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................ 236
6.2 Relation between fundamental concepts in language learning and the teaching of ICC with social media ................................................................. 237
6.2.1 Motivation and autonomy .................................................................. 237
6.2.2 Learning in a Community of Practice ................................................. 240
6.2.3 Interaction with peers: Deep learning or surface reflection? .......... 243
6.2.4 The issue of assessing ICC ................................................................. 246
6.2.5 The teacher roles: Providing descriptive and prescriptive feedback ..... 253

6.3 Conclusion ............................................................................................ 258

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ............................................ 260

Summary of Thesis ..................................................................................... 260
Discussion and Conclusions ..................................................................... 262
Limitations of the Study ........................................................................... 266
Action Research: Lessons to be learnt .................................................... 266
Directions for Future Research ................................................................. 268

REFERENCES ......................................................................................... 270

APPENDICES ......................................................................................... 310

Appendix 1 – The five C’S: Communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities ................................................................. 311
Appendix 2 – Defining the culture concept and implications for teaching 312
Appendix 3 - Assessment grid for intercultural competence .................... 313
Appendix 4 – Approval from the University of Limerick’s ethics committee ................................................................. 314
Appendix 5 – Information sheet given to participants (semesters 1 and 2) 315
Appendix 6 – Consent form signed by participants (semesters 1 and 2) ... 316
Appendix 7 – Information sheet given to participants (Semester 3).......... 317
Appendix 8 - Consent form signed by participants (Semester 3).......... 318
Appendix 9 - Questionnaire 1 .................................................................. 319
Appendix 10 - Questionnaire 2 ................................................................. 324
Appendix 11 - Questionnaire 3 ................................................................. 330
Appendix 12 – French stereotypes according to Frapar .......................... 339
Appendix 13 – Testimony on word confusion ........................................ 340
Appendix 14 – Example of formal blog .................................................... 341
Appendix 15 – Example of informal blog ............................................... 342
List of Tables

Table 1.1 – Breakdown of “big C” culture and “little c” culture as understood by the author .............................................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 16
Table 1.2 – A selection of terms referring to ICC .............................................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 21
Table 2.1 – Web 2.0 services ......................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 60
Table 2.2 – Similarities in defining motivation and intercultural communicative competence ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 78
Table 2.3 - CALL stages and the potential for learner autonomy ............................................. 87
Table 3.1 – Telecollaborative task types ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 105
Table 3.2 – Chapelle’s original criteria for CALL task appropriateness ........................................... 106
Table 3.3 – Distribution of countries ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 110
Table 3.4 – Summary table of research papers published between January 2000 and June 2012........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 118
Table 4.1 – Contrasting characteristics of six qualitative approaches ............................................. 139
Table 4.2 – List of courses undertaken by participants ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 147
Table 4.3 – Français oral marking scheme ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 148
Table 4.4 – Student registration in Français oral ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 150
Table 4.5 – The researcher’s stances ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 151
Table 4.6 – Research methods’ characteristics ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 159
Table 4.7 – Questionnaires details ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 161
Table 4.8 – Types of questions in surveys and questionnaires ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 162
Table 4.9 – Details about Questionnaire 1 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 163
Table 4.10 – Details about Questionnaire 2 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 163
Table 4.11 – Details about Questionnaire 3 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 164
Table 4.12 – Typology of interview strategies according to Silverman ............................................. 165
Table 4.13 – Types of interview questions ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 170
Table 4.14 – Overview of topics discussed and tasks (Pilot project) ............................................. 176
Table 4.15 - Pilot project timeline ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 141
Table 4.16 – Overview of topics discussed and tasks (Semester 1) ............................................. 180
Table 4.17 - Main study timeline – Semester 1 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 177
Table 4.18 – Overview of topics discussed and tasks (Semester 2) ............................................. 182
Table 4.19 - Main study timeline – Semester 2 ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 184
Table 4.20 - Main study timeline – Semester 3 .............................................................. 185
Table 5.1 – Reasons provided by students regarding their decrease in online participation ........................................................................................................ 191
Table 5.3 – Advantages of learning with social media ................................................. 209
Table 5.4 – Disadvantages of learning with social media ............................................ 210
Table 5.5 – Numerical rank of online discussion topics .............................................. 217
Table 5.6 – Topics of personal reflection in the blogs ................................................ 221
Table 6.1 – Evidence of deep learning in the study .................................................... 245
Table 6.2 – Marking grid for the discussion forum ...................................................... 247
Table 6.3 – Marking grid for the blog ........................................................................ 248
Table 6.4 – Marking grid for the wiki ........................................................................ 249
Table 6.5 – Error classification for the analysis of writing errors .............................. 254
Table 6.6 - Corpus analysis: quantitative results on a formal register ................. 255
Table 6.7 – Corpus analysis: quantitative results on genre-specific written language (informal) ........................................................................................................ 256
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 – Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity ..................... 25
Figure 1.2 – Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence ................. 31
Figure 1.3 – Deardorff’s pyramid and process models of intercultural competence .......... 35
Figure 1.4 – Possible path towards intercultural communicative competence .......... 39
Figure 3.1 – Distribution of articles per source .......................................................... 103
Figure 3.2 – Research methods .................................................................................. 108
Figure 3.3 – Level of education .................................................................................. 109
Figure 3.4 – Distribution of languages ....................................................................... 111
Figure 3.5 – Distribution of tools ................................................................................ 112
Figure 3.6 – Published examination of tools over time .............................................. 113
Figure 3.7 – Combination of tools .............................................................................. 113
Figure 3.8 – “Self-contained” empirical studies ......................................................... 115
Figure 4.1 – Mc Lean’s model (1995) ....................................................................... 142
Figure 4.2 – Summary of the research design ............................................................. 186
Figure 5.1 – Comparison of cultural knowledge before and after Semester 1 .......... 195
Figure 5.2 – Social media listed in order of preference .............................................. 197
Figure 5.3 – Contribution of the discussion forum for ICC acquisition .................... 199
Figure 5.4 – Contribution of the blog for ICC acquisition ......................................... 201
Figure 5.5 – Contribution of the wiki for ICC acquisition ......................................... 205
Figure 5.6 – Time of messages posting in the discussion forum .................................. 218
Figure 5.7 – Observable change in student’s definition of culture ............................. 225
Figure 6.1 – Evidence of social presence in the discussion forum ............................. 241
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALLP</td>
<td>Athena language learning project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMTB</td>
<td>Attitude/motivation test battery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Native culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Target culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAI</td>
<td>Computer-assisted instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALICO</td>
<td>Computer assisted language instruction consortium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALL</td>
<td>Computer-assisted language learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMILLE</td>
<td>Computer-assisted multimedia interactive language learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASLA</td>
<td>Computer applications in second language acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSTAR</td>
<td>Centre for support training analyses and research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMC</td>
<td>Computer-mediated communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMHC</td>
<td>Computer-mediated human communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>Intercultural communicative competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMIS</td>
<td>Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a foreign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Foreign language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICALL</td>
<td>Intelligent computer-assisted language learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and communication technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILTS</td>
<td>Intelligent language tutoring systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINCS</td>
<td>Language-learning through interactive, communication-based software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>Learning management system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMOG</td>
<td>Massively multiplayer online games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOODLE</td>
<td>Modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOO</td>
<td>Multi-user dungeon - object oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUD</td>
<td>Multi-user dungeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Personal computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLATO</td>
<td>Programmed logic for automatic teaching operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSS</td>
<td>Really simple syndication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SIE: Synthetic immersive environments
TCA: Thematic content analysis
TL: Target language
TOEFL: Test of English as a foreign language
TOEIC: Test of English for international communication
TICCIT: Time-shared, interactive, computer controlled information television
VLE: Virtual learning environment
Introduction

Research background

Research in social media in relation to the learning and teaching of intercultural issues is developing in a number of distinct yet interrelated directions. Indeed, the emergence and easy access of Internet tools has dramatically changed the way we communicate and interact with each other. Online communication makes the world a smaller place where individuals from multiple cultures can interact on a daily basis. These exchanges are sometimes challenged by cultural differences and a lack of intercultural skills which may lead to misunderstandings, confusion or even contempt. This highlights the need to stimulate a deeper understanding between nations or individuals of varied backgrounds. While the issue of developing intercultural dialogue is not a new occurrence, the effects of globalisation and access to fast and affordable communication technologies by a wide audience make the matter even more critical. The subject can be addressed in a variety of areas, including the foreign language classroom. As emphasized by the directives of the Council of Europe’s Linguistic Division Policy, language teaching and intercultural citizenship are both related to “communication, the promotion of mutual understanding and the development of individual responsibility” (Lázár et al., 2007: 18). The changes in communication have thus made their way into educational practices, and the implementation of online tools is now a major area of research for foreign language teachers and practitioners. The study of the use of emails, blogs, wikis and other forms of online communication is increasingly attracting the attention of researchers (Belz, 2003; Fratter and Helm, 2010; O’Dowd, 2006; Ware and Kramsch, 2005) who investigate the development of intercultural communicative competence.

This doctoral thesis brings together two fields of research. Firstly, it explores the elusive concept of intercultural communicative competence which has been receiving increasing interest in academic circles; the amount of published handbooks (Deardorff, 2009; Jackson, 2013; Straub et al., 2007) bringing together leading researchers and practitioners to define and conceptualise ICC in the context of modern languages teaching and learning is a testimony of this. In the European context, this relatively
recent attention accompanies a series of publications from the Council of Europe. Indeed, one of the primary aims of foreign language education has been redefined as forming “intercultural speakers” (Byram, 1997: 31; Commission of the European Communities, 2003; Council of Europe, 2001, 2007) rather than creating near-native speakers. This phenomenon has also gained significance in North America with L2 educationists recommending to complement the transmission of elements of ‘objective culture’, such as history and literature, with pedagogies addressing ‘subjective culture’ (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1996; Bok, 2006). Approaches from both sides of the Atlantic consider that twenty-first century (language) learners need to be provided with:

skills and knowledge to develop an understanding of underlying cultural values, communication styles, and worldviews to better understand others’ behaviours to interact effectively and appropriately with others and, ultimately to become more interculturally competent.  

(Deardorff, 2009: xiii)

In other words, students need to acquire an understanding of their own personal cultural values and how these may affect their behaviours (Guth and Helm, 2010: 18; Kramsch, 1993). Besides, the current literature indicates that ICC may not be obtained solely by learning a foreign language or being confronted with a foreign culture (Deardorff, 2006; Hunter, White and Godbey, 2006); during the course of their study, L2 learners also need to develop a set of skills such as observation, openness, and reflection (Byram, 1997), which they may hone when confronted with new cultures in their respective countries or abroad (notably during work placements or while on study abroad programmes), and subsequently throughout their lifetime. Indeed, despite the versatility of the concept, researchers seem to unanimously agree that developing ICC is a lifelong learning exercise, thus rendering its assessment in a formal context all the more complex (Fantini, 2006; Levy and Stockwell, 2006; O’Dowd, 2010). In addition, to define ICC, implement intercultural tasks in a university course, and analyse their outcomes, this research study will add to the current literature on ICC evaluation and describe the measuring criteria introduced by the author.

The second research area which informs this study is computer/social media-assisted language learning (CALL/SWALL) in third level education, and more particularly

---

1 Both terms will be explained in this thesis.
online intercultural exchanges (O’Dowd, 2007b), also referred to as ‘telecollaboration’ (Hauck and Youngs, 2008; Lee, 2009; Müller-Hartmann, 2006). Telecollaboration has come to the fore in language learning settings with the development of the Internet. It traditionally involves two geographically distant institutions establishing online exchanges between language learners from various cultural backgrounds, with the aim of developing linguistic skills and ICC. The Tandem (Brammerts, 1996; Vinagre, 2007) and Cultura (Furstenberg et al., 2001; Bauer et al., 2006) models are archetypal examples of such bilateral telecollaboration. Since their inception, online intercultural exchanges have evolved in terms of participants and languages. In addition to L2 learners, they are now open to other partners including pre-service teachers (Jauregi and Bañados, 2010; Liaw, 2003) in-service teachers (Keranen and Bayyurt, 2006; Müller-Hartmann, 2006) and ‘ordinary’ native speakers (Hannah and de Nooy, 2003). Furthermore online interactions may also be multilateral, and as a consequence extend the scope of linguistic possibilities; they can be:

- monolingual, involving just one of the partners’ languages (Lee, 2006) or neither’s, with the adoption of a lingua franca (Basharina, 2007), or they can be multilingual, involving the sharing of more than two languages (Fratter, Helm and Whigham, 2005).

(Guth and Helm, 2010: 15)

The uptake of telecollaborative projects has increased even more in the last decade or so with the advent of freely available and easy-to-use social media. Many practitioners see attributes relating to the use of Web 2.0 authoring tools as particularly suited for enhancing ICC. Social media features comprise content “sharing, openness, collective intelligence and collaboration” (Guth and Helm, 2010: 16). Besides, there is a number of publications suggesting that these media promote autonomy (Benson, 2001, 2006; Blin, 2004), critical thinking (Dubreil, 2006; Warschauer and Healy, 1998), and inherently develop the acquisition of new online literacies (Guth and Helm, 2010: 20). This being said, there is a widening gap between researchers who have already embraced CALL/SMALL and are implementing complex multi-institutional projects and practitioners who are still hesitant to adopt these technologies. This research may provide a useful first step for teachers (and learners) in the very early stages of Higher Education.
This doctoral research project was initiated by my interest in intercultural issues and a desire to explore the implications of Internet technologies in a language course that I have been teaching for a number of years. The course in question is taught to small groups of undergraduate students of French in a university context who have varied competence in French culture. Prior to this research, students enrolled in this tutorial were required to study texts of French society which triggered them to react and engage in open debates about what they read. The primary aim of the course was to develop the students’ oral communication and ability to express their opinion about a determined topic in a structured manner; as such it concentrated on developing the students’ linguistic skills. But invariably the learners’ weekly readings of French newspaper articles confronted them with societal aspects, values and ways of expressing ideas which sometimes varied from their own. Little attention was paid to these cultural characteristics and I thought that this situation could be improved.

My intention was to exploit the cultural elements depicted in the articles and use them to bring awareness about intercultural communicative competence to the students. The idea was also to prepare students before they would study abroad as part of the popular Erasmus exchange programme or start a work placement - which is a prerequisite of their degree - in a foreign country. To do so, a blended learning approach where students could interact online in addition to the traditional face-to-face class was introduced. Over the years, I had noticed that the classes were composed of students who had visited the target country, while others had not. Some knew native speakers and others did not, and the classes were always multicultural with foreign students attending the tutorials (e.g. German, Italian, Russian and Spanish). Therefore, a student-centred pedagogy enabling students to interact online with social media, and share their knowledge of the target language and culture seemed more than appropriate. In the classroom as well as online, students could bring their own varied experiences of French culture (and other cultures) through discussion and reflection. By sharing their viewpoints, students would benefit from each other’s experience, for example, students with little knowledge of the target culture could gain awareness by negotiating meaning with the more interculturally experienced. Furthermore, the idea to have students discussing cultural issues with their classmates, some of whom shared the same nationality, endeavoured to lessen the focus on the preconception that one target country is synonymous with one unique culture. Indeed, researchers emphasise that one nation
is composed of many cultures (Byram, 1997; Guest, 2002; Kramsch, 1993) and that the process of becoming interculturally competent implies analysing the target cultures together with one’s own.

**Objectives of the study**

This study examines how language learners’ encounters with the target culture in face-to-face classes can be complemented by the use of a virtual learning environment and social media to reflect on their learning and enhance their intercultural sensitivity. Blended learning is being introduced to a course which was previously taught in traditional face-to-face mode. This doctoral study has three main objectives. The first aim is to integrate new tasks and resources in the **Français oral** classes, and evaluate learners’ interactions within the new learning environment. Secondly, it seeks to investigate how elements of social media may enhance the teaching and learning of intercultural communicative competence. The final objective is to analyse the outcomes and to compare them to related research. The research questions addressed are as follows:

**Primary questions**

- **Question 1:** How is culture linked to language teaching and learning and what is intercultural communicative competence?
- **Question 2:** How do social media develop awareness of intercultural communicative competence?
- **Question 3:** How can intercultural communicative competence be developed online in an educational context?
- **Question 4:** How do fundamental concepts in language learning and education (motivation, autonomy, deep learning) relate to the teaching of intercultural communicative competence with social media?
- **Question 5:** What recommendations from this study set in a standard third-level teaching and learning setting may benefit other practitioners in foreign language education? The recommendations relate to the benefits and limitations linked to this type of project.
Secondary questions

- Can intercultural communicative competence be assessed in an educational context? If yes, how?
- Which social media are better suited for enhancing intercultural communicative competence?
- How do students react to social media implemented in their course for the purpose of developing intercultural communicative competence?
- How do students interact within the social media implemented in their course for the purpose of developing intercultural communicative competence?

Thesis outline

The first chapter of this thesis presents the first theoretical area of research which characterises this study. It explores the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and proposes a definition of the term as it is generally understood in a foreign language learning and teaching context. Chapter 1 highlights the change in pedagogical focus from the linguistic components of language acquisition to the inclusion of cultural elements which gradually led to an awareness of intercultural sensitivity and mediation. Four models portraying the components of ICC which influenced the present project are analysed and compared before the researcher’s model is delineated. Chapter 1 draws to a close with an account of challenges pertaining to the appreciation of interculturality, namely the subjectivity of teachers, the training of language instructors, the risk of strengthening stereotypes, and last but not least the ethicality of assessing ICC.

Chapter 2 reviews the historical development of computer technologies in the context of second language acquisition. It aims at highlighting how CALL has been supporting the teaching of foreign languages since the 1960-70s and at better understanding the potential offered by twenty-first century social media to foster intercultural communicative competence. Chapter 2 also examines key concepts in language learning and teaching, including the link between critical thinking and the membership of a Community of Practice (terms which will be explained in detail), the roles of teachers
and students in online environments. Learner motivation and autonomy are also considered in anticipation of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 where the participants’ reactions to social media-assisted language learning will be analysed. Chapter 2 ends with an exploration of the three social media used in the study and describes their features as well as elements to consider when using such tools in a language course.

After having delineated the two theoretical backgrounds which inform this research in the first two chapters, the thesis focuses on reviewing the research involving ICC and Internet applications from the threshold years 2000-2001 (Cultura project) to 2012. This comprehensive overview of past studies shows the variety of research already carried out in the domain. Chapter 3 situates this doctoral study with these projects in terms of task design and research methods. It also contributes to highlighting the gaps this research is hoping to fill, notably regarding the location and the language that is used, namely French, the combination of tools, and most importantly the intercultural setting scrutinised, namely a standard third-level language teaching and learning setting.

Chapter 4 presents the process through which the research methodology has been selected before the project was launched. This research combines both qualitative and quantitative methods and adopts a combination of action research and case study. Chapter 4 also lists other considerations taken which comprise the selection of participants and the position of the researcher who was also the instructor of the course observed. In addition, it justifies the data collection methods and the language of interaction. Chapter 4 concludes with a timeline of the project and explains the tasks the students were required to complete.

The following two chapters present the findings of the research. Chapter 5 concentrates on the students’ viewpoint and illustrates their experience with first-hand accounts, i.e. their feedback. Chapter 5 gives a portrayal of the participants’ profile and their testimony on using social media for learning in general and also for intercultural learning. Moreover, it explores their reactions to each specific medium: the discussion forum, the blog and the wiki and identifies which were more successful and the reasons behind it. Furthermore, as planned in Chapter 2, this chapter analyses the factors that motivated students to participate in the study and what discouraged them. It also shows to which extent learners worked autonomously, and reveals if the creation of a
Community of Practice was successful and helpful in increasing the students’ reflections on the target culture and on their own. Finally, Chapter 5 examines the content of students’ messages posted during the study and the way learners interacted within each online tool. Using some of the components of the models of intercultural communicative competence explored in Chapter 1, it identifies if a change in the students’ intercultural understanding occurred; it also attempts to give value to this change.

Chapter 6 continues the presentation of data analysis, with the researcher’s perspective more pronounced this time. While Chapter 5 emphasised the participants’ reactions and interactions, Chapter 6 links the data results with various theoretical backgrounds. It investigates further the notions of motivation, autonomy, Community of Practice, and deep learning in a second language acquisition setting. It also reviews the issue of assessing ICC, notably by describing the assessment grids used in the study, and demonstrating their reliability. Finally, it provides insight into tutor feedback in relatively new forms of online writing where a level of informality is not only accepted but makes interactions more authentic. To do so, a small corpus of 14,756 words, created from the participants’ messages posted in the online forum, will be analysed.

Although this research study was designed for a French as a foreign language learning context where participants were interacting within one institution with a set of three specific social media, it is intended that the findings will provide useful insights to practitioners from a wider range of educational settings. A number of recommendations are suggested in the concluding section of this thesis. It is hoped that this thesis will provide useful information for implementing intercultural reflection in the foreign language classroom, as well as serve as a springboard for language practitioners considering using CALL/SMALL for enhancing their teaching practice.
CHAPTER 1 – Intercultural communicative competence and language learning and teaching

We should never denigrate any other culture but rather help people to understand the relationship between their own culture and the dominant culture. When you understand another culture or language, it does not mean that you have to lose your own culture.

Edward T. Hall (Intercultural Communication Institute, 2013)

1.1 Introduction

It is now generally accepted among teachers and educational researchers that quality in language learning and teaching includes a paramount intercultural component. This situation has been greatly influenced by the work of researchers such as Byram (1989, 1992, 1997, 2008), Zarate (1986, 1991, 1995), and research projects published by the Council of Europe (2001, 2007), which have redefined the aim of language learning. For them the objective is not to speak like a native speaker, in which case most learners fall short, but to acquire intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and to appreciate that cultural difference does not imply superiority or inferiority. This is particularly true in times of globalisation and cultural challenges\(^2\) where a better understanding of the ‘other’ seems essential: “It is a widely held assumption among teachers and educational policy makers that foreign language learning creates greater tolerance and understanding of foreign people and their cultures or ways of life” (Byram, 1991: 11). Oxford and Shearin even go as far as stating that learning a foreign language is not only a way to enhance “cultural awareness and friendship” but is also “a key to world peace” (1994: 24). This is also stated in the publications of the Council of Europe which promote intercultural dialogue (2008). Accordingly, foreign language teaching objectives have evolved over the years in order to develop learners’ ICC. Today, there is still a debate on how and if intercultural communicative competence could be assessed. This chapter aims to offer some answers.

\(^2\) In October 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated during an open debate that her country’s attempt to create a multicultural society had “utterly failed”. Her statement was echoed a few months later by British Prime Minister David Cameron, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy who made similar claims regarding their country’s policies in February 2011.
This chapter is divided into four distinct parts which illustrate one of the two main theoretical backgrounds which inform this research, namely the defining and assessment of intercultural communicative communication (ICC) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). The CALL research context will be presented in Chapter 2. The first section proposes a definition of the concept of culture and shows how language and culture are related. The second part describes the evolution of language teaching objectives from an initial preoccupation with linguistic features to a greater focus on cultural or communicative competence and intercultural practices. A number of models for ICC are analysed in detail in Section 1.4 which also depicts the model developed for this research. Finally, Section 1.5 will highlight the challenges of developing ICC in an educational context, including the difficulty of evaluating the learners’ ability to mediate and communicate between languages and cultures.

1.2 The relationship between language and culture

1.2.1 Defining culture

It is not intended here to give a categorical definition of the culture concept, but rather to examine the key understandings of what culture is, and more importantly, how it is manifested in language education. Culture is a complex concept and is described as one of the most difficult words to define (Eagleton, 2000; Williams, 1976: 87). The first attempts to define the term are traced back to the nineteenth century (Levy, 2007: 104); in the first decade of the twenty-first century more than three hundred definitions have been listed in a wide range of disciplines (Baldwin et al., 2006: 139). In this section, culture will be defined in the context of language learning and teaching. Here, the notion of culture is not seen as the early definitions depicted it, namely as “unchanging and homogeneous, and all-encompassing systems of rules or norms that substantially determine human behaviour” (Atkinson, 1999: 626). Indeed, the idea of pure culture where the notion is limited to a nation-state or linguistic code (e.g., the French culture or Hispanic culture) is considered misleading and dangerous (Ibid.: 627, 634). In fact, culture is a “fuzzy concept” (Strauss and Quinn, 1997: 7) and cannot be limited to
geographical boundaries as cultures are constructed from “people’s shared experiences” (Ibid.).

Today, culture is often considered as a fundamental part of language learning and teaching objectives. In the European context, this is illustrated by the Council of Europe’s clear aims to promote cultural diversity and develop an intercultural dialogue between individuals of different backgrounds. The main goals are outlined as:

- To share visions of the world, to understand and learn from those that do not see the world with the same perspective we do;
- To identify similarities and differences between different cultural traditions and perceptions;
- To achieve a consensus that disputes should not be resolved by violence;
- To help manage cultural diversity in a democratic manner, by making the necessary adjustments to all types of existing social and political arrangements;
- To bridge the divide between those who perceive diversity as a threat and those who view it as an enrichment;
- To share best practices particularly in the areas of intercultural dialogue, the democratic management of social diversity and the promotion of social cohesion;
- To develop jointly new projects.

(Council of Europe, 2013)

In other words, creating intercultural dialogue is a means for individuals to be open to other cultures, and live peacefully in multicultural environments. These goals are also evident in the publications of the Council of Europe’s Language Policy Division, including the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages which clearly states that “socio-cultural knowledge” and “intercultural awareness” are inherent components (2000: 82; see also Section 1.3.2). Additionally, the integral part of culture is visible in American educational policies with the publication of the National Standards for Language Learning identifying five goals (commonly known as the five C’s): communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1996; Appendix 1). However, as we shall see, the understanding and teaching of culture in modern languages has evolved greatly before leading to today’s intercultural approach.

In the nineteenth century and up to the second half of the twentieth century, the standard teaching of culture involved exclusively “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (Williams, 1976: 90), that is to say organised thought or philosophy, and art forms such as literature, painting, music, and architecture. This
scholarly culture which was the canon of the nineteenth century Romantic movement was associated with elite classes and was the reflection of the “high culture” (Hall, 1997: 2; Williams, 1974) of a specific era. If we look at the Irish and British contexts, culture teaching changed significantly from the 1960s (Chambers, 2001: 15) when ‘high culture’ was dropped in favour of the anthropological definition of culture as “the way of life of a people, community, nation or social group” (Hall, 1997: 2). This shift was influenced by socio-cultural changes in a number of European countries, where immigration was increasing, as well as the introduction of the communicative approach in modern language teaching which supported the use of authentic materials (Chambers, 2001: 16). Communicative pedagogies encouraged the use of documents that language students could easily relate to. As “culture in the anthropological sense is synonymous with the everyday life” (Williams, 1958: 3) of ordinary people, this more modern concept of culture is also referred to as “ordinary culture” or “popular culture” (Hall, 1997: 2; Williams, 1974).

Culture in the research context of this study is understood as a concept which combines elements of both high culture and anthropological culture. This perception may be illustrated by Halverson’s (1985: 328) theory who divides the notion of culture into two categories: culture with a “big C” and culture with a “little c”. The former represents aspects of ‘civilisation’ including literature, arts, history and geography which are subjects widely taught in schools; whereas the latter describes components which are less perceptible and until recently were often unaccounted for in educational curricula. In the second case, culture is considered as a silent language (Furstenberg et al., 2001; Hall, 1973) which is invisible (Lo Bianco and Crozet, 2003) or hidden like the submerged part of an iceberg (Levine and Adelman, 1993). The iceberg analogy helps to visualise the obvious parts of a culture, e.g., language (Lázár et al., 2007: 7) which are at the tip of the iceberg, while the remaining submerged part represent cultural aspects that are more difficult to comprehend such as “communication style, beliefs,

---

3 ‘Civilisation’ in this case is not referring to socially refined individuals superior to primitive or barbaric beings (Eagleton, 2000). Civilisation here is considered as “l’ensemble des caractères propres à la vie intellectuelle, artistique, morale, sociale et matérielle d’un pays ou d’une société. Par exemple: La civilisation des Incas” (Larousse dictionary, 2013). In modern language teaching, ‘civilisation’ comprises elements of high culture.
values, attitudes, perceptions etc.” (Ibid.). This dichotomy is also known as ‘objective culture’ versus ‘subjective culture’ (Bennett, 2008; Deardorff, 2009).

However the differences between high culture and anthropological culture are not always clear cut and defining culture may sometimes lead to more varied appreciations of the concept. Indeed, it is important to note that the culture which has been subject to research in various areas, including anthropology, business studies, health care and sociolinguistics is not static (Byram, 1997: 17). In the context of language learning and teaching, culture is generally understood to be “the total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behaviours, social habits, etc. of the members of a particular society” (Richards et al., 1992: 94). Byram adds “the shared meanings of a social group”, and specifies that behaviours can be verbal or non-verbal (1997: 39). In other words, it refers to a common experience: “a stock of knowledge about the world that other people share” (Kramsch, 1998: 3). Lado concisely describes it as “the ways of a people” (1957: 110). Kramsch also defines culture as something which is the result of human intervention as opposed to nature (1998: 205), and divides it into three layers: diachronic, synchronic, and imagination: The first layer relates to a historical dimension which is composed of the common past and traditions shared by a community. The second refers to the space in which the social group develops, and the third as peoples’ thoughts which direct their decisions. Kramsch (1998: 10) insists that culture is heterogeneous, that is to say there is a variety of cultures within a community (different experiences, age, gender, ethnicity, etc.), and that it is constantly changing. This means that the mono-cultural approach is now considered as completely outdated (Eagleton, 2000: 14). The idea of heterogeneous culture highlighted by Krasmch may also be assimilated with cultural hybridity which is a characteristic of post-colonial literature studies. Cutural hybridity illustrates “the blending of different cultural influences” (Boehmer, 1995: 36 as cited in Chambers: 2001: 18), including the culture of the colonial occupant.

Other researchers view the notion of culture in a tripartite classification. Foreign language practitioners Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) consider that culture is divided into three elements: the first element called ‘products’ refers to literature, folklore, music and artifacts. The second element ‘behaviour’ comprises customs, habits, dress, foods and leisure; and the third element ‘ideas’ includes beliefs, values and institutions.
Holló and Lázár (2000) believe that the notion of culture is composed of three different categories: (1) civilisation, (2) behaviour and speech patterns, and (3) discourse structures and skills. The first category consists of values, customs, history, geography, literature; the second category contains all the speech acts, body language, and ways of socialising. The third category consists of logic, figures of speech, mediation, and ways of connecting ideas as well as developing an argumentation in written and spoken texts.

Levy (2007; see also Appendix 2) also acknowledges the complexity of the “multifaceted” culture concept and breaks it down into five features: (1) “culture as elemental, (2) culture as relative, (3) culture as group membership, (4) culture as contested, and (5) culture as individual” (2007: 105-12). In addition, Levy provides some pedagogical suggestions aimed at improving learning about culture in foreign language learning and teaching. To begin with, Levy reminds us that culture is acquired from the outset, at birth: as individuals grow and gain linguistic proficiency in their native language they conform to a specific way of life, usually being totally “unaware of [their] own cultural orientation” (Ibid.: 105). Culture is therefore ‘elemental’ because it is omnipresent, even if it is intangible or invisible. In the domain of language learning and teaching, this implies that learners project their personal values and beliefs onto the target culture when they are learning a new language. In other words, their ‘birth culture’ influences how they view the new culture without being conscious of it. This may prevent objective reflection upon the L2 culture, sometimes leading to the dangerous extent of rejecting the L2 culture if it does not meet the expectation of one’s frame of reference. As a result, language education ought to be “opening the minds of learners to difference and otherness” (Lo Bianco, 2003: 34).

Secondly, culture is ‘relative’, that is to say it can only be appreciated and understood when it is compared or contrasted with another culture (Levy, 2007: 107). In the domain of foreign language learning and teaching this is often translated by adopting a contrastive approach where learners make generalisations about the cultures in study when they confront them. However this type of approach has drawbacks, including the “oversimplification of the richness and variety within cultures” (Guest, 2002: 154) which may lead to stereotype building. Accordingly, language teachers are advised to enable learners to be actively engaged in their culture learning as opposed to considering culture as an immutable entity, and also concentrate on “the properties of
individuals […] rather than cultures at large” (Guest, 2002: 157) in order to obtain a more nuanced outlook. This thesis intends to show that this dynamic approach may be achieved with Internet technologies and social media (Chapter 2).

To further grasp the culture concept, one may recognise it as ‘group membership’. Individuals identify themselves as part of a community with whom they share common traits or “capital culturel” (Bourdieu, 1979), e.g., family, school, social class and home country from the early years in life. Further down the line, as years go by, individuals may refine their personality and develop affinities with other groups based on their geographical location, political views, religion, age group, career choices, sports practices, etc. (Levy, 2007: 108). In other words, culture is layered and multiple: “all human beings exist in multiple social worlds, have multiple social allegiances, and play multiple social roles – all of which, additionally, are continuously changing” (Atkinson, 1999: 643). The idea of ‘group membership’ is very similar to “groupness” (Lindsay et al., 1999: 27), namely people know rapidly if they belong to a new group they encounter or if their beliefs, values and behaviours differ too much. In the context of language education, ‘groupness’ is above all expressed through a shared language. This common linguistic code enables the members of the group to cohere and form a “speech community” (Hymes, 1974).

Furthermore, Levy (2007) also views culture for its ‘contested’ characteristic. Indeed, because culture is dynamic and multilayered, the beliefs and values of individuals encountering a new culture or subculture may be challenged. Individuals may experience a “culture shock” (Furnham, 1993; Oberg, 1960, 1972) which can be described as cultural disorientation: individuals contest the unfamiliar culture and necessitate adjusting to the new environment. Finally, culture is ‘individual’, or more precisely the understandings of a culture are subject to personal interpretation (Levy, 2007: 111). In other words, two members of one culture may understand it and describe it differently. As Atkinson puts it: “[No] two people can be said to share precisely the same cultures […] and all cultural groups are made up of individuals” (1999: 640-41). Foreign language teachers are not exempt from cultural subjectivity and are naturally influenced by their personal life history when depicting their own culture. This may seem problematic, but may be easily resolved: the same way language practitioners teach both a normative linguistic system and its context-dependent variable instances of
use, teachers can provide a broad understanding of a culture, and also explain the ambiguity of cultural interpretations and variations (Kramsch, 1993: 11).

Table 1.1 – Breakdown of “big C” culture and “little c” culture as understood by the author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of culture</th>
<th>“Bic C” culture or High culture</th>
<th>“Little c” culture or Anthropological culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Values (e.g., family values, work ethics, holidays)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary arts (e.g., novels, short stories, poetry)</td>
<td>Behaviours, body language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual arts (e.g., drawing, painting, sculpting, architecture, photography, cinema, TV)</td>
<td>Customs, habits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing arts (e.g., music, dance, theatre, fashion)</td>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language (e.g., French)</td>
<td>Figures of speech, metaphors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social practice, etiquette, communication style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mediation, communication style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ways of connecting ideas and developing an argumentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sport, leisure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politics and government bodies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Society systems (e.g., school, health, transport)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To summarise, the above definitions of culture indicate that the notion of culture in the context of language education encompasses a wild spectrum of elements which are not limited to ‘civilisation’ aspects traditionally thought of. Thus, culture is understood as a collective concept including facts about ‘civilisation’ and information about values, beliefs, behaviours, etc. Referring to Halverson’s dichotomy (1985), this thesis acknowledges culture as being composed of both ‘big C’ and ‘little c’ or ‘high culture’ and ‘anthropological culture’; Table 1.1 provides a non-exhaustive list of “big C” and “little c” elements as understood by the author.
1.2.2 Linguistic relativity

The relationship between language and culture or language and perception was initially associated with the works of Whorf (1956) and Sapir (1970). Their analyses of Native American languages such as Hopi conclude that language strongly influences perception and behaviour, and are known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The most controversial form of the hypothesis claims that the way we perceive things is determined by our native language:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. [...] We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.

(Whorf, 1956: 213)

According to this hypothesis, translation between very different languages is impossible. The concept that language determines thought, i.e. linguistic determinism, has been widely criticised by (socio)linguists (Kramsch, 1998: 11-14; Martin, 1986; Pinker, 1994: 53), and the current trend acknowledges a diluted form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis according to which our native language influences to a greater or lesser degree our thoughts, behaviours, and perceptions of the world rather than determines them. This is known as linguistic relativity. In other words, language and culture are intertwined: “language expresses cultural reality” (Kramsch, 1998: 3). Indeed, it is recognised that “language is not a culture-free code, distinct from the way people think and behave, but, rather, it plays a major role in the perpetuation of culture” (Ibid.: 8). Agar refers to the interconnection between language and culture as ‘languaculture’:

Language fills the spaces between us with sound; culture forges the human connection through them. Culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture. [...] Whenever you hear the word language or the word culture, you might wonder about the missing half. “Languaculture” is a reminder, I hope, of the necessary connection between its two parts.

(1994, 28)

This statement implies that language teachers must also develop a cultural competence in their learners and attempting to omit it would prevent successful language teaching: “Since language and culture are inseparable, we cannot be teachers of language without
being teachers of culture – or vice versa” (Byram and Morgan, 1994: vii). This is true even from the *ab initio* language learner level. In spite of being acknowledged and having gained respectability, the cultural component of language learning may still be ignored or denied. Valdes also points out that teaching culture is inevitable even if some language teachers think that they are not doing so:

> From the first day of the beginning class, culture is at the forefront. Whatever approach, method or technique is used, greetings are usually first on the agenda. How can any teacher fail to see the cultural nature of the way people greet each other in any place in any language? […] Not calling it a lesson in culture does not prevent it [from] being one. (1990: 20)

In brief, languages convey implicit meanings or cultural traits which are shared by the members of the same group: “Native speakers of a language speak not only with their own individual voices, but through them they speak also the established knowledge of their native community and society, the stock of metaphors this community lives by, and the categories they use to represent their experience” (Kramsch, 1993: 43). This is also true when a minority language (e.g., Navajo) is replaced by a dominant one (e.g., English) and speakers of the ancestral language reproduce the cultural behaviours when communicating through the new language (Saville-Troike, 1992). Therefore, being proficient in a language implies more than mastering linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary and syntax; it also involves understanding the social context in which it is spoken. This concept is known as cultural competence.

### 1.3 From cultural competence to intercultural communicative competence

#### 1.3.1 Cultural and communicative competence

The concept of cultural competence, according to which successful communication in a foreign language cannot be attained without understanding the culture in which the language is developed, gained prominence in the 1980s with the advent of communicative pedagogy (Canale and Swain, 1980; Pulverness, 2003; van Ek, 1986). At the time, language teaching methods shifted from a focus on linguistic competence
The concept of communicative competence is greatly influenced by the works of Habermas (1970) and Hymes (1972). In his work on native speakers’ linguistic development, Hymes observed how children learn their first language and concluded that sociocultural competence was essential in this process:

> Within the developmental matrix in which knowledge of the sentences of a language is acquired, children also acquire knowledge of a set of ways in which sentences are used. From a finite experience of speech acts and their interdependence with sociocultural features, they develop a general theory of the speaking appropriate in their community, which they employ, like other forms of tacit cultural knowledge (competence) in conducting and interpreting social life”.

(Ibid.: 279)

Hymes’ conclusions inspired the 1980s foreign language teaching methods. Canale and Swain (1980) defined the components of communicative competence as linguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. Van Ek (1986) completed this definition with two additional factors: sociocultural competence, and social competence which he respectively describes as the “awareness of the sociocultural context in which the language concerned is used by native speakers” and “the ability to use social strategies appropriate to the achievement of one’s communicative goals” (Ibid.: 8).

In later years, this communication pedagogy was criticised (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993, 1998) specifically because it was based on native speaker language proficiency. It became apparent that the learning objectives were unrealistic and regarded learners in a detrimental way as “incomplete native speaker[s]” (Byram, 1997: 11). Moreover, the native speaker framework assumes that bilingual individuals are equally competent linguistically and socioculturally in two systems, and therefore speakers of a foreign language should aim to be as proficient in the target language as in their own. Byram argues that research in the domain proved this to be wrong, in other words the majority of bilinguals never reach the same competence in two languages. Byram adds that setting such objectives is also undesirable because it forces speakers to abandon their identity in order to adopt another one when the linguistic and sociocultural
environments vary. Byram calls this phenomenon ‘linguistic schizophrenia’ and declares that it could lead to a damaging “cultural shock” (Oberg, 1960, 1972; Furnham, 1993) or “anxiety relating to disorientation from exposure to a new culture” (Gass and Selinker, 1994: 237). Instead, Byram suggests redefining the foreign language teaching objectives to develop *intercultural* communicative competence, i.e. to bring learners to “see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviours and meanings, as expressed in a foreign language, and those of their interlocutor’s, expressed in the same language – or even a combination of languages” (1997: 12). In other words, language learners do not need to adopt a different identity and ignore their own values in order to blend in the new cultures they may interact within. Instead, they learn to appreciate their own values, and understand how these influence their code of conduct (Guth and Helm, 2010: 18).

### 1.3.2 Cross-cultural / intercultural / socio-cultural competence and other terms

The idea of ICC is not exclusive to Byram’s work; in fact many researchers and sociolinguists have in recent years (from the 1990s onwards) expanded the notion of communicative competence (Alred and Byram, 2002; Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1992, 1997, 2008; Byram and Zarate, 1994; Byram *et al*., 2002; Corbett, 2003; Council of Europe, 2001; Deardorff, 2006, 2009; Eastman, 1990; Fantini, 2000; Furstenberg *et al*., 2001; Kramsch, 1993, 1995, 1998; Lázár *et al*., 2007; Lo Bianco *et al*., 1999; Zarate, 1995; Zarate *et al*., 2004).

Similarly to the concept of culture, ICC is complex to define and the variety of terms⁴ that arose to describe the concept is a testimony of this (see Table 1.2). It is not uncommon to read publications where authors use a variety of terms to discuss the notion of ICC (Takkula *et al*., 2008; Stickler and Emke, 2011). For example, Polisca (2011) refers to “cultural awareness”, “cultural sensitivity”, “intercultural awareness”, “intercultural competence” in a short journal article.

---

⁴ For simplicity, the term intercultural communicative competence will be used in this thesis from now on, with the exception of direct quotations.
Table 1.2 – A selection of terms referring to ICC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Cross-cultural communicative competence’</td>
<td>Takkula et al. (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Cross-cultural exchange’</td>
<td>Dubreil (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Cross-cultural learning’</td>
<td>Liaw and Johnson (2001), Truscott and Morley (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Cultural literacy’</td>
<td>Furstenberg et al. (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Cultural sensitivity’</td>
<td>Polisca (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Cultural awareness’</td>
<td>Polisca (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Intercultural communication’</td>
<td>Kinginger et al. (1999), Menard-Warwick (2009), Müller-Hartmann,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2000), O’Dowd (2000, 2003), Thorne and Payne (2005), Zeiss and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isabelli-Garcia (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elola and Oskoz (2008), Fantini (2009), Liaw (2006), Polisca (2011),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schenker (2012), Stickler and Emke (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2007), Schuetze (2008), Takkula et al. (2008), Tudini (2007), Wang and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coleman (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tudini (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Intercultural literacy’</td>
<td>Diehl and Prins (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Intercultural maturity’</td>
<td>Stickler and Emke (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Intercultural sensitivity’</td>
<td>Bennett (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Intercultural understanding’</td>
<td>Fisher et al. (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Pan-European communicative competence’</td>
<td>Takkula et al. (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Plurilingual and pluricultural competence’</td>
<td>Coste et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Socio–cultural competence’</td>
<td>Byram et al. (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Transcultural communicative competence’</td>
<td>Takkula et al. (2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variations in the term express a different emphasis on the concept; for instance the ‘cross-cultural’ terms accentuate the fact that individuals navigate from one culture to another but may have to adopt a different identity each time (a concept criticised by Byram as mentioned in Section 1.3.1), while the ‘intercultural’ terms highlight the fact that individuals are able to adapt their self according to the situation when navigating between cultures without renouncing their values. The expression ‘Pan-European’ limits the geography of the competence to the European Union (Takkula et al., 2008: 89). The term ‘cultural’ express the idea of “developing awareness of the relation between selfhood and otherness” (Furstenberg et al., 2001: 75). The ‘socio’ prefix highlights the link between a culture and its society or community, and the idea that knowledge
construction is done via human interactions (Kramsch, 1993). Authors may draw on a selection of terms depending on what component of ICC they wish to stress. Despite the plethora of expressions used and the confusion it may create, there seems to be a general consensus that foreign language teaching objectives should enable learners to acquire “the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures (Paige et al., 2000: 4). The only significant difference that may be identified between these terms is the language used to exhibit intercultural competence. For instance, Byram (1997) makes a clear distinction between “intercultural competence” and “intercultural communicative competence”:

In the first case, individuals have the ability to interact in their own language with people from another country and culture [...] On the other hand, someone with Intercultural Communicative Competence is able to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language.

(1997: 70-1)

Experts in the domain of ICC, including Byram and Zarate, have been approached by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe to establish a standardised foreign language teaching and learning model. Their work contributed to the creation of the Common European Framework of References for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001): a scheme providing comprehensive descriptions of knowledge and skills to be acquired by language learners, and giving guidelines for educationalists creating curricula, examinations, and course books within Europe (Council of Europe, 2000). It defines specific levels of proficiency in languages and the “cultural context in which language is set” (Council of Europe, 2000: 1), in other words levels of sociocultural competence which has now become a standard in Europe. This framework clearly states the need for developing plurilingualism in language educational environments. Indeed, the Council of Europe makes a distinction between multilingualism which is “the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society” (2001: 4) and plurilingualism:

The plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples […], he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. In different
situations, a person can call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor. […]

(2001:4-5)

Even if the socio-cultural competence of language learning and teaching only represents a fraction of the knowledge and skills described in the CEFRL, the quotation above shows how important intercultural qualities and knowledge are for effective communication. It indicates that language learners’ experiences and overlapping cultures enable them to adapt to new contexts; they learn how to communicate differently and appropriately according to the situation they find themselves in. The quotation continues as follows:

From this perspective, the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve ‘mastery’ of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. This implies, of course, that the languages offered in educational institutions should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop a plurilingual competence.

(2001: 4-5)

This confirms the idea that foreign language pedagogies which encompass multiple skills, including adopting an intercultural stance are thought to be more effective than approaches which excessively focus on linguistic objectives (grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation).

Moreover, the notion of ICC corresponds to today’s general sense of globalisation awareness. Indeed, the current world is characterised by a highly mobile society which is constantly interacting within new cultures. Buttjes claims that “at a time of increasing international dependency and imminent global threats” understanding and respecting other people’s beliefs and attitudes is a priority (1991, 9). The need to encourage “intercultural citizenship” (Byram, 2008) is also emphasised in the Council of Europe’s directives:

The teaching of languages has aims which are convergent with those of education for democratic citizenship: both are concerned with intercultural interaction and communication, the promotion of mutual understanding and the development of individual responsibility.

(Council of Europe, 2007: 18)

Now that a general definition of intercultural communicative competence has been presented, this thesis will look closely at four ICC models from a selection of renowned
authors whose publications have been very frequently quoted in the last two decades, namely Bennett (1986, 1993, 2004), Byram (1997), Deardorff (2006, 2008, 2009) and Kramsch (1998). This will enable us to further understand the concept of ICC. Section 1.4.5 will then present the model which shaped the research conducted by the author. The ICC frameworks are presented in chronological order, in order to show how the concept evolved through the years: from a more linear conception with definitive results to a life-long or process model.

1.4 Models of intercultural communicative competence

1.4.1 Bennett’s model: Intercultural sensitivity

Bennett elaborated a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) which is a six-stage intercultural acquisition process leading to a successful cultural awareness phase (1986, 1993, 2004). The six stages are illustrated in Figure 1.1. Starting from an egocentric stage learners gradually become aware of differences with the other, progressively gain respect for these differences, and therefore expand their background knowledge of the target language/culture. The first three stages are part of the ethnocentric phase: ‘denial’ (I see no difference), ‘defense’ (I am against difference), and ‘minimisation’ (of difference). The last three stages are part of the ethnorelative phase: ‘acceptance’ (I perceive things different), ‘adaptation’ (I behave and react differently), and ‘integration’ (I am different, i.e. I can adapt my behaviour while being myself). The DMIS described by Bennett is presented as linear, which could infer that the process of culture learning also follows a continuous development framework. However, Bennett recognises that the model is not progressive and that learners may skip stages.

A person at an ethnocentric phase assumes that “the worldview of his or her own culture is central to all reality” (Bennett, 1993: 30) and either denies completely the existence of cultural difference or minimises its importance. The denial stage is usually maintained by physical separation (isolation) and/or the creation of social barriers (separation). It can be viewed as “the inability (or disinterest) in differentiating national
cultures” (Ibid., 2004: 64). For instance Western individuals might neglect the cultural differences between China and Japan. To overcome the effects of ethnocentrism, Zarate suggests controlling the fear of the unknown by encouraging personal implication (1986)\(^5\). This could be achieved by adopting strategies which bring about cultural awareness, such as intercultural activities, and could allow learners to recognise difference.

![Figure 1.1 – Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity](adapted from Bennett, 1993: 29)

Defense, which is the second stage of ethnocentrism, shows a development towards awareness as cultural differences are identified but they are perceived as threatening. The learners’ sense of reality is challenged and can lead them to evaluate difference negatively. This is generally called ‘negative stereotyping’. Another level of a defensive attitude towards another culture is when the learner considers the other as inferior. But like denigration, this stage is only temporary. To surmount superiority, Bennett advises “allowing, but not overemphasising, the benefits of cultural pride” (1993: 39). Before learners reach the third stage of minimisation, they may engage in a reversal of appreciation of their own culture. It is possible that they denigrate it and find another

---

\(^5\) “Pour dépasser les effets de l’ethnocentrisme, il faut apprendre à juguler la hantise de l’inconnu et du vide, à maîtriser les démarches d’autonomie / To overcome the effects of ethnocentrism, we must learn to curb the fear of the unknown and the empty, to master autonomy approaches” [translated by author] (Zarate, 1986: 37).
one superior. In general, to facilitate the process from defense to the following stage, teachers could draw attention to what is good in all cultures, and compare similarities.

The third stage is a place where learners consider difference as common and do not see it negatively. While acknowledging difference, they regard it as of little importance and identify more universal traits than dissimilarities. The universality is perceived at two levels: physical, e.g., human beings of all cultures have identical needs and physical characteristics, and transcendent, e.g., human beings share the same fundamental values and beliefs. The shift from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism is crucial. It is advised to develop cultural self-awareness through methods of discovery such as small group discussions, and when possible, to include participants from other cultures. Levy also underlines the importance of cross-cultural communication and reflection: “Pedagogical approaches and techniques that help learners to reflect objectively on their own culture are especially important” (Levy, 2007: 107). The main attribute of a person at the ethnorelative phase is that they assume that cultural difference is neither good nor bad, but simply different.

The fourth stage is acceptance. It is characterised by learners who not only acknowledge difference but also respect it. At this stage, learners recognise linguistic relativity (as explained by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis discussed earlier in this chapter): “languages are seen as shapers of realities” (Bennett, 1993: 48). Furthermore, they appreciate verbal and non-verbal behavioural difference as well as valuing the difference. A strategy to develop the cultural competence of learners who have reached this stage is to put their beliefs into action, through cultural simulations for example. Bennett illustrates this point with the case of a training programme which aims at improving relations between American students and their European host families via a discussion of transatlantic value differences.

Learners who are in the fifth stage, adaptation, see difference as an asset. They maintain their own culture and also embrace aspects of other cultures to adapt their behaviour to various contexts and socialise with people of different cultures. They understand that culture is not a thing you own but a process: “One does not have culture; one engages in it” (Ibid., 52). Any strategies which allow learners to develop their empathy with the target cultures and to use cross-cultural communication are suitable at this stage. The
final stage of the cultural learning process is integration. Learners are now “multicultural persons[s]” (Adler, 1977: 25) whose identity is plural. While keeping a main cultural attachment, they see themselves “existing within a collection of various cultural and personal frames of reference” (Bennett, 1993: 59). They can easily adapt to the cultures of people around them. In order to retain this high level of cultural awareness Bennett advocates defining a personal accepting framework, and acting as a cultural mediator so that not belonging to one culture in particular is considered as an asset as opposed to a weakness.

1.4.2 Kramsch’s model: The third place

In the early years of defining ICC, Kramsch (1993) developed key concepts which influenced the intercultural frameworks that followed. For instance, her notion of ‘third place’, which is still relevant today, is often quoted or referred to in research (Byram, 1997; Corbett, 2003; Kinginger et al., 1999; Liaw, M.-L. 2007; Lo Bianco et al., 1999; Mason: 2010; Schwienhorst, 1998). The ‘third place’ is a state in which foreign language speakers reach an intercultural stance (Corbett, 2003). More recently, Kramsch redefined her own concept of ‘third place’ as ‘symbolic competence’ (2011).

Kramsch highlights several points regarding culture acquisition and summarises four findings in the teaching and learning about culture: (1) “Establishing a sphere of interculturality, (2) teaching culture as an interpersonal process, (3) teaching culture as difference, and (4) crossing disciplinary boundaries” (1993, 205-6). In brief, Kramsch asserts that to understand a foreign culture, comparison needs to be made with one’s own culture and that reflection is crucial in this process. In addition, she insists that macro features of culture need to be taught as opposed to static components or what has been referred to as “big C” in Section 1.2.1. In other words, it is more important to be culturally aware rather than acquiring the (unattainable) knowledge of all cultural traits of a target culture. Similarly, culture should not be seen as merely a national attribute: “not that national characteristics are unimportant, but they cannot be adduced without further specification of other cultural factors” (Ibid.: 206). Indeed, our age, gender, geographical (re)location within a country, ethnic origin, and social class, to name a
few, can be determinant of our sense of belonging to a culture. Finally, Kramsch insists on the importance for language educators to link the teaching of culture to other academic disciplines such as social sciences, ethnography, and sociolinguistics.

As culture derives from a social construction and is “the product of self and other perceptions” (Ibid.: 205) Kramsch claims that when foreign language learners interact with native speakers, they create a third culture which is neither their native culture ‘C1’ nor the target culture ‘C2’. To illustrate this, she takes the example of expatriates, i.e. individuals who live, work, and sometimes raise their families in a culture which differs from the one they grew up in. These persons often share the common feeling of ‘being on a fence’. In other words, they are in an in-between state: neither do they pertain to their native culture any more, nor do they entirely fit in their adoptive culture. As a consequence, these individuals find their home in a culture “of a third kind” which differs from C1 or C2 (Ibid.: 235). Referring to Kramsch, Kinginger et al. recognise that from this third perspective, “learners look critically at their own culture as well as the culture that is the focus of classroom study” (1999: 853). This is precisely what Kramsch advocates; she believes that intercultural education should “enable learners to take both an insider’s and outsider’s view on C1 and C2” (1993: 210).

Kramsch established a four-step approach to intercultural understanding within an educational context which shows the beginnings of future ICC models:

1. Reconstruct the context of production and reception of the text within the foreign culture (C2, C2’).
2. Construct with the foreign learners their own context of reception, i.e. find an equivalent phenomenon in C1 and construct that C1 phenomenon with its own network of meanings (C1, C1’)
3. Examine the way in which C1’ and C2’ contexts in part determine C1” and C2”, i.e. the way each culture views the other.
4. Lay the ground for a dialogue that could lead to change.

(Ibid.: 210)

In this model, Kramsch introduces the notions of observation, reflection, interpretation, comparison, and mediation which are some of the skills now deemed necessary to be interculturally competent. Finally, Kramsch adds that taking one’s interlocutor’s outlook, even for a brief period of time, may be difficult for novice learners, but this can be solved through dialogue and negotiation of meaning.
With the advent of the Internet and the apparition of new discourses in the media, Kramsch updated her notion of ‘third culture’ to the notion of ‘symbolic competence’ (2011). She explains that ICC is very much linked to understanding “discourses and the production of meaning” (Ibid.: 356). Without withdrawing her previous views on the ‘third space’ as being a place where individuals understand themselves and the other, as well as express tolerance and empathy (2011: 356), she adds that ‘symbolic competence’ is also:

a matter of looking beyond words and actions and embracing multiple, changing and conflicting discourse worlds, in which the circulation of values and identities across cultures, the inversions, even inventions of meaning are often hidden behind a common illusion of effective communication.

(Ibid.)

To illustrate her argument, she explains that foreign language competencies have evolved. For instance, reading proficiency in the twenty-first century – ‘the information age’ – implies deciphering if the information published online is reliable, identifying who wrote the information, and establishing the motive of the writer as much as knowing vocabulary (2011: 360). In other words, interculturally competent individuals understand the cultural context in which language and discourses are generated.

1.4.3 Byram’s model: Intercultural mediator

Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence is the most widely used model in the domain of language learning and teaching. This is particularly true in the European context, probably due to his eminent work and collaboration with the Council of Europe (Helm, 2009: 94). Byram’s model of ICC (Figure 1.2) comprises linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and intercultural components. It is composed of five savoirs or four elements “skills (x2), knowledge, and attitude” which fit into a foreign language teaching context. The first two factors – attitudes and knowledge - are preconditions for an intercultural interaction to take place while the two skills listed are necessary aptitudes (Byram et al., 2002).
As the ICC model fits in an educational environment, Byram takes into consideration requirements such as teaching objectives and assessment which will be presented later in this chapter. Byram emphasises the roles of teachers who have the responsibility to give learners opportunities to develop their “critical cultural awareness [savoir s’engager]” (Byram et al., 2002: 341). In other words, learners must acquire an ability to analyse viewpoints and practices belonging to their own culture as well as other cultures or countries. However, Byram, states that becoming an intercultural mediator can be achieved outside a foreign language teaching situation. Furthermore, Byram recognises that his model portrays an ideal, yet he argues that it is an “attainable ideal” (1997: 70) as it rejects the notion of native speaker as a model for foreign language learners, i.e. a model based on the social context rather than on linguistic criteria only: “the learner [must] be able to see similarities and differences, and to establish a relationship between their own and other systems, rather than imitate a native speaker” (1997: 14).

Similarly to Bennett and Kramsch’s works, Byram’s model of ICC is based on the concept of the ‘intercultural speaker’ (Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993) which he later changed to ‘intercultural mediator’ (Alred and Byram, 2002) as the second term stresses the person’s ability to act in a social context rather than on linguistic proficiency. Providing recommendations for language teachers, Byram describes intercultural mediators as individuals who are able to adopt an objective stance, and are willing to briefly adapt their behaviour, values and beliefs in order to relate to the values of their interlocutor. To illustrate this point, Byram makes a difference between a tourist and a sojourner: “Where a tourist remains essentially unchanged, the sojourner has the opportunity to learn and be educated, acquiring the capacity to critique and improve their own and others’ conditions” (Byram, 1997: 2). Byram therefore makes a distinction between bicultural individuals who merely adopt a chosen identity depending on the social group they are interacting with, and individuals who act interculturally (2002). Intercultural mediators avail of a combination of their knowledge, positive attitude, and skills to maintain relations with individuals from other social and cultural groups.
Byram identifies two types of knowledge. Firstly, when individuals are engaging in an interaction, they bring their personal knowledge of their own culture or social group as well as knowledge about the culture of their interlocutor’s. This type of knowledge may be minimal or substantial, conscious or unconscious, but is constantly present during the interplay. This form of knowledge originates from primary and secondary socialisations, in other words the first socialisation people are subject to with their family in early years, and the second socialisation which mainly occurs in formal
education: “Primary is the first socialisation an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society. Secondary socialisation is any subsequent process that inducts an already socialised individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society.” (Berger and Luckman, 1966: 342-3). The second category of knowledge that intercultural mediators bring to an interaction is the knowledge that their worldviews are the result of primary and secondary socialisations, and thus anticipate and prevent divergence or conflict:

Awareness that one is a product of one’s own socialisation is a pre-condition for understanding one’s reactions to otherness. Similarly awareness of how one’s ‘natural’ ways of interacting with other people are the ‘naturalised’ product of socialisation, and how parallel but different modes of interaction can be expected in other cultures, is part of the knowledge an intercultural speaker needs. (Byram, 1997: 52)

This second category of knowledge which may not be naturally gained is crucial to intercultural mediators, and differentiates them from ‘ordinary’ speakers. Byram also emphasises that acquiring this awareness matters more and is more achievable than getting to know all the characteristics of a particular culture or social group.

**Attitudes**

Regarding attitudes, intercultural mediators need to be curious, open and ready to question their values or adopt the viewpoint of their interlocutors. By this, Byram does not imply that they deny their beliefs, principles and behaviours, but rather to acknowledge their interlocutor’s. This stance is the result of what Byram (1989) and Doyé (1992) call ‘tertiary socialisation’ or ‘tertiärer socialisation’. This concept is “the process of induction into another society” (Alred and Byram, 2002: 341) or the fact that language learners are led to experience cultural traits beyond their social group.

The notion of ‘tertiary socialisation’ is very similar to Kramsch’s idea of ‘third place’:

Where tertiary socialisation takes place […], it is not that one set of beliefs and schemata are replaced by others but that new beliefs and schemata are held side by side with existing ones, the individual being ready to operate with whichever is relevant in a given context […]; the individual acquires new behaviours but, combined with their insight into other schemata and moral values, they do not simply adopt new ways of behaving, but find ‘middle ways’ of intercultural behaviours with which they and people of another culture feel comfortable. (Alred and Byram, 2002: 342-3)
According to Byram, bad attitudes are characterised by prejudices and stereotyping - negative as well as positive stereotypes - and he suggests that good attitudes can be encouraged in an educational context with critical and analytical reflection of one’s own and others’ culture (1997).

**Skills**

The two skills listed in Byram’s model are a way of complementing the knowledge held by intercultural mediators: the ‘skill of interpreting and relating’, and the ‘skill of discovery and interaction’. With the first skill, intercultural mediators can pinpoint ethnocentred comments in a document and identify their provenance. They can also observe two interlocutors of different cultures engaged in an interaction and identify the reasons that may lead the speakers to a misconception of meaning even if they are both at high level of language proficiency. Moreover, intercultural mediators would be able to reconcile the misunderstood speakers. The second skill insists on the immediacy with which intercultural mediators can apply their knowledge, attitude, and skills “for mediation between interlocutors of one’s own and a foreign culture” (1997: 53), and this in any given social group or cultural environment. Finally, Byram makes a distinction between ‘intercultural competence’ and ‘intercultural communicative competence’. The former depicts individuals who bring into play the knowledge, attitude and skills described above when interacting in their native language with people of other cultures, whereas the latter designates mediators who are able to communicate with different social groups in a foreign language, and to "reconcile or mediate between different modes present" (Byram and Fleming 1998, 12).

**1.4.4 Deardorff’s model: Internal and external outcomes**

Deardorff has developed two models of intercultural competence (Figure 1.3): a pyramid model (2004) and a process model (2006) which is an amended version of the previous one, and self-professed as more representative of the acquisition of ICC. Indeed, the linear feature of the process model does not convey the versatility of ICC development. As such, the latter will be put under scrutiny in this section.
Deardorff’s process model draws on findings of a study (2004, 2006, 2008) conducted with intercultural experts predominantly situated in the United States (24 administrators and 23 scholars) with the aim of gaining a consensus on the definition of intercultural competence. To this end, she presented the participants with descriptors elicited from Byram’s model of ICC. Accordingly it encompasses attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills. Like Byram, Deardorff believes that attitudes come first and determine the ability to acquire intercultural knowledge. Attitudes of openness, respect, curiosity and discovery are listed as prerequisite. Deardorff views two types of knowledge: the knowledge of one’s own culture, and sensitivity to that of the interlocutor’s. The participants of the study agreed that knowledge on its own is insufficient in the development of intercultural competence (2008) and that individuals must also put certain qualities in practice.

Moreover, intercultural awareness is more important than exhaustive (impossible) knowledge; learners cannot know all the cultural traits of a social group. What really matters is to make them aware of changes and enable them to analyse, interpret, relate to, and observe situations: “[institutions] must be chiefly concerned with teaching students to think interculturally” (2008: 35). The panel also identified key communicative and cognitive skills: listen, observe and evaluate, analyse, interpret and relate.

This shows that analytical and critical thinking skills are valued as paramount in the intercultural acquisition process. Deardorff and Deardorff (2000) set up the OSEE tool which invites individuals to put in practice the essential skills of observation and analysis:

O – Observe what is happening
S – State objectively what is happening
E – Explore different explanations for what is happening
E – Evaluate which explanation is the most likely one

(Ibid., as cited in Deardorff, 2008: 44)
Figure 1.3 – Deardorff’s pyramid and process models of intercultural competence
(Deardorff, 2009: 13; Ibid.: 33)
Thus far, Deardorff’s model is very similar to Byram’s ICC model. However it is original in the way that it portrays an internal and an external outcome. As the name conveys, the internal outcome is an intimate state which is not easily observable; it represents the internal changes or the “shift in frame of reference” (2006: 255) occurring within the individuals who become interculturally competent. The internal outcome comprises qualities of adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelative view and empathy. To exercise empathy, Deardorff advocates individuals to apply the ‘platinum rule’, i.e. behaving with others as they would like, as opposed to the ‘golden rule’ which implies behaving with others as you would like (2008: 39). In other words, to be willing to understand the other rather than willing to be understood first and/or only is essential.

The external outcome concerns the capacity to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately in an intercultural situation. Deardorff understands effectiveness as “the achievement of valued objectives” and appropriateness as “the avoidance of violating valued rules” (2006: 255-6). In addition, the circular layout of the model clearly conveys that the intercultural acquisition process is developmental, namely attitudes lead to acquisition of knowledge comprehension and skills “which helps to reshape internal frames of reference that then influence external behaviours” (2008: 39). Deardorff’s framework also shows that each part of the model may directly impact the external outcome. In addition to this, the non linear feature of the model demonstrates the ongoing or lifelong nature of the process “implying that one never reaches the pinnacle of intercultural competence” (Ibid.: 39). Deardorff also adds that one can be a proficient intercultural mediator in one social context and a novice in another.

Furthermore, similarly to Bennett’s DMIS, Deardorff’s model does not explicitly include linguistic features. This may be explained by the fact that the model is described as intercultural as opposed to intercultural and communicative. However, some of the experts’ definition of intercultural competence which inspired the model included language proficiency levels. Deardorff’s study concluded that no consensus on the importance of language to reach intercultural competence was reached. Some participants claimed that individuals can be fluent in a language and not be interculturally competent or vice versa, while others alleged that language mastery was essential: “One might argue that language itself becomes a window through which to understand another culture’s worldview and thus remains a key knowledge component” (Ibid.: 38). This highlights that intercultural competence is a complex construct that
involves more than one component. For instance, “knowledge of language does not guarantee intercultural competence” (Deardorff, 2006: 259).

1.4.5 Model developed for this research

The various models demonstrate that ICC is subject to interpretations which determine the authors’ definition and framework of the concept. As a consequence, decisions need to be made when adopting a model: “Should we emphasise knowledge of culture and cultural practices or rather the capacity and skills of conscious analysis of intercultural interaction?” (Byram, 1997: 30). Should we include linguistic ability, namely verbal and non-verbal features? Should we focus on a mental adaptation as well as the ability to act effectively and appropriately? The research model used in this study does not aim to revolutionise the concept of ICC but rather to take elements of previous models in order to inform the design and implementation of the present study.

Firstly, this model of ICC is developed for a specific educational context, at university level to be precise. Also, the emergence of an intercultural speaker or mediator (Bennett, 1986, 1993, 2004; Byram, 1991, 1997, 2008; Deardorff, 2006, 2008; Kramsch, 1993) has replaced the idea that isolated characteristics of a culture or social group should be taught, and has become the standard in foreign language education (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). This research model adopts the same concept. Besides, it considers that one country is composed of several cultures “a national or racial matrix is often a poor indicator of the actions and attitudes that exist within the subgroups and social genres found within any race or nation. […] we should understand that culture […] varies greatly within sub-genres” (Guest, 2002: 156). Accordingly, the study highlighted this reality to participants. Furthermore, the analysis of students’ definitions of culture completed at the end of the project shows that culture understood as a plural or heterogeneous concept has been appreciated by learners (see Section 5.3.4).

Secondly, the model developed for this research conceives the development of ICC as a life-long process because cultures are constantly changing and all types of situations cannot be anticipated. As a consequence, speakers who are interculturally competent in
one social group may still be challenged in another context and be disturbed by unexpected beliefs, values and behaviours. (Byram et al., 2002: 12). This model is composed of different stages and favours cyclical or process frameworks (Deardorff, 2006, 2008) as opposed to linear ones (Bennett, 1986, 1993, 2004) which infer that stagnation is not possible. This means that individuals may progress, stagnate and/or regress in their learning of ICC (Fantini, 2009), as well as that they may be at different competency stages according to the socio-cultural context they are interacting within. For instance, Bennett’s model which is linear could be modified to illustrate this lengthy aspect (Figure 1.4). Like the players of the board game ‘Snakes and ladders’, language learners evolve towards their goal erratically. They may progress at a slow pace or quite rapidly (ladder) but they may also regress (snake) at any time, unexpectedly. Figure 1.4 shows a number of possible paths among many that can be taken by foreign language learners developing their ICC. This being said, the model developed for this research considers that complete regression is unthinkable “once one becomes aware, it is difficult to return to a state of total unawareness” (Fantini, 2000: 29). On top of that, the author’s model dismisses the idea that being an intercultural mediator implies agreeing with all the values of the culture of the other like in the ultimate ‘integration’ stage of Bennett’s DMIS (1986, 1993, 2004). Instead it approves seeing one’s culture from the eye of the other (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006, 2008 Kramsch, 1993, 1998): “acceptance does not necessarily mean approval” (Deardorff, 2008: 41).
In addition, the model of this research embraces the idea that acquiring ICC competence is a constantly evolving process, namely that individuals may never reach total proficiency:

“ICC development is an on-going and lengthy — often a lifelong — process. Occasionally, individuals experience moments of regression or stagnation, but normally there is no end point. One is always in the process of "becoming," and one is never completely "interculturally competent." Although we may develop and expand our competencies, new challenges always exist. Like the speaker of two or more languages, one rarely attains complete and native-like fluency in the subsequent systems one enters beyond the native system.”

(Fantini, 2000: 29)

As in the most recent models (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; 2008), the author believes that ICC is composed of knowledge, skills and attitudes, and acknowledges the importance of reflection in developing these (Bennett, 2003; Deardorff, 2008; Furstenberg et al., 2001). In addition, the model of this research includes linguistic features as levels of proficiency in the host tongue may facilitate understanding and communication. This model also recognises that the ICC process involves internal and external outcomes (Deardorff, 2006, 2008).
Finally, as the model envisages that one may never be completely interculturally competent, this thesis puts emphasis on raising awareness of or ‘sensitivity’ (Bennett, 1986, 1993, 2004) to ICC, and investigating learners’ ‘third place’ (Kramsch, 1993) rather than aiming at students acquiring complete ICC.

1.5 The challenges of developing intercultural communicative competence

1.5.1 Changing culture, stereotypes, and mediators

The extensive research publications on language and culture teaching and learning raise questions regarding effective integration of cultural aspects; firstly because culture is constantly evolving (Kramsch, 1993, 1998), and secondly because it is often claimed that it cannot be taught without leading to generalisations and caricatural images (Coleman, 1997; Guest, 2002). This may be very much linked to the competence of mediators with whom individuals develop their ICC.

As seen in one of the early sections of this chapter, culture is “not easily defined or understood” (Lázár et al., 2007: 37). This is in part due to the fact that the concept is not monolithic, and developing ICC is a lengthy process punctuated by periods of improvement but also of decline. As a consequence of the changing nature of culture, levels of learners’ competence are difficult to determine: “Nobody, least of all the teacher, can tell [students] where that very personal place is; for each learner it will be differently located, and will make different sense at different times” (Kramsch, 1993: 257).

In addition to this factor, language teachers are faced with the issue of stereotypes that learners may have about a culture or a social group. These often inaccurate received ideas or oversimplified views, negative but also positive ones, which are equally damaging (Byram, 1997) are usually the result of generalisations about a social group, in other words static interpretations excluding “individualized realizations of cultural traits” (Yoshida, 1996: 98). Accordingly, linguists now focus on ‘interculturality’, in
order to avoid stereotyping or the belief that the culture of the other is inferior. Understanding another culture implies comparison with one’s own (Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993; 1998; Levy, 2007; Zarate, 1986), and acknowledging difference is a major factor in a learner’s successful acquisition of interculturality: “the reality which we experience is constructed according to variable cultural patterns and […] these differences are the crucial factors in our attempts to understand and communicate experience cross-culturally” (Bennett, 1993: 24).

While conceding that other approaches advocate the importance of recognising cultural similarity (Brislin, 1981), Bennett stresses that from his observation, failure to develop intercultural skills is due to the denial of cultural differences rather than a lack of appreciating likeness. With this in mind, linguists recommend several approaches to enhance ICC; one of them is to enter a new culture as an ethnographer or with an ‘emic’ perspective (Guest, 2002; Mason, 2010). This has led in recent years to the year of study abroad or language exchange programmes (Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig) facilitated among others by the European Union where individuals can live in a target country for a determined length of time and experience culture in “L2land” (Coleman, 1997), i.e. in total immersion. However, the cultural outcomes of these stays abroad divide linguists. While many recognise positive results, other researchers (Andrews, 2000; Bennett, 2008; Coleman, 1997, Truscott and Morley, 2001) draw attention to the fact that they may have the opposite effect and strengthen stereotypes: “students retain and sometimes reinforce their stereotypes of L2landers, while a minority of post-residence abroad students have more negative attitudes to L2 landers than do pre-residence abroad students” (Coleman, Ibid.: 11). This reality may be due to the individual’s failure to develop ICC; Bennett reminds us that being in contact with a target culture does not automatically bestow intercultural competence (2008: 17). But it may also be the consequence of interacting with native speakers who are not necessarily trained to teach about their own culture: “Being from another culture does not preclude ethnocentrism” (Bennett: 1993, 46). Native speakers are not necessary cultural mediators and may comfort their interlocutors in their inaccuracies (Guest, 2002). This is true in the target culture but also in an intercultural foreign language classroom in ‘L1land’. Finally, Lázár et al. warn that this may also be applied to language teachers:
The teachers are the social actors as well as instructors, but do they see themselves as cultural mediators? Although all language teachers have some intercultural experiences, are they aware of them? Although they interpret intercultural communication situations in their classes, do they take into account the development of a new identity that the learner is confronted with? Do they adopt strategies to exploit, negotiate or even provide solutions when there are tensions or misunderstandings between groups of learners?

(2007: 37)

This shows that there can be a large part of subjectivity in teaching language and culture. This is of particular concern when dealing with ICC assessment, as the next section will show.

### 1.5.2 Assessing intercultural communicative competence

The assessment of ICC is a sensitive issue (Levy and Stockwell, 2006; O’Dowd, 2010). Indeed, deciding on who is interculturally competent or what behaviour is showing intercultural skills may be biased and ethically questionable. Firstly, the absence of a single model which is unanimously referred to by all researchers challenges practitioners to identify what is to be assessed. Secondly, while a specific framework (e.g., Byram, 1997) has been identified as a reference, other interrogations remain: can ICC be assessed holistically or can only a limited amount of components (e.g., skills of discovery and interaction) be assessed at any one time (Borghetti, 2011b)? Also, if intercultural progression may be expressed internally and externally (Deardorff, 2006), how does one measure internal outcomes (Borghetti, 2011b)? To overcome these challenges, practitioners may attempt ‘measuring’ or ‘evaluating’ intercultural development as opposed to assessing intercultural development, which is a value-laden term.

The same way the definition of ICC evolved, so did the recommendations on the ways to measure it. Harrison critiqued language evaluation up to the 1990s: “One of the first consequences of looking at a language from a communicative point of view is the realisation that the context of an utterance has a vital importance in establishing its meaning. A question for testing is whether this context is necessary for the assessment of communicative skills” (1991: 97). Today, language experts seem to agree that there is not one method that can evaluate all aspects of ICC despite the plethora of assessment
tools available: more than eighty-five according to Fantini (2006). How could evaluation instruments test knowledge, skills, behaviours, attitudes and linguistic proficiency all at the same time? Corbett (2004) makes a distinction between objective assessments which test the memorisation of facts, and a subjective evaluation which he recommends. The latter measures a deeper understanding which involves “the ability to organise, synthesise and relate information” (Entwistle, 1992: 9). Educators are used to assess knowledge and skills as they are easily quantifiable. But this may be less true regarding values and attitudes which raise ethical issues of subjectivity from the examiner (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2000). Indeed, how does one determine if an individual is interculturally competent?

Firstly, when thinking about assessing intercultural communicative competence, it is important to firstly decide on a clear definition of the actual concept and secondly to think about the conceptualisation of the evaluation method(s), i.e. to determine which component(s) of ICC will be measured (Deardorff, 2009; Fantini, 2009). Fantini (2009) adds that the evaluation process must be closely linked to the learning objectives, the curriculum design, and its implementation. Using the SMART method may be a way to identify measurable objectives:

Specific (what, why, how), Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Time delineated. A key part of this statement is that the objective is realistic – it needs to fit what can realistically be accomplished with the parameters of the course or program. For example, it would not be realistic for a participant at a beginning level to speak another language fluently after only 2 or 3 weeks in another country”

(Deardorff, 2009: 482)

The recent developments in ICC evaluation are reflected in the Council of Europe publications (Lázár et al., 2007). Three criteria to measure ICC have been established: (1) knowledge/savoirs, (2) know-how/savoir-faire, and (3) being/savoir-être. The first dimension refers to the learner’s “collective memory” (Ibid.: 25) and their awareness of the socio-cultural varieties in which languages are developed and spoken. The second criterion includes the learners’ linguistic level as well as their ability to interact comfortably in an array of cultural situations, i.e. without adopting stereotypical viewpoints. The final point encompasses the “attitudes, motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles and personality linked to personal identity” (Ibid.: 26). In other words,
it is characterised by the learners’ capacity to understand, accept and interpret the
culture(s) of the other, and the ability to act as intercultural mediators in peaceful and
conflictual situations. However, it is arguable that the linguistic level is only relevant in
the second criterion. Some might view that it also permeates the other two criteria. The
three points have been introduced in order to answer new needs identified in foreign
language teaching and assessing.

There is a general agreement that ICC should be evaluated with mixed methods, namely
quantitative and qualitative (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini,
2000, Lázár et al., 2007) and allow for triangulation⁶ in order to gain a better insight of
the learners’ levels of competence (Deardorff, 2008). Deardorff’s study (2008: 46-48)
rated the top evaluation methods as: case studies, interviews, self-report instruments
such as narrative diaries, observation by others or host culture, and judgment by self and
others. Byram (1997, 2008) and Corbett (2004) also add reflective essays, role-plays,
projects and portfolios. In addition, mixed methods can also be implemented by using
direct and indirect evaluations, and holistic or analytic evaluations (Lázár et al., 2007):

We refer to ‘direct assessment’ when the student is actually doing or performing;
for example, when a small group is discussing another culture’s attitudes (savoir-être) or performing a role-play (savoir-faire) and the assessor observes with a
criteria grid, matching the performances to the most appropriate categories on the
grid. It is ‘indirect assessment’ when we use a test, usually, on paper, which often
assesses knowledge. […] Assessment can be holistic or analytic. ‘Holistic
assessment’ means making a global synthetic judgment about the learner’s
performance. ‘Analytic assessment’ requires the assessor to observe closely all
dimensions and subdimensions, or each one separately, in order to come out with
different profiles of performance or competence.

(Ibid.: 30)

Experts recommend continuous formative assessments as opposed to occasional
summative ones (Council of Europe, 2001; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2000; Lázár et al.,
2007). Due to their process nature, formative evaluations may cover “behavioural,
affective […] and cognitive domains” (Lázár et al., 2007: 30) which can hardly be
addressed with a simple grade. Formative assessments enable teachers and educators to
concentrate on determining the students’ learning development in comparison with the
learning objectives. Strong emphasis is put on the need to measure ICC on an ongoing
basis because its acquisition is a lifelong undertaking, not a direct consequence of a

---

⁶ Triangulation which is more commonly understood as cross-examination refers to the use of more than
two methods of analysis in order to obtain valid and reliable results. This concept will be further
developed in chapter 3.
unique experience, such as a short period of study in the target culture/country (Deardorff, 2006, 2009). For this reason, the use of pre and post-tests is rejected by many (Corbett, 2003; Deardorff, 2006; Kramsch, 1993) as “the results may not accurately reflect the impact of a particular intervention but may be the result of a combination of factors” (Deardorff, 2006: 252-3). Moreover, the continuous evaluation may be carried out by both the teacher and the learners. Self-assessment may develop a critical reflection which is valued by intercultural experts (Byram, 1997; Corbett, 2003; Deardorff, 2008; Furstenberg et al., 2001; Levy, 2007) as it allows for a deep understanding rather than the “unthinking adoption of […] the interaction patterns of the target culture” (Corbett, 2003: 193). Deardorff mentions that social media such as blogs and wikis (2008, 2009) can be used to facilitate the writing of reflective journals, and to “hone the necessary critical thinking skills of relating, evaluating, and synthesising (Deardorff, 2008: 45).

A large number of recommended ICC assessment methods imply the judgment of the markers as not only knowledge but also skills and attitudes need to be measured. The Council of Europe provides guidelines regarding how teachers may overcome their subjectivity (Byram et al., 2002; Lázár et al., 2007). Indeed teachers are first and foremost human beings whose background and personal experiences may influence their judgment about other cultures and communities. So how can these professionals overcome their own prejudices and stereotypes? In addition to using multiple sources of data collection methods when evaluating ICC, it is believed that teachers need not worry whether they are influencing their audience’s viewpoints but rather concentrate on stimulating their students’ “curiosity and sense of openness” (Byram et al., 2002: 29). This can be achieved by challenging their own opinions as well as their students’, or more precisely by exploring the cultural reasons which determine their beliefs. For instance, an experiment on the introduction of stereotypes could trigger this and develop the concept of ‘savoir s’engager’. This approach was used at the beginning of this study: students were encouraged to react to a document on French stereotypes (Appendix 12) and also to comment on stereotypes relating to their own culture. Finally, Deardorff (2008) suggests a list of questions to take into consideration when preparing intercultural competence assessments (Appendix 3). These include the selection of intercultural competence components to assess according to the curriculum’s objectives, the cultural biases of the examiner, and the time frame of the evaluation (punctual or
ongoing). A number of these questions have been observed for the purpose of this study, notably the issue of using the literature to define ICC (Question 1), the need to determine which components of ICC will be assessed (Question 8), and the inclusion of several methods to assess the participants’ level of ICC awareness (Question 11).

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored aspects of intercultural communicative competence and highlighted that this challenging notion continues to evolve, which is perhaps one reason why it is so difficult to define, and that it is still complex to measure its development. Recent research works conclude that ICC assessment may be ethically questionable (O’Dowd, 2010) but measurement may be attempted if it is “multi-perspective, multi-method, intentional, ongoing, and integrated” (Deardorff, 2008: 48). Many past studies have been conducted in order to identify “what kinds of activities and experiences help participants increase awareness of themselves and others as cultural beings” (Fantini, 2000). However, there is still a need to investigate how elements of social media can help in the acquisition of ICC awareness. “What role can technology play in students’ development of knowledge and skills in relating to people from different backgrounds? […] How can students work together effectively and appropriately in small groups during the course?” (Deardorff, 2009: 15). These are questions which will be dealt with in the next chapter. The thesis will proceed with the review of the evolution of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technologies and how social media may raise awareness about intercultural communicative competence.
CHAPTER 2 – Computer-assisted language learning: From the computer as tutor or tool to social environments

Although some have fretted that CALL programs might one day supplant the teacher, the staggering advances in digital technology have actually intensified the need for talented and well-trained instructors […] Far from being rendered obsolete by the computer, the teacher remains a vital and crucial element of the learning process.

(Donaldson and Haggström, 2006: viii-ix)

2.1 Introduction

As seen in Chapter 1, teaching methods have evolved at a similar pace to research in language and culture. A parallel can be drawn with this change and the introduction of new technologies. The use of ICT has become more prevalent as computers became cheaper and easier to use, and even more predominant with the arrival of the Internet. This chapter will show the evolution of computers in a foreign language teaching context, or CALL (computer-assisted language learning) context. It will show how past ideas influenced today’s technology and for some can still be used today. New media are ‘merely’ a technology or a medium, and pedagogy is still the most important factor in language teaching and learning. It is important however to study the link between technology and pedagogy.

This chapter is divided into three distinct parts which examine the second theoretical background informing this research, namely the development and impact of CALL and new media on language teaching and learning. Computer technologies have changed greatly since their first introduction as drill and practice exercises in the late 1980s to today’s interactive and social applications. The interest in their potential for language learning is immense and a review of CALL literature would inform this research project as to how computer-mediated communication may support L2 teaching and learning (Liu, 2002). Therefore, the first section proposes an informative analysis of the progression of CMC through the years from the 1970s onwards. In the CALL literature,
it is common to present technological advances in decades which influence or accompany new language pedagogical approaches (Warshauer and Healy, 1998). This division in decades or so will be followed but the focus will then be put on the current experimentation in social media-assisted language learning or SMALL (Stevens et al., 2010) research area. The second part describes CALL characteristics which are critical to delivering qualitative language teaching and learning, and foster ICC awareness, such as deep learning and the creation of Communities of Practice. The second part of Chapter 2 also examines how students and teachers must adapt their roles to learner-centred pedagogy which gives learners the opportunity to “take charge of their own learning” (Holec, 1981: 3). For this purpose, learner motivation and autonomy in the context of foreign language and culture learning will be analysed consecutively. These two secondary issues raised in this research thesis are closely linked to SMALL as Internet technologies implemented in the foreign language classroom are generally used with a learner-centred approach. Finally, this chapter will scrutinize three authoring tools which will be used in this research study, that is to say discussion forums, blogs and wikis. The limitations and features making these tools attractive and relevant to L2 teaching with these tools will be outlined.

2.2 Computer technologies in the language classroom: From CALL to SMALL

Since the invention of the computer in the 1960s, interest and research studies in computer use for education has grown steadily. Different terms have been associated with the use of computer in foreign language teaching and learning: “telecollaboration” (Belz, 2003, 2005; Kern, 1996; O'Dowd and Ritter, 2006), “computer-mediated-communication” or CMC (Belz, 2005; Levy and Stockwell, 2006; Lomicka, 2006), "computer applications in second language acquisition or CASLA (Chapelle, 2001), “computer-mediated human communication” or CMHC (Tella, 1996), “computer assisted language learning” or CALL (Bax, 2003, Blin, 2004, Chappelle, 1998), “computer-assisted instruction” or CAI (Dunkel, 1991, Levy, 1997) and more recently “Web 2.0 tools” and “social media” (Anderson, 2007; Lee, 2009; Surowiecki, 2004). In fact, appellations were adjusted along with the progress of technology (Levy, 1997) and the change in teaching pedagogy focus (Warschauer and Healy, 1998). Levy concisely
describes CALL as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (1997: 1). More specifically, CALL refers to “communication between humans that is mediated by computer technology. It covers a wide range of synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (delayed) forms of mediated communication, and includes e-mail, chat, text-based conferencing and videoconferencing, discussion lists, and mobile technologies.” (Levy and Stockwell, 2006: 24-5). Today, SMALL tools such as wiki, blog, and podcasting can be added to update this list (Lee, 2009). Belz specifies that Internet tools also facilitate intercultural exchanges: “[Telecollaboration] involves the use of Internet communication tools […] in order to support prolonged intercultural exchanges between groups of students in various institutional settings who might otherwise not have the opportunity to interact” (2005: 4).

Technological developments have greatly influenced the pedagogical use of CALL. CALL designs have evolved from a computer as tutor to a computer as a tool, to social media. In the beginning, the computer was sometimes used as a substitute to teachers and played a tutor role or ‘agent role’ (Cole and Griffin, 1987); the technology enabled language learning through human-computer interactions (Levy and Stockwell, 2006). With CALL tutors, learners complete exercises (e.g., reading and listening comprehensions, multiple-choice quizzes) and their answers are provided with simple (e.g., right or wrong) feedback. Further down the line, CALL tutors became more sophisticated, and gave feedback tailored to the level of learners. For example, in the use of grammar exercises, instead of giving an identical standard feedback to all learners, CALL tutors analyse previous answers entered by learners, and generate individualised comments (Toole and Heift, 2002). These intelligent CALL tutors are referred to as “intelligent language tutoring systems” (ILTS) or “intelligent computer-assisted language learning” (ICALL) programs” (Levy and Stockwell, 2006: 23). CALL tutors are still in use today as they offer teachers the possibility to create simple exercises relatively quickly. However, CALL tutors are limited to vocabulary and grammar issues, and are not of significant usefulness for the development of ICC. Change came when CALL applications were considered as a medium for interaction. Rapidly, the computer was designed not to replace the human teacher, but to assist the work of the human teacher; the technology enabled language learning through human-to-human interaction via computer (Levy and Stockwell, 2006) which was expressed
through the term computer-mediated communication (CMC). With CALL, language teaching and learning enters a different dimension which is associated with the advent of Internet communication tools. CALL tools include communication technology (e.g., e-mail), language databases (e.g., online dictionary) as well as CMC tools (e.g., chat, discussion forum). Finally, CALL has progressed rapidly from “first generation tools […] to the so-called Web 2.0 generation vehicles” (Lee, 2009: 425). Social media such as blogs, wikis and social networking sites (Anderson, 2007) are taking a more predominant role in foreign language teaching and learning, and provide a space for the development of ICC. This chapter will describe them in more details.

The next four sections will present research in the area of CALL and more specifically the teaching of culture, and ICC. These sections will show the development of CALL from grammar focused methods to approaches developing interculturality approximately every ten years since the 1960-1970s, even though this approach has proven to be controversial (Bax, 2003) for the pedagogical focuses do not always exactly coincide to decade-defined historical periods. The four stages - entitled (1) Behaviouristic CALL (2) Communicative CALL (3) Integrative CALL and (4) Web 2.0 and social media - are largely inspired by publications in the field (Bax, 2003; Warshauer and Healy, 1998). These authors explain that this chronological breakdown provides a fair representation of the change in teaching methods and the parallel evolution of technology despite the fact that the stages “do not fall into neatly contained timelines. As each new stage has emerged, previous stages continue. Current uses of computers in the language classroom correspond to all of the paradigms mentioned” (Ibid.: 58). Examples are taken from the USA, Australia, or set in the European context as CALL applications predominantly come from developed countries where the use of computers is widespread.
2.2.1 1960s-1970s: Behaviouristic CALL

CALL applications in the 1960s and 1970s were informed by the behaviouristic learning pedagogy which consists of drill-and-practice exercises concentrating on vocabulary and grammar. This model corresponds to the CALL tutor period, described in Section 2.2 where the computer is considered as tutor and provides feedback at the learners’ pace. This period is illustrated by the well-known PLATO tutorial system, namely the ‘Programmed logic for automatic teaching operations’ project created in 1960 in the University of Illinois. PLATO “featured extensive drills, grammatical explanations, and translations tests at various intervals (Warshauer and Healy, 1998: 57). PLATO was a breakthrough in CALL but was limited in the sense that it did not fulfil language learners’ essential needs, such as oral production. It was designed more for grammatical and lexical purposes. Another major system featured in the 1960s-70s: the TICCIT project, namely ‘Time-shared, interactive, computer controlled information television’, which also originates from an American university (Brigham Young University, Utah). TICCIT is thought to be the first computer system to integrate text, audio, and video multimedia. In the early years of CALL, authoring computer programs were difficult to use and required punctilious precisions from developers for them to work smoothly. For instance, a missed punctuation mark could jeopardise the desired running of the program (Levy, 1997: 69). This being said, PLATO and TICCIT were ahead of their time by integrating multimedia. Following some changes and adaptation to comply with the ensuing technological developments, they both continued to be used for the next decades.

2.2.2 1980s: Communicative CALL

The advent of the communicative teaching methods of the 1980s was accompanied by the emergence of the microcomputer. The first research journals specialising in CALL issues emerged at that time; this was the case for instance of CALICO which was launched in 1983 (Levy, 1997) or Computers in the Schools (1984). Communicative CALL rejected behaviouristic approaches which overly focused on explicit grammar teaching, and favoured communicative competence as a priority as well as the
development of the four language skills “that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication” (Richards and Rodgers, 1986: 66). During this period, authoring systems including text-reconstruction programs (e.g., Storyboard, Masker, Textbag) and cultural awareness gradually paved their way into foreign language learning curricula. As explained in Section 1.3.1 the concept of sociocultural competence came to the fore in the 1980s.

Three projects exemplify this keen interest in (inter)cultural issues: the Athena Language Learning Project (Morgenstern, 1986; Murray et al., 1989) which emerged in the USA, the CAMILLE Project (Ingraham, 1993) which grouped partners from various European countries, and the use of Minitel (Debyser, 1989) which was tried in France, Italy and Portugal. The Athena Language Learning Project (ALLP) originates from a collaboration between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), IBM, and Digital Equipment Corporation (Morgenstern, 1986). The eight-year project started in 1983 and aimed at creating multimedia rich learning prototypes for learners of French, German, Spanish, Russian, English as a second language, and Japanese (Levy, 1997; Morgenstern, 1986). The principles of the ALLP described by the contributors adopt van Ek’s (1986) view that communicative competence in L2 learning includes both awareness of the sociocultural context of the target language, and the aptitude to approach a situation with appropriate cultural and social manners:

> Language is seen as a negotiable system of meanings, expressed and interpreted via the social interaction of reader and text, or between speakers in a culturally coded situation rather than as a closed system of formal lexical and grammatical rule. Accordingly the aim of the materials being developed is not so much a mastery of the grammatical and syntactic code as the ability to use this code to perform certain actions. (Murray et al., 1989: 98)

ALLP assumes that the computer is a tool rather than a tutor, even though learners do not interact with human beings as such. It is understood and accepted that “there can be no better ‘communicative’ learning environment than the warm and responsive presence of other human beings” (Underwood, 1984: 80) but the Athena Language Learning Project offers language learners “the next best thing”, in other words “computer-assisted instruction that is more ‘human’ than what is currently available” (Morgenstern, 1986: 740). With the ALLP programs, learners are interacting with “characters” rather than with a machine (Ibid.). These ‘real-life’ characters are accessible through videos of
actual people via ‘language-learning through interactive, communication-based software’ (LINCS). Learners are immersed in real-life situations such as making enquiries at the travel agency or doing a job interview (Spanish prototype) or searching for an apartment (French prototype). In addition, learners are provided with authentic materials such as maps, advertisements, on-location photos, newspapers ads, and schedules. To summarise, ALLP programs were created with the idea that L2 learning is developed through interaction, and they are a combination of “authentic materials with simulation in hopes of achieving a high degree of cultural awareness” (Ibid.). Also, the ALLP programs are not designed to replace the human teacher, but to be used in conjunction with traditional classroom activities.

The ‘Computer-assisted multimedia interactive language learning environment’ project better known as CAMILLE project⁷ was created in the early 1990s, but belongs to the communicative CALL era. Similarly to ALLP, CAMILLE supports the acquisition of foreign languages (Dutch, Spanish, French and English) and cultures with a communicative approach in an interactive multimedia environment (Ingraham, 1993: 43). The homepage of the learning environment resembles a textbook in which users can navigate through the different activities at their disposition. A number of tools are provided to assist the learners: a textbook of learning activities, a grammatical aid, a dictionary with recordings of a native speaker pronouncing the words, audio and video files, and a book on the L2 culture (Ibid.: 49). The exercises include drills, quizzes (behaviouristic CALL), and role-play (communicative CALL). ALLP and CAMILLE projects were cutting-edge in the 1990s and had the merit to put the learner in an active role, but with today’s hindsight, some pitfalls can be identified. Despite the effort to gather ‘authentic’ documents (maps, newspapers ads, etc.) and make learners experience ‘real-life’ situations with ‘real-life’ characters, the learning contexts and characters were not authentic. They were fabricated and simulated. This approach may have been beneficial on the linguistic level, but it had shortcomings on the (inter)cultural level.

The use of Minitel was different. The Minitel projects described by Debyser (1989) are unequivocal about their intention to experiment and develop intercultural exchanges

⁷ http://camilleweb.upv.es/camille/
between actual human foreign language learners. The Minitel is often considered as the ancestor of the Internet. Initiated in France in 1982, the Minitel is an online service made accessible through telephone lines provided by Poste, Téléphone et Télécommunications (PTT), the French postal and phone services, which resembles a microcomputer. From the beginning of its existence, the Minitel enabled its users to make purchases online (such as train bookings), search the phone book, and text chat virtually. Interesting intercultural projects took place between French schools and a number of international schools through the medium of Minitel in the second half of the 1980s (Ibid.). The first international connection of this kind occurred in March 1986 via “salons” (Ibid.: 18) or “lounges” which can be compared to today’s chat rooms. Students between 15 and 17 years of age from Sèvres (France) communicated with students from Naples (Italy), and Lisbon (Portugal) in order to collaboratively write a fictitious tale. The Franco-Italian work was later published (Les Carnets de voyage de Fortunat). Throughout the process of their work, learners were confronted with the intercultural dimension of L2 learning. Indeed, they read authentic L2 messages written by native speakers, discussed cultural aspects of their respective countries and compared them with the L2 cultural issues, and even developed a new written lexicon which can be compared to today’s short text messages (e.g., “BCP” for “beaucoup”, “TT” for “tout” or “KI TU ES?” for “Qui es-tu?”). These projects also underline how relatively easy it was to make learners from different geographical locations work together with interactive media. Despite their technical limitations (e.g., absence of accents in text) these early chat projects in the history of CALL highlight important issues in the use of new media which will be developed further in Section 2.3.2: the need to set tasks, the teacher and student roles, participant motivation, the rapid familiarisation with new media, the rapid linguistic improvement, and the creation of friendliness between participants in non-threatening environment (Ibid.: 23). The use of Minitel was ahead of its time and innovative. It gives an insight of what the next CALL decade will look like: as opposed to ALLP and CAMILLE, it enabled genuine authentic intercultural exchanges between L2 learners. For this reason, it might be argued that it very much belongs to the following phase: the integrative CALL period. However, its use was (1) isolated as it only concerned a minimal number of classes in three European countries, (2) unrepeated as the project was carried out only once, and (3) restrictive (chat room only). Language learners and teachers will have to wait for the Internet revolution of the
1990s to engage in widespread, recurrent and authentic intercultural interactions made possible by CALL applications supporting several media.

### 2.2.3 1990s: Integrative CALL

As much as behaviouristic CALL came under criticism in the 1980s, communicative CALL started to be condemned in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Tella, 1996). Educationists and researchers favoured a move from artificial communicative learning situations which were branded in-authentic, such as those offered by the ALLP and CAMILLE projects, to actual authentic and social learning contexts. Educationists and researchers also expressed the need to better integrate technology: “In integrative approaches, students learn to use a variety of technological tools as an ongoing process of language learning and use, rather than visiting the computer lab on a once a week basis for isolated exercises” (Warshauer and Healy, 1998: 58). The shift in pedagogical perspectives coincides with a new revolution in computer science. Indeed, the 1990s are undoubtedly characterised by the democratisation of microcomputers and the Internet revolution which contributed to the new views on foreign language teaching and learning. Without CALL and the Internet, intercultural exchanges would be “considerably less practical and cost-effective” (Kinginger et al., 1999: 853). The new generation of microcomputers made the launching of expensive purpose-built systems such as TICCIT and ALLP redundant; when used with the appropriate software, modern and more affordable personal computers (PC) could read any type of multimedia (Levy, 1997). Internet connections were still expensive for schools and universities but computer-assisted language learning applications were much more accessible. In addition, the restrictive and pedantic programming of authoring CALL programs of the 1970s and early 1980s had been replaced by user-friendly applications which reconciled teachers with computers: “technology should be adapted to our needs, not the reverse” (Ibid.: 69). A new wave of virtual learning environments (VLEs) provide access to a variety of Internet technologies such as blogs and discussion forums in a safe (password protected) environment for education purposes: Sulis, Moodle, Blackboard, and WebCT. Moreover, CALL applications mainly supported learner-to-learner interaction as opposed to learner-computer interaction. Herring defines CMC as “communication that
takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers” (1996: 1). As Tella (1996: 6) points out CMHC and CALL share many characteristics:

The same kind of equipment can be used; the sender and recipient need not and will not necessarily meet or see each other as most communication is taken care of through electronic communication. Learning experiences can resemble each other to some extent as interaction with co-learners contributes to creating a fruitful learning environment. Independent (self-directed) or autonomous work is equally possible. In computer-mediated communication teachers tend to become consultants or co-learners.

The Internet revolution opens L2 learners and teachers to the entire world. More specifically, it provides instant access to multimedia and native speakers, and links users to live and constantly updated contemporary cultural information (Dubreil, 2006). This dynamic network of multimedia epitomises integrative CALL:

The multimedia networked computer – with a range of informal, communicative, and publishing tools now potentially at the fingertips of every student - provides not only the possibilities for much more integrated uses of technology, but also the imperative for such use, as learning to read, write, and communicate via computer has become an essential feature of modern life in the developed world

(Warshauer and Healy, 1998: 58)

In the integrative CALL period, language teachers and researchers increasingly made use of Internet tools that were not primarily designed for foreign language teaching and learning. The use of MUDs, MOOs, and e-mailing are good illustrations of this trend. MUD is short for “multi-user dungeon”; it is an online game inspired by “Dungeons and Dragons” in which players are the heroes. It has been used for the purpose of language learning notably for its conferencing option (Levy, 1997). MOO which stands for “MUD object oriented” is a more sophisticated “social world” or “virtual environment in which participants can meet together and interact” (Svensson, 2003: 125). MOO platforms provide access to mainly synchronous tools like conferencing, and chat room, but e-mail (MOOmail) has also been used; they also support sounds, graphics, and hyperlinks to web pages (Levy and Stockwell, 2006). MOOS are particularly attractive for the teaching of ICC for they give access to authentic communication in the target language, promote self-directed learning, and support the learner’s initiative - the learner is the hero (Von der Emde et al., 2001). MOOs for the teaching and learning of languages and intercultural exchanges include: SchMOOZE (English), Le MOO
The International E-mail Tandem Network or eTandem was launched in 1993 by Helmut Brammerts (Brammerts, 1996; Levy, 1997). As its name conveys, eTandem consists of the “organized learning exchanges between two language learners who both want to improve their proficiency” via e-mail (Levy and Stockwell, 2006: 25). This project is a modern development organised by educational institutions of the already existing tandem exchanges during which two individuals meet face-to-face to learn each others’ mother tongue (Schwienhorst, 1998). The International E-mail Tandem Network grasped the advantages of the widespread (worldwide) e-mail technology which enables users to share written content as well as attached multimedia file (photo, audio, and video). The concept of eTandem is twofold, according to Schwienhorst (Ibid.) and Levy and Stockwell (2006) who identify the two principles of ‘reciprocity’ and ‘autonomy’. The first describes the balanced commitment of both learners to the exchanges, but also the use in equal measure of both languages which can be attained if learners write half of their e-mail in their L1 and the other half in their L2. The second describes the learners taking responsibility for their own learning and agreeing on each other’s role in the exchanges.

Despite the rise in using Internet tools for language teaching and learning for its ease of use and cost-effectiveness, grand projects designed specifically for (inter)cultural development such as the Cultura project (Furstenberg et al., 2001) were still carried out. The Cultural project is a major contribution to the development of intercultural communicative competence. It was conducted between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the Institut National des Télécommunications (INT) during the spring and autumn Semesters of 1999. The principle was to analyse the process through which the students of both institutions went to compare their respective cultures and see the world in a different perspective. A blended learning approach was adopted, that is a combination of activities online and on a face-to-face basis, usually in class. At the beginning of the project, students of both institutions filled in a series of Web-based questionnaires; the aim was to discover cultural differences and similarities of each culture. After completing the questionnaires, the participants analysed in their own time at home the results of the questionnaire or discussed them in class with their respective
teachers. Further reflection and discussion were then carried out via online forum exchanges with students from both institutions, and finally in the classroom. The International E-mail Tandem Network (http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/) and the Cultura project (http://cultura.mit.edu/) are still widely used today, as the resources are freely available for learners owning a computer and an Internet connection. The research project of this thesis was inspired by the Cultura project and reproduces the pattern of reflection and online discussion. Nonetheless, this study’s context differs as social media and student mobility (e.g., Erasmus programme) are now pervasive, and it aims at giving an intercultural basis to university newcomers.

2.2.4 The noughties: Web 2.0 and social media

The first decade of the twenty-first century commonly known as ‘the noughties’ continues the Internet revolution. With the speed of the Internet increasing and the price of connection decreasing, the Internet has become an integral part of everyday life (Anderson, 2007). The Internet has entered a new generation, and is now called “Web 2.0”, an expression believed to have been invented in 2004 by Dale Dougherty, vice-president of O’Reilly Media Inc., when considering the title of a Web-related conference (Anderson, 2007: 195-6). The new World Wide Web is driven by two concepts: the “read/write web” dimension (Richardson, 2006: 1), and the “collective intelligence of the crowd” (O’Reilly, 2005: 2). Firstly, the content of Web 2.0 is generated by the general public. During the previous Web 1.0 era, lay Internet users could not contribute as easily to the Net; non-specialist users often merely read and downloaded content. Now, billions of individual Internet users can “add to and edit the information space” (Anderson, 2007: 195-6) by producing, uploading and sharing text, photos, audio and video podcasts. McLoughlin and Lee (2007: 664) call this phenomenon the “two-way Web […] information age”. Secondly, Web 2.0 is powered by the idea of collective intelligence, the “wisdom of the crowds” (Surowiecki, 2004) or the “the wisdom of the masses” (Wheeler et al., 2008: 989). In brief, when working and sharing ideas collaboratively, “communities can be significantly more productive than

8 For instance, in June 2013, an average of 300 million photos are uploaded on facebook every day [http://techcrunch.com/2013/01/17/facebook-photos-record/] and 100 hours of videos are uploaded to YouTube every minute [http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html].

58
individuals working in isolation” (McLoughlin and Lee, 2007: 666-7). The content of Web 2.0 is the result of a social experience made possible by a wide number of tools supporting interaction between users:

> It is arguable that the Internet has always comprised a network of individuals connected through social technologies like e-mail, chat rooms and discussion boards (now referred to as the “1.0” technologies). Current social software tools not only support social interaction, feedback, conversation and networking but are also endowed with a flexibility and modularity that enables *collaborative remixability* – a transformative process in which the information and media organised and shared by individuals can be recombined and built to create new forms, concepts, ideas, mashups and services. (Ibid., 2007: 665)

The social dimension of Web 2.0 is well illustrated by the creation of new online services in a short time spell (Table 2.1). Accordingly, as Lee points out (2009), CALL has also rapidly evolved from first generation Internet tools (e-mail, chat, discussion forum) to the Web 2.0 generation applications (wiki, blog, podcasting). The second generation of Internet services are technologies which foster the building of communities where users may come together to “collaborate, learn and build knowledge” (McLoughlin and Lee, 2007: 664). Indeed, with these technologies, users are actively involved in their learning process rather than being passive consumers of knowledge, and they belong to a networked community (Ibid.: 668). Like earlier CALL, this learning practice is associated with constructivism or socio-cultural theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) – concepts which will be further discussed in Section 2.3.

Recent research on the development of ICC with Web 2.0 technology include Elola and Oskoz’s (2008) analysis of blog use and Guth and Marini-Maio’s (2010) case study of third-level students interacting via Skype and a wiki. Elola and Oskoz investigated the ICC development of two groups of American students learning Spanish over one semester. One group was composed of learners on a study abroad programme in a Spanish institution while the other students were studying in their home university. At the beginning of the semester, both groups attended workshops where they discussed and reflected upon cultural aspects of Spain that they would encounter during their stay or programme of study, and were communicating through blogs in order to share their (inter)cultural learning for the remainder of the semester. Students based in Spain wrote their first-hand daily experiences, and students in America used the blog to broaden
their knowledge acquired in class (2008: 461). Elola and Oskoz (2008) analysed the students’ ICC progression by applying Byram’s (2000) assessment guidelines and concluded that both groups benefited to some extent from the blog exchanges. For the purpose of this doctoral study, students were also asked to keep a record of their intercultural encounters in a blog.

Table 2.1 – Web 2.0 services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mature social software applications</th>
<th>Media-sharing services</th>
<th>Social networking services</th>
<th>Social bookmarking</th>
<th>Open social virtualities</th>
<th>Massively multiplayer online games</th>
<th>Synthetic immersive environments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instagram (2010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guth and Marini-Maio (2010) observed and assessed the progress of university students of English based in Italy and American students of Italian. The objectives of the course were to put under scrutiny the impact weekly synchronous conversations on Skype had on the learners’ L2 communication skills and ICC. A wiki was also used to facilitate the organisation of the conversations. Feedback from the participants shows that this experience was successful: they felt that their language skills improved (listening, conversation, writing skills) and that they learnt about their interlocutors’ culture (Ibid.: 421-2).

Web 2.0 social tools are also used to modernise integrative CALL applications, as it is the case with the International E-mail Tandem Network. E-Tandem learners can now make use of tools like Skype which combine audio, video calls and chat room, to

---

9 Categories inspired by Anderson (2007: 195-6) and Sykes et al. (2008: 528, 534). The list of Web 2.0 services is a non-exhaustive list for demonstration only.
replace or use besides e-mailing. In addition to social networks, other Internet-based resources continue to inspire educationists and researchers in the noughties: open social virtualities such as Second Life, modern online gaming (following the example of MOOs) referred to as massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) such as World of Warcraft, and also synthetic immersive environments (SIEs) such as Croquelandia (Sykes et al., 2008; Thorne, 2008). For instance, Second Life\textsuperscript{10} (created in 2003) was originally designed as a three-dimensional environment where players are residents of a world they bring to life, in which they can socialise, create businesses, or explore not unlike they do in real life. Research projects are in progress to investigate the use of Second Life for development of ICC (Dell’Aria and Nocchi, 2010; Nocchi, unpublished, Panichi et al., 2010). Furthermore, recent research projects show that these modern interactional online spaces are beneficial for learning, and especially “for achieving communicative and intercultural competence” (Sykes et al., 2008: 534). This is possible because users are faced with situations where they have to adapt or question their communicative skills and social codes:

\begin{quote}
Mediated experiences in different online social and gaming worlds allow users to experiment and interact with a wide variety of norms of communication and social interaction (Ibid.)
\end{quote}

Thorne (2008) who studied the learning opportunities provided by War of Warcraft (WoW) for L2 learners comes to the same conclusion:

\begin{quote}
MMOGs are deeply educational in the sense that gamers must learn to negotiate complex scenarios, be socialized into culturally-specific discursive formations, and be capable of negotiating play in real-time with game-driven characters as well as other co-present gamers.

(Thorne, 2008: 317)
\end{quote}

In his study, Thorne observed several instances where gamers adopted an intercultural stance in order to successfully interact with other gamers. (2008).

If it is difficult to predict what will characterise the next decade in terms of CALL advances; one would expect that one day, Internet technologies will come second after pedagogy and learners’ needs, that is to say technology will be taken for granted. Bax

\textsuperscript{10} http://secondlife.com/
labels this stage as ‘normalisation’, namely a stage where “the technology becomes invisible, [is] embedded in everyday practice and hence normalised” (Bax, 2003: 23). Indeed, there is no reference to pen-assisted or book-assisted language learning. In the meantime, it is felt that more research projects involving Web 2.0 technologies are needed, as ‘telecollaboration 2.0’ is still in its infancy (Guth and Marini-Maio, 2010).

### 2.3 CALL and SMALL characteristics

With the advent of numerous technological tools provided by Web 2.0, the way we communicate has changed dramatically. These changes have led to the integration of online educational environments (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008) and today’s educators are faced with new challenges. In addition to their search for introducing ICC in their teaching, they are encouraged to adapt their methods and avail of these new digital technologies: “It has never been more imperative for educators to understand how to adapt new technologies and software into real teaching contexts” (Wheeler et al., 2008: 987). Moreover, the benefits of technology are increasingly acknowledged (Weigel, 2002), and the use of online teaching is strongly recommended by the Council of Europe:

> Instead of perceiving learners as dependent on teachers, they can and should be offered opportunities to determine and organise their own learning, whatever their age; this involves the introduction into the learning programme of an initiation into learning to learn and the offer of learning opportunities by means which allow them open access (distance learning, on-line learning, learning centres).

(Council of Europe, 2007: 43)

Chappelle adds that today the question is no longer if computer-assisted language learning (CALL) should be introduced in teaching practices but rather how it can be best integrated (2003). Chappelle also makes the point that technology is such a pervasive aspect of learners’ everyday lives and future use of the language they are learning that it should be an integral part of language learning: “Anyone concerned with second language teaching and learning in the twenty-first century needs to grasp the nature of the unique technology-mediated tasks learners engage in for language acquisition” (2001: 2). With this in mind, the following section will highlight how CALL may foster critical thinking and deep learning in an online Community of
Practice, and what roles teacher and students may take. Indeed, CALL enables learners to move from a teacher-centred classroom to a learner-centred classroom, thus modifying the traditional class dynamics (Dubreil, 2006). Learner motivation and autonomy will also be examined in order to identify how new media can be better introduced to students and improve their learning experience.

2.3.1 Critical thinking and constructivism

It is now accepted that encouraging student reflection is crucial in acquiring ICC (Wickersham and Dooley, 2006; Dubreil, 2006: 250). Critical thinking, also called deep learning can be fostered by CALL technologies, as they “are very good at storing, manipulating and retrieving large amounts of information, making them particularly useful in the area of ‘data-driven learning’” (Warschauer and Healy, 1998: 61). CALL applications also foster student-centred pedagogy, collaboration and social interaction which are concepts believed to be paramount in knowledge construction and cultural development (Council of Europe, 2007; Levy, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978).

‘High-order learning’ (Butcher and Taylor, 2008; Garrison and Anderson, 2003) or ‘deep learning’ (Weigel, 2002) though not new in the literature is coming to the fore in today’s teaching methods, especially the education approaches involving the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). Deep learning refers to an educational model which aims at enhancing the students’ learning experiences and developing them into more competent learners. Referring to Entwistle’s work on learning styles in Higher Education (Entwistle, 2001), Weigel (2002: 6) identifies several deep learners’ characteristics. To begin with, deep learners link new concepts with their prior knowledge and experience as opposed to considering them separately. As well as this, they look for patterns and related ideas. They exclude rote learning (memorisation by repetition) and prefer to develop a personal understanding of new content through data examination (Beatty, 2003). They also address logic and argumentation with a critical stance. Finally, while surface learners fail to reflect on their learning, deep learners are fully aware of the progression of their understanding and show evident interest in their programme of study. In other words, deep learners engage in may be the ideal approach to learning. Section 5.4.4 and Section 6.2.3 will
investigate if participants of this study availed of the deep learning approach to enhance their awareness of ICC.

The deep education model draws on constructivist concepts which focus on active learning in a social context. Constructivist theories claim that knowledge is something that we construct actively, that is through experience, in order to make sense of the world surrounding us. Namely, what we experience shapes our minds, and our knowledge is likely to change with time. According to constructivist theories, learning is motivated by the pursuit of knowledge, and is based on “knowledge constructions” which “refer to ways of perceiving and thinking that make the world meaningful to us. Our knowledge of the world is based entirely on these knowledge constructions” (Weigel, 2002: 3). Also, as personal experiences differ from one individual to another, so do the knowledge constructions. The process of learning is twofold, according to Piaget who identifies the two phases of ‘assimilation’ and ‘acquisition’. The first describes the construction of new knowledge from prior knowledge, and the second describes how we modify our understanding of a concept as a consequence of the acquisition of new information (Weigel, 2002). Vygotsky claims that knowledge construction occurs in a social context through “collaboration with more able peers” (1978: 86). This is part of what he calls the zone of proximal development. In other words, collaborative reflection and discussion greatly enhances our aptitude to resolve problems; what individuals cannot do or understand on their own, they can by working in collaboration with more experienced persons (Ibid.: 86). Taking an example from a child’s progression, Vygotsky adds that cultural development is also the result of social interaction:

Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals.

(Ibid.: 57)

Bakhtin (1986) validates Vygotsky’s theories, and adds that written pieces as well as oral speeches are constructed on the same collaborative principle. Researchers refer to this as “the text-mediational interpretation” (Warschauer, 1997: 471) of Vygotsky’s
theories. Wells and Chang-Wells (1992) explain that within an online collaborative community, learners can develop their thoughts through reading and writing:

[…] by making a record of text of thought available for reflection, and, if necessary, revision, a written text serves as a ‘cognitive amplifier’ […] , allowing the reader or writer to bootstrap his or own thinking in a more powerful manner than is normally possible in speech.

In an academic language and culture learning context, the social interactions are exchanged between learners and teachers where collaborative reflection and discussion develop learners’ aptitude to resolve problems.

Deep learning can be defined as “learning that promotes the development of conditionalized knowledge and metacognition through communities of inquiry” (Weigel, 2002: 5). Indeed, the deep education model is composed of three components: (1) ‘conditionalized knowledge’ (2) ‘metacognition’ (3) ‘communities of inquiry’. The first element describes the relevance of ideas and methods in their domain. This implies that the deep educational model enables students to apply their knowledge to various contexts, and therefore to make out a rationale for their use. Problem-based learning (PBL) is considered as a major contributor to ‘conditionalized knowledge’ development as it challenges students to learn actively by solving problems collaboratively under the supervision of their teacher. For instance, participants of this doctoral research project were asked to work collaboratively, notably in defining French culture with a wiki tool.

The second component, ‘metacognition’, relates to the students’ aptitude to reflect on their own learning experience and develop their autonomy as learners: “the development of critical thinking skills and the ability to articulate and reflect on ideas are foundational to the art of thinking” (Weigel, 2002: 7). Moreover, students availing of metacognition are thought to be more competent in transferring learning skills acquired in one area of expertise into another.

The third component of the deep education model is ‘communities of inquiry’. They are also referred to as ‘Communities of Practice’ (Wenger, 2009; Wenger et al., 2002) and ‘learning communities’. A detailed account of Communities of Practice will be presented in Section 2.3.2.
Cognitive apprenticeship methodologies cater for deep learning. Researchers (Brown et al., 1989; Murray and Hourigan, 2006) argue that the manner in which we build knowledge can be compared to the way a craftsman learns to use a tool, that is learning by watching and doing, hence the name of the model. They also point out the importance of the cultural dimension when we learn: “it is not possible to use a tool appropriately without understanding the community or the culture in which it is used” (Brown et al., 1989: 33). The teacher/master models the student/apprentice’s behaviour in various contexts. This being said, it is imperative to note that cognitive apprenticeship varies from traditional apprenticeship in three ways. To start with, cognitive apprenticeship concentrates on the development of intellectual skills whereas traditional apprenticeship concerns a trade or physical skill. Secondly, it allows learners to apply their newly acquired knowledge in different situations as opposed to one dedicated working environment. Although this idea is debatable as one could argue that artisans are also able to transfer their knowledge into other contexts. Thirdly, cognitive apprenticeship is free of workplace demands and is assimilated to a higher educational programme.

There are six recognised methods in cognitive apprenticeship which are compatible with e-learning methods: ‘modelling’, ‘coaching’, ‘scaffolding’, ‘articulating’, ‘reflecting’, and ‘exploring’. They all present features where the teacher supports the learners all the way through their knowledge construction. With ‘modelling’ teachers make cognitive progression explicit step by step, and students observe. They show students the thinking process so that they can discern patterns and develop their own problem-solving strategies. Teachers can also make the students more active by ‘coaching’ them. This strategy puts the learners in the position of performers. They are asked to complete a task or use a skill while the teacher observes the exercise, asks questions and provides feedback on the students’ performance. With the third method, the teacher, as well as the students, takes part in knowledge construction. This can be done with the teacher assisting an individual experiencing difficulty performing a task alone, with the members of a Community of Practice who help the same individual or with both the teacher and the members. In addition, deep learning can be achieved with students articulating their cognitive reaction and problem-solving strategies. By doing this, students make implied knowledge explicit. The process of articulation is also
recognised as enabling students to use their problem-solving methods in other situations. As part of this study, students could use the blog as a reflective diary, and articulate their learning process in writing, thus enabling the teacher to provide supportive feedback. The penultimate method relies on the students reporting on their work by comparing their notes or performance in the area of problem-solving with those of other students. This method puts the students’ analysis at the centre of the course. The last method of cognitive apprenticeship is stimulating the students’ curiosity. Students are encouraged by their teacher to develop their knowledge by discovering new domains. The teacher guides the students by helping them to set realistic objectives, to make assumptions and test them. As shown, the different methods of cognitive apprenticeship encourage reflection, critical thinking, and collaboration which echo the components of deep learning.

2.3.2 Pedagogy 2.0 and Communities of Practice

The depth education model and constructivist theories are still very relevant today. With the Internet revolution, the terminology may have changed slightly, but the underpinning ideas remain the same. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, McLoughlin and Lee introduced the notion of “pedagogy 2.0” (2007: 668-71) which combines the concept of collaborative construction of knowledge and the social nature of Web 2.0 tools. According to them, the World Wide Web is a place connecting dynamic minds and communities of learning which stimulates individual and collaborative initiative. In other words, pedagogy 2.0 shows how modern Internet technologies can support Vygotsky’s theories:

[…] the conventional principles of social constructivist learning […] tell us that effective learning is conversational in nature, and that it necessitates a social dimension, including communication, dialogue and shared activity. The benefits of making connections to others and communicating through instant messaging and social networking, for instance, can provide an impetus for inquiry-based approaches and collaboration.

(McLoughlin and Lee, 2007: 671)

Researchers agree that ‘Communities of Practice’ (Garrison et al., 2000), ‘communities of inquiry’ (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008), ‘electronic learning communities’ or ‘networked discourse communities’ (Dubreil, 2006: 249) may be a suitable fit for the teaching of intercultural communicative competence in a foreign language learning
context drawing on Vygotsky’s constructivist theories (Warschauer and Kern, 2000; McLoughlin and Lee, 2007). Indeed, these virtual communities “construct a culturally authentic context in which language and culture learning can take place” (Dubreil, 2006: 248). Several CALL projects such as the Cultura project (Furstenberg et al., 2001) are designed like a Community of Practice; participants are authoring the content of their learning, as they create their own understanding of the target culture (Dubreil, 2006). Communities of Practice are “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2009). They are not specific to education and can also be found in organisations, governmental bodies, associations, the social sector, and on the Web (Ibid.). They can vary in size (number of members), in geography (local or global), in interaction (face-to-face and/or online), and in formality (formal or informal). Communities of Practice comprise a domain in which the group members share an interest; this makes a distinction between the members and other persons. In addition, CoPs are characterised by collective learning which is made possible via relationship building (the community), and active interaction (the practice). Examples of activities developed by the practitioners of a Community of Practice are: problem solving, information requests, experience seeking, and coordination and synergy.

In an educational context, Communities of Practice can be formed with Internet social media or VLEs such as Blackboard, Moodle or Sakai. They are key factors in deep learning or ‘high-order learning’, and are composed of teachers and students who interact in order to generate critical thinking, construct and confirm understanding. Garrison and Anderson (2003), and Garrison and Vaughan (2008) have elaborated a framework which depicts the three elements which constitute a Community of Practice: cognitive presence, online social presence, and teaching presence. Cognitive presence is a vital component of critical thinking and deep learning. It describes the degree of the students’ ability to build and validate meaning via continuous reflection and interaction. Cognitive presence is created through the use of triggering events which aim at puzzling the learners and sparking reactions from them. It is also obtained with exploration, integration, and resolution. This means that students seek and exchange information in order to understand an issue, are able to link different ideas together and apply them to new ones. In blended and e-learning, asynchronous text-based tools (such as discussion forums, blogs and wikis) are believed to enable students to become deep learners
(Wickersham and Dooley, 2006) as they provide time for reflection (time before writing a contribution and time to read a posting before replying for example). The second element, ‘online social presence’, refers to the members’ tendency to portray aspects of their personality to the other participants via the tool selected for the exercise, e.g., multiple or excessive postings in a discussion forum may reveal a ‘heavy’ and influential ‘social presence’. It helps supporting ‘cognitive presence’ by creating a friendly environment. It can also be manifested by risk-free expression and signs encouraging collaboration. These demonstrate that a sense of trust has been established making open communication and group cohesion possible even when the participants’ viewpoints differ. The third element which constitutes a CoP is ‘teaching presence’. The latter relates to the functions under the responsibility of the teacher even though some functions can be held by other participants at times. The functions include “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Garrison and Anderson, 2003: 29). In other words, it is linked to managing the environment before and during the learning process.

In brief, the key principles of pedagogy 2.0 are, firstly, that knowledge is created as it is shared through social Internet applications or a Community of Practice. This means that the more contributors share information the more they learn. Secondly, it assumes that learners have prior knowledge they can contribute to the discussion, and that learning is made possible only if participation is involved. To do so, participants must be provided with optimal learning conditions (Cole, 2008). These conditions include a good understanding of teacher and student roles. For the purpose of the present study, an effort was made to enable students to be actively engaged in the construction of new knowledge under the supervision of their tutor.
2.3.3 Teacher and student roles

Teacher roles

Following the shift from computer as a tool to computer as a medium, teacher roles have changed (Kern, 1996). In the traditional language classroom, the teacher is the holder of knowledge and occupies a prevailing position; the teacher is a “sage on stage” (King, 1993: 30; Tella, 1996: 13). In other words, the teacher provides expert information to passive students, who then memorise it and repeat it in their exam paper. This teacher-centred model known as the transmittal model (King, 1993) is deemed inadequate (Beatty, 2003; Kern, 1996; Tella, 1996; Ware and Kramsch, 2005) for today’s modern language classroom where online social and communicative interaction is praised. In CALL and the constructivism model, the teacher is considered as a “facilitator of learning rather than the font of wisdom” (Warschauer and Healy, 1998: 58). More specifically, the acquisition of knowledge is not considered as an outcome but as a process:

To instruct someone in a discipline is not a matter of getting him to commit results to mind. Rather, it is to teach him to participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge. We teach a subject not to produce little living libraries on the subject, but rather to get a student to think mathematically for himself, to consider matters as an historian does, to take part in the process of knowledge-getting. Knowing is a process, not a product.

(Bruner, 1966: 72, as quoted in Beatty, 2003: 94-5)

King (1993: 30) and Tella (1996: 13) name this facilitating role of the teacher as “guide on the side”. In brief, the teacher has a less directive influence; the teacher is no more the sole knowledge provider as information and validation come from varied sources which include other learners. Moreover, mistakes are regarded positively as they may contribute to the learning process (Beatty, 2003). This points to tutor feedback (Section 5.4.3).

Models and theories depicting teacher roles vary but the fundamental principles are agreed on: the modern teacher roles are multiple. Teachers need to be flexible and adapt to the students new needs. To illustrate this, several models will be presented: Mazzolini and Maddison (2003), Levy (1997), and Dubreil (2006). Mazzolini and Maddison’s case study discusses the teacher roles in a class where postgraduate students used a
discussion forum. Their paper investigates “what level of instructor intervention is optimal?” (2003: 238). The authors develop King’s (1993) theory which depicts the teacher as either “sage on stage” or “guide on the side” by adding a third role: “ghost in the wings” (Ibid.: 237) which implies a minimal input from the teacher. Their findings reinforce the belief that a facilitating role as “guide on the side” is more suitable for CALL. Indeed, the authors noticed that when the teacher adopted a “sage” position, i.e. when he or she posted messages more frequently, the students’ participation did not increase accordingly. Also, the more frequently the teacher posted messages in the forum, the shorter were the students’ messages. This being said, students perceived teachers who were often posting messages online as more knowledgeable and devoted (Ibid.: 237). Furthermore, Mazzolini and Maddison noted a difference in attitude between beginner students and more advanced or mature students. Advanced and mature students were more active online when the discussion was initiated by one of their peers as opposed to their teacher, whereas the identity of the first person posting in the forum had no such impact on beginner students’ participation. To conclude, the authors recommend that discussion forum instructors take on a ‘guide’ role because a leading ‘sage’ role deflects participation, and a too discreet “ghost” role is associated with ignorance and apathy (Ibid.: 245).

Before the Web 2.0 revolution of the noughties, Levy (1997: 100-8) described two roles for the teacher: as contributor and as author. Teachers of early CALL materials could make use of ready-made teaching materials and therefore contribute to their implementation in the classroom, or create their own CALL materials which require computer-programming skills. The teacher roles as contributor will be put under scrutiny in this section. Levy refers to the Ahmad (Ahmad et al., 1985) and Farrington models (1986) which respectively define the computer as tutor and tool. In the Ahmad model, the teacher has a minimal contribution to the learning process because the computer material has been conceived as self-reliant (Levy, 1997). On the other hand, in the Farrington model, the teacher has a more central role as the computer is only regarded as a tool or a medium. These models were designed at a time when researchers believed that computers could free teachers from the “more tiresome labours of language teaching” (Ibid., 103). Later on, with the arrival of the World Wide Web, Levy underlined that when contemplating the Internet for language and culture teaching, considering the computer as a substitute for teachers was not realistic: “The Internet,
while providing more learning opportunities for the student, requires the teacher to know more and to do more in order to facilitate interactions in this environment” (Ibid.). In other words, student-centred pedagogy mediated by the Internet is accentuating teacher duties. Levy (1997) recognises that the teacher must be seen as multitasking; he identifies two main responsibilities which are organizational and curricular challenges. Teachers’ organizational challenges include the coordination and facilitation of (inter)national/local projects, ensuring that tasks and guidelines are clearly understood, making sure that the technology is working satisfactorily, and linking students/institutions for collaborative interaction (calendar, class schedules). Curricular challenges involve but are not limited to the design and implementation of the course, liaising with students and colleagues (e.g., via e-mail), assessing the project, and providing feedback. Undoubtedly, in these circumstances “the roles of the teacher are many, and the demands correspondingly high” (Ibid.: 103).

This anticipated view of the prevailing and yet discreet teacher has been confirmed more recently by Dubreil (2006: 250-2) who identifies four key roles: ‘architect’, ‘composer’, ‘guide’ or ‘facilitator’, and ‘student’. It is important to note that Dubreil’s theories apply specifically to the teaching of ICC through online Communities of Practice. According to Dubreil, with the use of CALL and social media, the teacher’s input in student learning may be less noticeable, but his/her presence is undeniable (Ibid.: 250). The role of ‘architect’ described by Dubreil is very similar to what Levy (1997: 103) called ‘organizational challenge’. Teachers of foreign languages and cultures are responsible for the design, building and supervision of the environment where, or the community with which, student learning will be facilitated. Teachers as architects decide on the structure and delivery of the teaching materials, determine the type of tasks students will have to complete, and choose a suitable Web 2.0 instrument if needed (Dubreil, 2006). Teachers can also be viewed as composers because they can adapt existing instructional materials to reach their target objectives or create new material entirely (Ibid.). The third teacher role, guide or facilitator is self-explanatory:

The FL classroom can be considered a community in and of itself, with its own culture, where internal and external contexts interact with each other, where students and teachers coconstruct meaning. Learning depends on the sociocultural interactions and the teacher, who is the facilitator of these interactions and provides the context and guidelines within which the construction of meaning (i.e., learning) can take place.

(Dubreil, 2006: 251-2)
In this perspective, intercultural awareness may be developed within the classroom community (Dubreil, 2006). Finally, teachers may be taking the role of a student, i.e. having a learner stance. Teachers should accept that they are not the only source of knowledge. In the specific context of raising awareness about ICC, students are likely to experience a shift in their perception of cultures (their own and the target culture) through discussion and reflection. According to Dubreil, teachers should also be open-minded and leave room for their viewpoint to be altered; teachers should “be attentive and learn from their students, from their students’ culture(s), from their students’ perspective on culture – both their native and the target culture” (Ibid.: 252).

These many and varied teacher roles highlight the computer’s “omnipotent fallacy” identified by Bax (2003: 26) and also the “wow factor” by Murray and Barnes (1998: 250). Technology on its own is not efficient enough to substitute the teacher. As it has been presented above, it actually reinforces the teacher presence. The teacher’s input may not be as visible as in a teacher-centred context - mainly because most of the teacher accomplishment is done outside of the class (Dubreil, 2006: 252) - but the teacher is playing a pivotal role. Bax adds that it is also false to believe that modern technology guarantees a successful implementation of the aforementioned technology in the classroom, what he calls the “sole agent fallacy” (2003: 26). To summarise, whether it is as guide on the side, contributor, author, organisational or curricular expert, architect, composer, facilitator or student, as Donaldson and Haggström (2006: viii-ix) state, Web 2.0 teachers are key elements of the student learning process:

As facilitators, teachers must in many ways know more than they would as directive givers of information. Facilitators must be aware of a variety of material available for improving students’ language skill, not just one or two texts. They also need to know how to teach learners to use the material effectively. Teachers as facilitators have to be able to respond to the needs that students have, not just what has been set up ahead of time based on curriculum developer’s idea of who will be in the classroom. Teacher training is a key element to success in this more flexible language classroom, so that teachers can use multimedia and other resources effectively.

(Warshauer and Healy, 1998: 58)

Training of in-service teachers is therefore of relative significance (Bax, 2003: 26). Given these factors, the student roles will now be examined.
Student roles

The transition from computer as a tool to computer as a medium also had an impact on student roles. As a consequence, learners are moving from a passive stance to a more active one; instead of taking in information from a unique source (the teacher), learners are working independently and collaboratively, interacting, making comparisons, and creating new meaning with their fellow students, teachers, and other individuals from around the world (Kern, 1996). In brief, Web 2.0 language learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning experience:

Recent research attests to a growing appreciation of the learner’s control over the whole learning process. Evidence suggests that we can improve learning effectiveness by giving the learner control over, and responsibility for their own learning. This is the foundation for such approaches as problem-based and inquiry-based learning, and is central to the grand vision of Pedagogy 2.0, where learners have the freedom to decide how to engage in personally meaningful learning through connection, collaboration and shared knowledge building (McLoughlin and Lee, 2007: 669)

Similarly to his depiction of teacher roles, Dubreil (2006) notes four key roles for language and culture learners in the pedagogy 2.0 era. According to Dubreil, students are ‘active participants’, ‘researchers’, ‘ethnographers’, and ‘authors’. Active participation is the first characteristic of modern students. As stated earlier, learners are not solely recipient of knowledge provided by their teachers; they gain information from interaction with others, and their teachers act as facilitators of this learning process. Secondly, students may adopt the demeanour of a researcher. In other words, they express their curiosity by looking for information, collecting and assimilating the same, developing hypotheses, and amending them in order to construct meaning. Thirdly, students behave as ethnographers. Ethnographers study “the qualitative description of human and social phenomena” (Ibid.: 254). Like researchers, ethnographers collect pieces of information, observe human interactions, and conduct interviews. In the context of intercultural communicative competence acquisition, these actions may be applied to collecting cultural artefacts, observing attitudes and behaviours, and taking part in intercultural discussions. For the duration of their case study, ethnographers keep track of their discoveries and write their reactions in field notes or personal journals. Dubreil points out that the keeping of such journals is an effective way to support “intercultural exploration” (Ibid.) as it enables students to
reflect on their findings and scrutinize the impact these have on their beliefs and mindsets. Dubreil also indicates that student journals can easily be shared with teachers if they are kept online, e.g., shared via e-mail. Moreover, depending on the students’ proficiency in the L2, journals may be kept in the learners’ native language or in the target language. Finally, students may take the role of authors. This emulates the constructivist approach whereby teachers “relinquish control of the class” (Ibid.: 255) and students construct their knowledge under their guidance. An analysis of the teacher’s roles employed for the purpose of this study, and their impact on students’ autonomy is provided in Section 5.4.3 and Section 6.2.5.

2.3.4 Learner motivation

So far, focus has been put on defining ICC, and how Web 2.0 technology can be used to enhance this competence through online Communities of Practice along with specific roles to be adopted by students under the guidance of their teachers. However, neither the most adequate virtual learning environment nor the appropriate input from teachers is sufficient to safeguard a successful learning achievement. As Dörnyei points out, learner motivation is as critical as the conditions mentioned above (1998). This section will identify what is understood by motivation in L2 acquisition, and investigate how current theories in the matter can be applied to the enhancement of intercultural communicative competence.

Motivation and second language learning

Learner motivation in second or foreign language learning has been the subject of a regained interest and debate in the 1990s which has led to a plethora of definitions (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994, 1998; Oxford and Shearin, 1994). This being said, Gardner (1985, 2001; Gardner and Lambert, 1959; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991; 1993a; 1993b; Gardner and Tremblay, 1994) and Dörnyei (1998; 2001a; 2001b; 2009) seem to remain the two leading figures in researching motivation. This section will in particular depict these two researchers’ understanding of L2 motivation. Gardner defines motivation as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity”
Gardner and Lambert (1972) have identified two main types of motivation: **integrative** and **instrumental**. Integrative motivation is characterised by a positive attitude towards the target language and the community using it. It refers to learners who show enthusiasm in learning a foreign language for empathy reasons, such as admiration for the L2 culture, fondness for the people speaking the language, and desire to be *au fait* with, and belong to the target language group. Instrumental motivation is characterised by a pragmatic behaviour towards the acquisition of the target language. It refers to learners who are agenda-driven and strategically take on the learning of an L2 in order to obtain or have access to something concrete, such as good grades, a specific degree, a job or higher salary, and the ability to read technical documents. Social integration into the target language group is not of significant importance, if ever present, in instrumental motivation.

In his definition of motivation, Gardner also makes a distinction between ‘motivational orientation’ and ‘motivation’. This discernment often overlooked by researchers can be compared to the difference between a student’s decision to enrol in a language course for a specific reason (motivational orientation), and the same student’s actual effort to commit to the learning of the language (motivation):

> Motivation is not the same as motivational orientation in Gardner’s view, because a student might demonstrate a particular motivational orientation but not be highly motivated to implement it. […] Motivation reflects the power to attain the goal which is reflected in the motivational orientation. This power stems from the desire to attain the goal, positive attitudes towards learning the language, and effortful behaviour. (Oxford and Shearin, 1994: 14)

In other words, orientation on its own cannot guarantee a positive language learning process. Only the pairing of instrumental or integrative orientation with “heightened motivation to learn the second language” (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991: 58-9) can foster successful linguistic acquisition. In addition to suggesting a definition of motivation, Gardner has set up an “Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB)” (1985: 177-84) to measure student motivation to learn a second language. Gardner proposes that motivation is composed of three components: “the combination of effort”, the “desire to achieve the goal of learning the language”, and “favourable attitudes toward learning the language” (Gardner, 1985: 10). The AMTB has been elaborated with the evaluation of these three components in mind and thus includes three subtests:
“Motivational intensity, Desire to Learn (the language), and Attitudes” (Gardner and Tremblay, 1994: 361). The AMTB comprises 134 items. Its constituents are as follow:

- Attitudes towards French canadians (10 Likert scale items)
- Interest in foreign languages (10 Likert scale items)
- Attitudes towards European French people (10 Likert scale items)
- Attitudes towards learning French (10 Likert scale items)
- Integrative orientation (4 Likert scale items)
- Instrumental orientation (4 Likert scale items)
- French class anxiety (5 Likert scale items)
- Parental encouragement (10 Likert scale items)
- Motivational Intensity (10 multiple choice items)
- Desire to learn French (10 multiple choice items)
- Orientation index (1 multiple choice item)
- Evaluation of the French teacher (25 semantic differential scales items)
- Evaluation of the French course (25 semantic scale items)

(Dörnyei, 2001a: 53)

The attitude of this study’s participants was also evaluated; results showed a strong instrumental motivation (Section 5.4.2).

**Motivation and intercultural communicative competence**

Furthermore, Gardner shows that both attitudes and motivation are essential in learning a second language (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991). More specifically, Gardner considers that the integrative motivation, which he also refers to as integrativeness, is an ensemble of various components, including attitudes: “Integrative motivation is a complex of attitudinal, goal-directed, and motivational variables” (Gardner, 2001: 1). Also, Gardner explains that integrative motivation includes empathy with the target language group:

The concept of integrative motivation assumes that
a. Second language acquisition refers to the development of near-native-like language skills, and this takes time, effort, and persistence.

b. Such a level of language development requires identification with the second language community.

(Ibid.: 1-2)

This view on motivation is very relevant to the acquisition of ICC. Indeed, similar criteria have been identified by researchers for raising awareness of ICC (Table 2.2).
Table 2.2 – Similarities in defining motivation and intercultural communicative competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Integrative motivation (Gardner, 2001: 5)</th>
<th>Intercultural communicative competence (Various authors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitudes</td>
<td>- “The variable integrativeness reflects a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer to the other language community”&lt;br&gt;  - “a favourable attitude toward the language community”</td>
<td>- “have positive attitudes towards another culture” (Bennett, 2004: 67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness, curiosity and respect</td>
<td>- “this implies an openness to, and respect for other cultural groups and ways of life”&lt;br&gt;  - “an openness to other groups in general”</td>
<td>- “The skill of discovery and interaction” (Byram, 1997: 37)&lt;br&gt;  - “Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own (savoir être)” (Byram, 2008: 69)&lt;br&gt;  - “general openness toward intercultural learning and to people from other cultures” (Deardorff, 2006: 249)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of ethnocentrism</td>
<td>- “In the extreme, this might involve complete identification with the community (and possibly even withdrawal from one’s original group) […] but more commonly it might well involve integration within both communities”&lt;br&gt;  - “an absence of ethnocentrism”</td>
<td>- “the ability to take perspective or shift frame of reference vis-à-vis other cultures” (Bennett, 2004: 68)&lt;br&gt;  - “the ability to see how different cultures relate to each other […] and to act as mediator between them […], where desirable, adapt one’s behaviour and underlying values and beliefs” (Byram, 2008: 68)&lt;br&gt;  - “Cultural difference is neither good nor bad, it is just different. […] Ethnorelativism” (Bennett, 1993: 46)&lt;br&gt;  - “Ethnorelative view, empathy” (Deardorff, 2006: 256)&lt;br&gt;  - Third place […] learners take both an insider’s and outsider’s view on C1 and C2” (Kramsch, 1993: 210).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional identification</td>
<td>“Integrativeness involves emotional identification with another cultural group”</td>
<td>- “intercultural sensitivity (focus on positive emotion toward cultural difference)” (Deardorff, 2006: 249)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, Gardner and other researchers with expertise on L2 motivation come to the same conclusion of researchers working on ICC; more specifically, they agree that the acquisition of a foreign language is not socially neutral (Williams, 1994), and that the attitudes of foreign language students towards the target language group have a direct influence on their learning achievement (Gardner, 1985). As Dörnyei writes:

Language, after all, belongs to a person’s whole social being: it is part of one’s identity, and is used to convey this identity to other people. The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system or rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviours and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner.

(1998: 122)

In view of these similarities between integrative motivation and the qualities of a speaker who is interculturally and communicatively competent, one might wonder if
students who are integratively motivated are more likely to enhance their ICC than students who are instrumentally motivated. Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) observed language students and analysed if instrumental and integrative motivation influenced them differently. All participants of the study were doing similar tasks, but one half was enticed instrumentally: if they reached a determined level of proficiency they would receive a monetary reward. The authors’ conclusions showed that “both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation facilitated learning” (Ibid.: 57). This being said, they noted that “integratively motivated subjects learned more than those not integratively motivated” (Ibid.: 68).

One of the main criticisms of Gardner’s motivation theory is that his view of motivation being either integrative or instrumental is too limiting (Oxford and Shearin, 1994). Dörnyei (1994) lists additional variables compiled by a number of researchers which include ‘intrinsic motivation’ (Brown, 1994), ‘intellectual curiosity’ (Laine, 1981), ‘attribution about past successes/failures’ (Dörnyei: 1990; Skehan, 1991), ‘need for achievement’ (Dörnyei: 1990), ‘self-confidence’ (Clément, 1980; Clément and Kruidenier, 1985; 40), and ‘classroom goal structures’ (Julkunen: 1989). The latter comprises more sub-variables which reflect the learning context in an educational setting: “classroom events and tasks, classroom climate and group cohesion, course content and teaching materials, teacher feedback, and grades and rewards” (Dörnyei, 1994: 275). Some might argue that some of these additional variables are actually included in the instrumental/integrative dichotomy. For instance grades and rewards would be part of instrumental motivation. In response to criticisms, Gardner and Tremblay (1994) iterate the fact that instrumental and integrative variables should be applied to orientations as opposed to motives. Furthermore, they explicitly agree that more variables may be relevant: “motivation is best explained as a complex and dynamic process with room for several intervening variables.” (1994: 366). Their view may be further clarified by Dörnyei’s statement:

There does not exist an integrative/instrumental dichotomy in Gardner’s model but this is at the orientation (i.e., goal) level, and as such, is not part of the core motivation component; rather, the two orientations function merely as motivational antecedents that help to arouse motivation and direct it toward a set of goals, either with a strong interpersonal quality (integrative) or a strong practical quality (instrumental). Gardner’s motivation theory has three particularly well developed areas: a) the construct of the integrative motive; b) the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), and c) the socio-
Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System

In light of the 1990s debate about L2 motivation (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Oxford and Shearin, 1994), Tremblay and Gardner (1995) also subsume new motivation components which expand Gardner’s theories. The new measures include: “persistence, attention, goal-specificity, and causal attributions to each other” (Ibid.: 505). More recently, Dörnyei has established a new framework entitled ‘L2 Motivational Self System’ (2005; 2009) which brings novelty to the existing theories of L2 motivation. Indeed, this system brings to the fore the notion of ‘self’ which is predominant in motivational psychology. Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System draws on the work of Higgins (1987; Higgins et al.: 1985) and Markus and Nurius (1986: 954) who first identified the notions of ‘ideal selves’, ‘selves that we would become’ or ‘ought self’, and ‘selves we are afraid of becoming’. The L2 Motivational Self System is composed of the following three components:

(1) **Ideal L2 Self**, which is the L2-specific facet of one’s ‘ideal self’: if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ‘ideal L2 self’ is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves. Traditional integrative and internalised instrumental motives would typically belong to this component.

(2) **Ought-to L2 Self**, which concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes. This dimension corresponds to Higgins’s ought self and thus more extrinsic (i.e. less internalised) types of instrumental motives.

(3) **L2 Learning Experience**, which concerns situated, ‘executives’ motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g., the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success). This component is conceptualised at a different level from the two self-guides and future research will hopefully elaborate on the self aspects of this bottom-up process.

What Dörnyei describes as ‘Ideal Self’ is the representation of all the qualities that a person would like to possess, such as hopes and ambitions. One’s ‘Ideal L2 Self’ is associated with the mastery of a foreign language, as well as the personal identity development which characterises L2 learning. Dörnyei’s framework (2009) also embraces the concept of mental imagery or imagery enhancement technique which is commonly used by athletes. If students can picture themselves reaching their ideal, they
are more likely to obtain a favourable outcome. In addition to Higgins’ self-discrepancy theory (1987, 1996), Dörnyei identified another highly motivating factor which is particularly relevant in an academic setting: the notion of ‘feared self’ (2009: 21-2). The fear of failure which is a constituent of ‘Ought-to L2 Self’ may overpower the will to succeed. In other words, the potential of negative consequences is very compelling. For instance, a language student may be more motivated to complete and submit an assignment by fear to miss a deadline rather than by the wish to do well (Ibid.: 22).

Referring to the study of Oyserman et al. (2006), Dörnyei suggests that a balanced combination of positive mental imagery and fear to fail is most effective, rather than one or the other. Finally, the L2 Motivational Self System includes a third component as ‘Ideal L2 Self’ and ‘Ought-to L2 Self’ are not sufficient to guarantee success. Indeed, an action-plan which is part of the ‘L2 Learning Experience’ must also be implemented and followed. This action-plan is congruent with language teaching methodology, and may be constituted of a set of targets to reach (motivational factor), individual study strategies (methodological factor), and specific pedagogical methods (methodological factor) (2009: 37).

Dörnyei claims that his framework is filling a gap left vacant by Gardner’s theories. More specifically, he disputes Gardner’s integrative motive which he believes is not applicable to most language learning environments (Ibid.: 10, 24). Indeed, typical L2 classrooms are deprived of direct contacts with native speakers and removed from the target language’s cultural settings:

In a multicultural setting such as Montreal, where Gardner first developed his theory, we can talk about potential ‘integration’, but in learning situations where a foreign language is taught as a school subject without any direct contact with its speakers (e.g., teaching English or French in Hungary, China, Japan or other typical ‘foreign language learning’ contexts) the ‘integrative’ metaphor does not have any obvious meaning.

(Ibid.: 24)

Despite criticising Gardner’s integrativeness, Dörnyei admits that Gardner’s motivational theories and his framework share some undeniable similarities. To begin with, both frameworks adopt characteristics from social psychology. Secondly, both frameworks indicate that motivation is a complex construct which can be interpreted with three closely corresponding factors: Integrativeness, Instrumentality, and attitudes
towards the learning situation (Gardner) and Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience (Dörnyei) (Ibid.: 29-30).

What can be learnt from the works of Gardner and Dörnyei is that motivational behaviour may differ depending on the learner and the learning environment. Students who are integratively oriented may be more prone to develop ICC, but in the typical language classroom, which in this thesis is constituted of a majority of Irish students learning French in an Irish setting, integrative motive may be low, and the teaching methods (e.g., the class dynamics or the weighing of marks) may influence students’ motivation more effectively. As Dörnyei states, in a language classroom, what really matters is not to ponder on defining motivation, but rather to determine how student motivation can be increased (Dörnyei, 2001b: 52).

**Motivation in second language learning and online tools**

With the increasing use of the Internet for teaching purposes recent studies on motivational behaviour and online technologies have emerged. The questions raised by these studies are whether online devices can encourage students’ participation and whether particular online tools are more effective than others to motivate learners. Conclusions vary (Heafner and Friedman: 2008; Lundin, 2008). On the positive side, a number of studies conclude that online discussion forums increase student participation (Chun, 1994; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Sullivan and Pratt, 1996; Warschauer, 1996, 1997). This increase is noted at three levels:

(a) percentage of student talk versus teacher talk,
(b) directional focus of student talk (toward other students or toward the teacher), and
(c) equality of student participation.

(Warschauer, 1997: 473)

Indeed, participation in online discussions has proven to be more balanced than face-to-face discussions by allowing students who are usually silent in the conventional classroom to engage in the activity (Warschauer, 1997; Warschauer and Healy, 1998). Lundin noted the same with wikis, indicating that the optional use of pseudonyms may be attractive to students, even though total anonymity remains an illusion (2008). Novak and Cowling (2011) also confirm this trend with their study on Twitter among
university students as a method for asking questions and gaining feedback. Their findings show that the microblogging site may benefit shy students, who usually do not have the confidence to speak out in front of the whole class, into increasing their participation as the technology enables them to ask questions in class without revealing their identity. Heafner and Friedman (2008) have mixed views on the issue and state that the use of open online tools may have both motivating and dissuading effects. In their research on the use of wikis, they observed that the collaborative feature of the tool highly engaged participants in their assignment as they were active contributors to their learning experience, and working with peers was a motivating factor. Some participants showed pride and felt powerful in sharing their knowledge with other participants. But the researchers also discovered that working with peers may also be a deterrent for some participants who would be reluctant to contribute their own knowledge for fear of embarrassing themselves (mistakes, loss of power). Both benefits and limitations of online interaction depicted above have been noticed in this study (see Section 5.3 and Section 5.4.1). Furthermore, Lundin (2008) explains that despite many qualities, new technologies such as wikis do not counteract students’ general reluctance to engage in texts. She described her participants as ‘lurkers’ as they read the messages that were posted but were rarely if ever commenting on other participants’ messages unless the topic of the messages was of particular interest to them. What can be elicited from these findings is that Internet technologies may be used for educational purposes and have a positive influence on students’ participation and motivation. However, tools such as discussion forum, (micro)blog and wiki remain futile instruments of technology if they’re not accompanied with sound pedagogical approaches.

2.3.5 Learner autonomy

A number of research studies (Dickinson, 1987, 1995; Dörnyei, 1998; Ushioda, 1996) show that learner motivation and learner autonomy are closely linked. There is no real consensus on the causal connection between autonomy and motivation, in other words, it is not clearly identified whether it is motivation that produces autonomy, or whether autonomy results in heightened motivation (Ellis, 1985). However, the work of Dickinson (1987, 1995) and Ushioda (1996, 2000, 2003, 2006), both leading figures on
autonomy, claims that motivation is a prerequisite for autonomous learning. As Ushioda states “Autonomous language learners are by definition motivated learners” (1996: 2). Also:

Enhanced motivation is conditional on learners taking responsibility for their own learning [...] and perceiving that their learning successes and failures are to be attributed to their own efforts and strategies rather than to factors outside their control.

(Dickinson, 1995: 173-4)

This section will define the notion of autonomy, and will show the development of research in the area in a language teaching and learning context. More specifically it will describe the concept of intrinsic motivation which is essential in autonomous learning. This section will also depict the change in focus from autonomy considered as isolated self-directed learning to autonomy in a classroom setting, as well as the role of CALL in fostering autonomy.

Henri Holec’s definition of autonomy (1979; 1981) remains the most quoted definition in this research area. Holec views autonomy in foreign language learning as “the ability to take charge of one’s learning” (1981: 3). Furthermore, Holec describes five actions typical autonomous learners may undertake:

1. Determining the objectives;
2. Defining the contents and progressions;
3. Selecting methods and techniques to be used;
4. Monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.);
5. Evaluating what has been acquired.

(Ibid.)

Little (1991) adds that autonomy is the logical result of learner-centred pedagogy and is the expression of learners’ ability to reflect and think critically, to make independent decisions and act upon these decisions. Little also claims that autonomy is “self-motivated, and undertaken in order to fulfil a personal need” (1991: 10). This last view is confirmed by Deci and Ryan (1985), Dickinson (1987), and Ushioda (1996, 2000) who call this behaviour ‘intrinsic motivation’ According to Ushioda there is a close link between intrinsic motivation and autonomy (2000: 121). Deci and Ryan are the first to have developed the theory of intrinsic motivation which they distinguish from extrinsic motivation. In the context of foreign language learning, individuals who are intrinsically
motivated would be students who are learning an L2 because they are driven by a personal force (intrinsic), and not because they are made to, from an external pressure or with the perspective of a reward in sight (extrinsic) (Benson, 2006; Deci and Ryan, 1985). In this regard, Deci and Ryan’s theories can be assimilated to Gardner’s concept of integrative and instrumental attitudes (Dickinson, 1987). Deci and Ryan believe that intrinsic motivation contributes to enhanced learning and can be fostered in educational settings that combine two conditions. First of all, the environment should be “informational” rather than “controlling” (Deci and Ryan, 1985: 96; Dickinson, 1987: 66). This means that the classroom or learning environment is structured through relevant information to guide action rather than “evaluative feedback” (Dickinson, 1987: 166). In a discussion forum, this could be illustrated by the teacher guiding the students through their task, instead of providing comments indicating right or wrong answers. Second of all, the classroom or learning environment should be autonomy supportive or facilitating “self-determination” (Ibid.: 166, 169). The setting should be providing support for “students’ learning, especially conceptual learning and creative thinking” (Ibid.: 169). To continue with the example of a discussion forum, this could be illustrated by letting the student taking initiative, be it by posting the first message of a thread or choosing different multimedia to convey their opinion (e.g., including a web link, a photo or a podcast instead of simply writing a few lines).

This concept of learner autonomy provided by a favourable class management or educational setting is relatively recent in this research area. From the 1980s up to the 1990s, autonomy was linked with self-access centres and learners working on their own (Benson, 2006: 22). The focus then changed around the 1990s with a shift towards degrees of autonomy (Ibid.: 23). Researchers then agreed that there are several levels of autonomy (Littlewood, 1997; Nunan, 1997). It was accepted that the behaviour of autonomous learners may differ, depending on their language proficiency, their age or what objectives they have set (Little, 1991: 4). From the 2000s until today, the interest has taken a “sociocultural turn” (Benson, 2006: 29). Indeed, autonomy is characterised by independence and interdependence:

Independence entails taking responsibility for one’s own learning, setting objectives, and making informed pedagogical decisions based on some form of self-evaluation. However,
learners exercise their independence within a specific sociocultural context where interdependence, through socialisation and the nature of their interaction with peers and teachers, will impact on the levels of control they exercise and develop.

(Blin, 2004: 378).

In other words, when individual students show the capacity to take control over their learning, their actions inevitably have social repercussions (Benson, 2001). Moreover, today’s notion of autonomy assumes both classroom applications and individual differences. The different instructional contexts in which autonomy may be applied are listed as:

- Self-access centres,
- CALL technologies,
- Distance learning,
- Tandem learning,
- Study abroad,
- Self-instruction.

(Benson, 2006: 26)

This list may differ according to researchers, but it shows that the early view of autonomy being associated with isolation or self-instruction belongs to the past (Blin, 2004: 378). It is erroneous to believe that autonomy cannot be reached with teacher presence; autonomy “is not exclusively or even primarily a matter of how learning is organized” (Little, 1991: 3). Namely, the relationship or “pedagogical dialogue” between the teachers and the students is as, if not more, important than the learning setting (Benson, 2006; Littlewood, 1999).

Various case studies show that computer-assisted language learning technologies have the potential to develop autonomous learning (Benson, 2001; Blin, 2004; Kramsch, 1993; Warshauer and Healy, 1998). Three main aspects of CALL have been identified: physical flexibility, adjustable pace of learning, learner control over interaction and content. To begin with, CALL applications enable learners to study at their own convenience (Boyd, 1996) in multiple environments, e.g., in the classroom, the computer lab, the library or at home (Tella, 1996). CALL applications also give learners the opportunity to study at their own pace. In a case study, Murray (1999) observed students using the interactive video programme “À la rencontre de Philippe” and analysed the prominence of autonomy and interactivity in the virtual environment.
Murray points out that “multimedia tools enable learners to proceed according to [their] own pace and proficiency” (Ibid.: 298), which directly supports learner autonomy.

Table 2.3 - CALL stages and the potential for learner autonomy (Blin, 2004: 380)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage (Warschauer &amp; Healy, 1998)</th>
<th>CALL applications and technologies</th>
<th>Potential for learner autonomy (Benson, 2001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviouristic CALL</td>
<td>Drills, vocabulary and grammar</td>
<td>Control over pace of learning; Control over mode (e.g., instruction, practice or testing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative CALL</td>
<td>Text reconstruction, games, simulations (problem-solving, cognitive engagement, spoken communication with peers); Word-processors, desktop publishing packages, concordancers and databases</td>
<td>Control over path taken; Control over text creation and interpretation; Control over process of learning: Development of metacognitive skills and metalinguistic awareness (i.e. cognitive and metacognitive autonomy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative CALL</td>
<td>Multimedia, hypermedia and interactive technologies promoting integration of skills (CD-ROMS); (Rich linguistic and non-linguistic input, new language presented through a variety of media, branching options); Internet: e-mail, on-line discussion, web authoring; Large collaborative projects (opportunities for collaborative learning)</td>
<td>Control over the selection of materials and over strategies of interpretation; Control over access; Control over learning content; Control over interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, this type of multimedia seems to decrease student anxiety and increase enjoyment because participants do not feel under pressure (Ibid.: 300). Indeed, the coercive nature of the standard classroom is replaced by independent work and self-discipline; for this reason participants claim that the use of CALL gives a sense of added responsibility, and helps to customise the learning process (Ibid.). Similarly, it has been put to the fore that other Internet technologies such as the e-tandem exchange programme (Ushioda, 2000) and blogs (de Almeida Soares, 2008) have very similar patterns with autonomy as they help participants develop a sense of ownership, and give control over the content and process of learning. Blin suggests that a new framework including individual and social autonomy must be drawn in order to support the idea that recent CALL technology may foster autonomy, (2004: 377). Table 2.3 illustrates the correspondence between Warschauer and Healy’s (1998) historical overview of
CALL and Benson’s (2001) analysis of the potential of learner autonomy afforded by CALL applications and technologies.

2.4 Highlight on three tools: discussion forum, blog and wiki

To further define CMC/CALL, we will scrutinize three tools which will be used in this study, and that are representative of what can be done with Web 2.0 technology. The authoring tools examined are discussion forums, blogs and wikis and will be briefly defined. Their description will be followed by an account of their characteristics which are relevant to the author’s research project: (1) ease of use, (2) text-based interaction, (3) flexible time and geographical features, (4) asynchronous and synchronous features, (5) private and collaborative features, (6) challenges in using new media. Warschauer’s\(^\text{11}\) (1997) description of CMC features were used as a starting point to create these categories.

A discussion forum is a communication tool containing written questions and answers posted by users. Users read through messages that are presented chronologically (the older contribution is at the top of the page) and reply to the messages by simply clicking on a reply button (Helic et al., 2004). Discussion forums were implemented in the Web 1.0 era, but are still widely used and relevant in today’s instructional settings for two main reasons. Firstly, in an educational setting, learners may use discussion forums to exchange views on various topics (e.g., course content, learning task or project). This goes beyond the simple exchange of information; discussion forums provide valuable knowledge from which participants can learn (Helic et al., 2004). As a consequence, discussion forums are a central feature of Communities of Practice. Secondly, discussion forums have evolved since their creation; they have successfully adapted to newer technologies. For instance, online forums can now support multimedia (pictures, videos, and podcasts) and non-Roman characters, all of which were not possible when forums were first used (Godwin-Jones, 2003).

\(^{11}\) Warschauer’s features of computer-mediated communication included: Text-based and computer-mediated communication; Many-to-many communication; Time-and Place-Independent communication; Long distance exchanges, and Hypermedia links.
A blog is an online diary, usually written by one person, open to all or a selection of Internet users. The term itself is a contraction of “web log” (Georgescu, 2010: 186), where log refers to a diary or a website in which personal information, viewpoints or feelings are posted via messages which are displayed in reverse chronological order (the latest post is at the top of the page) (de Almeida Soares, 2008). A blog contains details such as a title, the name of the author, a list of friends or followers, and the latest post - with its title, date, and sometimes comments made by readers (Georgescu, 2010). The first blog was created in the USA at the end of the 1990s and the tool has known an international success ever since (Ibid.). “Educational blogs” or “edublogs” are created by teachers, students or bodies involved in educational policy (Ibid.: 187). Campbell (2003) divides the blogs used in foreign language teaching into three categories, each one having its peculiarities: the ‘tutor blog’, the ‘learner blog’ and the ‘class blog’. Tutor blogs are created and controlled by teachers for the use of their students. Learner blogs are run by either individual students or a group of students working as part of a small group. Learner blogs can be created either as an online journal or as an online portfolio. The latter use gives students the possibility to review their own work, and evaluate their progress (de Almeida Soares, 2008). Finally, class blogs are run by the entire student body of a class (Georgescu, 2010).

A wiki is a user-editable website (Leuf and Cunningham, 2001; Lundin, 2008), a feature also referred to as ‘open editing’ (Fichter, 2005: 50). Indeed, one of the first wikis was developped by Ward Cunningham in 1995 with the aim to encourage Internet users to publish (Richardson, 2005; 17). Any reader accessing a wiki can freely modify its content by adding or deleting text, and creating new pages and links after clicking on the “edit” button. A wiki is composed of several pages: a homepage with the project in its current form, a history page where the identity (real names, pseudonyms or IP addresses) of contributors is revealed, as well as the changes made and the time when these were posted, and an edit page where users can make their modifications. The wiki concept has known worldwide notoriety with the success of Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia created by Jimmy Wales in 2001. Wikis are a very attractive authoring tool for users who need to “create a knowledgebase” or “need to build a shared knowledge repository” (Fichter, 2005: 50).
2.4.1 Ease of use

Literature on online discussion forums (Helic et al., 2004), blogs (de Almeida Soares, 2008; Georgescu, 2010) and wikis (Heafner and Friedman, 2008; Lundin, 2008) all emphasise the ease of use of these Internet technologies. These tools are not only successful because they are free but also because they are simple to use, and quick to develop – ‘wiki’ is actually the Hawaiian word for ‘quick’. The flexibility and intuitive features make online authoring a reality for any Internet user (McLoughlin and Lee, 2007). Indeed, the characteristic of Web 2.0 tools is that no expertise in computer programming, HTML code or FTP (File Transfer Protocol) is necessary to contribute to the Internet. Discussion forums, blogs and wikis use WYSIWYG (What you see is what you get) editors, i.e. “an application which displays a page nearly corresponding to the end result as the document is created” (Heafner and Friedman, 2008: 290), which are user-friendly:

[...] entries are made by typing directly into the browser and with the click of a button are instantly published on the Internet. All basic document formatting, like spacing, bold, italics, underline, and creating links, requires no knowledge of HTML, or FTP (File Transfer Protocol), so that anyone who can type, copy, and paste can create and maintain a weblog.

(georgescu, 2010: 187)

The affordance of modern social media contributes to make Web 2.0 tools “fit” for learners (Chapelle, 2003: 80) and thus engage them in the language task to a greater extent.

2.4.2 Text-based interaction

Discussion forums, blogs and wikis, while not only confined to the written format, are predominantly using text-based interaction. The benefits of writing and sharing with peers (e.g., paper-based dialogue journals) have already been recognised in language teaching and learning (Peyton and Reed, 1990). However, when writing on paper, the interaction is very limited as the editing process is very slow. Web 2.0 tools are enhancing this written experience as they enable rapid interaction and collaboration: “[they] unleash the interactive power of text-based communication (Warschauer, 1997: 472). Moreover, the text-based mode of interaction enables students to pause and reflect.
before contributing a written reply, thus providing more creative and better thought contributions. According to Kroonenberg’s study (1994/5) the faceless characteristic of the computer screen results in students (including shy participants) being less intimidated and more expressive. Furthermore, Kroonenberg notes that the classes which follow the online written interaction improve significantly: “The quality of the arguments is enhanced and thinking is more creative than without this kind of preparation” and “interest in listening is augmented as well” (Ibid.: 26-7). Furthermore, these online tools can keep participants on a non-hierarchical structure which is learner-centred and therefore may minimise the role of the teacher. They can provide a non-threatening environment where greater equality occurs, and where learners feel less hesitant to give opinions and ask questions (Alvarez-Torres, 2001; Warschauer, 1997). Both teachers and learners thereby become “equal participants in the discussion, and participants do not have to wait for their turn or for the teacher to invite them to contribute” (Alvarez-Torres, 2001: 314).

2.4.3 Flexible time and geographical features

Discussion forums, blogs and wikis are “time-and-place-independent communication” technologies (Warschauer, 1997: 474), i.e. they are accessible to people around the world at any time, from anywhere (library, computer lab, 3G mobile phones) with an Internet connection (Cress and Kimmerle, 2007). In an educational setting, this extends the learning process outside the scheduled classroom, thus allowing students to catch up with course content, reaching their fellow students or teachers at a time that is most convenient to them. On the downside, these applications which enable users to write and receive messages at any time, may create a dependence whereby users may feel frustrated if they do not obtain an answer in a timely manner, or may give the false belief that the teacher is available at all times. Furthermore, another feature results from the time and geographical flexibility of these three Web 2.0 technologies: users have access to up-to-date and authentic information which can be integrated into class projects (Warschauer, 1997). For instance, students of French may consult French websites (e.g., online newspaper, transport schedule, topical discussion forums, and tourist board pages), in order to complete a group project or form their opinion.
**2.4.4 Synchronous and asynchronous features**

CALL technologies can be classified as synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous applications make the online exchange of information possible in real-time, i.e. participants can read, listen or watch messages and respond instantly. This implies that all participants meet online at the same time which can be a hindrance when users are located in different time zones or when students have different class schedules (Levy and Stockwell, 2006). Synchronous technologies comprise chat rooms (Smith *et al.*, 2003), video-conferences (Jin and Erben, 2007; O’Dowd, 2000) and MOOs (Shield, 2003; Svensson, 2003). Chat rooms are the most commonly used synchronous applications for they are described as the “most interactive end of the CMC spectrum” (Paramskas, 1999: 17). On the contrary, asynchronous applications do not confine all participants to be online simultaneously. Users can access the applications at their own convenience (Levy and Stockwell, 2006). This being said, in an educational setting, participants may have to respect a specified timeline, such as a week period for instance. Asynchronous technologies include e-mails (Itakura, 2004), discussion forums (Hanna and de Nooy, 2009), blogs (Elola and Oskoz, 2008), and wikis (Guth and Marini-Maio, 2010).

As mentioned in Section 2.4.2 the text-based nature of CALL technologies, be they synchronous or asynchronous, allows users for more planning time than oral communication, and can be used as a supplement to face-to-face discussion (Warschauer and Healy, 1998). Nonetheless, the time-delayed characteristic of asynchronous technologies enables “learners to reflect both on content and language as they write and read at their own pace” (Lee, 2009: 426), and therefore helps develop more in-depth analysis and critical thinking. Referring to discussion forums, Wickersham and Dooley note that asynchronous communication provide “all students [with] the ability to interact and participate in the discussion, to learn at their own pace, and to have more time to reflect and respond within the expanded timeframe” (2006: 185). Moreover, asynchronous communication is better suited for long and complex discussions involving a large number of participants (Warschauer and Healy, 1998).
2.4.5 Private and collaborative features

Web 2.0 tools and social media are collective in essence, i.e., they are created and maintained by a group of people (teachers and students). Discussion forums, blogs and wikis used for language teaching and learning purposes are no exception to this. Although, blogs are more versatile, as their access can be limited to one user (the sole author), and be used as a portfolio for personal development (Davis, 2004). The collaborative feature of the three tools investigated in this thesis may benefit students in many ways (Levy and Stockwell, 2006). To begin with, online collaboration applications are very efficient at saving time as participants “collectively author, edit, and review materials in a group workspace” (Fichter, 2005: 49). This way, students don’t have to visit multiple platforms to complete their project, and can make minor changes without having to schedule time-consuming meetings to discuss them with the other contributors. In addition, collaborative learning allows for collective intelligence, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, which is also referred to as “many-to-many communication” (Warschauer, 1997: 473), “wisdom of the crowds” (Surowiecki, 2004), “the sum of human knowledge” (Richardson, 2005: 17) or “the wisdom of the masses” (Wheeler et al., 2008: 989). As the work is conducted by several persons, it is believed that the knowledge shared via online technology is of greater significance than the work produced by a single individual. Indeed, the participants’ knowledge is not limited to the content they have added since they are responsible for the document as a whole. They not only concentrate on their contribution but also read, review, and modify the content written by others. The act of sharing facilitates the creation of a document of greater quality than separate documents written by people working independently (Butcher and Taylor, 2008). Furthermore, online collaborative tools enable foreign language learners to work with peers (e.g., journal writing with a blog, discussing and investigating ideas with a forum, and creating a document with a wiki), which other researchers also call “peering” (Ibid., 2008; Tapscott and Williams, 2006):

The idea […] is to shift thinking about content from “my” content to “our” content” […]
Peering also means […] participants engage in their own “peer review” process of reviewing and critiquing each other’s content as it is developed. […] the group is mutually responsible for solving problems for their “part” but more importantly, being held accountable to everyone in the group by contributing to the whole […] page, thus strengthening the sense of community within the group, and allowing group members with overlapping or similar ideas to view and collaboratively build on each other’s work.

(Butcher and Taylor, 2008: 38-9)
Moreover, students have the opportunity to improve their language proficiency when the tasks are carried out in the target language. Students not only share information and exchange viewpoints, they also improve their vocabulary and language skills (Beatty, 2003: 99-100). The exercise of building knowledge and solving problems as part of a class group is also a way to practice various competences at a micro level that would be useful in their future life. This corresponds to ‘situated language learning’ (Mills, 2011) which Warschauer describes as: “learning that takes place (is situated) within a particular environment but that becomes useful in multiple contexts”. (1997: 487). Similarly, group work brings contributors together, and engages them in their task where they share their experiences, and give each other feedback. As McLoughlin and Mynard point out this encourages the “manipulation of information, not simply memorisation” (2009: 148) which brings us to another benefit of online tools: long-term retention. As shown by Johnson and Johnson (1986) and later confirmed by the study conducted by Heafner and Friedman (2008), the use of cooperative teams, strengthens long-term retention. The second study demonstrates that, eight months after the project, the students who used a wiki remembered facts better than the students who were taught more traditionally, and showed a greater understanding. This provides evidence that non-traditional methods have positive outcomes.

Cress and Kimmerle (2007, 2008) have established a model of collaborative knowledge building with wikis which explains this phenomenon. They have identified four processes of knowledge building: (1) externalization, (2) internalization, (3) assimilation, and (4) accommodation. The externalization phase describes the process through which online contributors acquire deeper knowledge as they have to articulate their ideas in writing for others to understand. This action of making one’s viewpoint coherent and meaningful actually helps the authors to better understand their ideas (Cress and Kimmerle, 2007; 2008). In brief, this phase shows how the information can be transferred from one individual to several contributors. The internalization phase describes how participants integrate the information that they retrieve from the wiki into their personal knowledge spaces (Ibid.). In brief, this phase shows how the information can be transferred from the wiki to one individual. Incidentally, this shows that collaborative learning may help students who are not actively engaged in the project but do visit the online tool, namely “lurkers” (Lundin, 2008: 441). For instance, students
who do not post messages may still benefit from reading from other students’ posts. The third process describes how participants assimilate the information and incorporate it with pre-existing knowledge (Cress and Kimmerle, 2008). The assimilation process is merely quantitative, i.e., pieces of information are added to the individual’s knowledge, whereas, the accommodation process implies a change in one’s individual knowledge space:

In this case, people do not simply assimilate new information into existing knowledge, but actually change knowledge in order to better understand the environment and its information. In contrast to the quantitative process of assimilation, we consider the creation of new knowledge, in the process of accommodation, as an indicator of learning in a qualitative manner.”

(Ibid., 113)

Cress and Kimmerle believe that learning can be developed either by assimilation or accommodation. Depending on the tool used, knowledge building can occur internally or externally. Their model is based on McConnell’s view that online collaborative learning enables learners to reveal information and ideas not only to other learners, but also to themselves:

This making public’s work as a central process in cooperative learning and confirms its social and democratic nature. It can be thought of along several dimensions: our learning is public when it is known to others and ourselves; it is blind when it is known to others and ourselves; it is blind when it is known to others but not ourselves; it is hidden when it is known to ourselves but not to others; and it is unconscious when it is not known to ourselves or to others

(McConnell, 1994: 12)

Finally, collaborative learning may develop skills which are congruent with intercultural communicative competence, such as mediation, and openness:

“Collaboration is manifested in the actions as a learner takes when working with others and can be evidenced, for example, as a willingness to listen to others’ ideas, suggestions and opinions so that they can be discussed and integrated into further actions, such as decisions about how to complete a task”

(Beatty, 2003: 102)
2.4.6 Challenges in using new media

Despite clear positive effects, online tools may bring challenges to students and teachers, such as setting-up logistics, access to the Internet, computer literacy, appropriate language use, working as part of a group, project assessment, and plagiarism (Georgescu, 2010; Heafner and Friedman, 2008; Notari, 2006).

To start with, online intercultural communication involving bilateral cooperation (e.g., between two universities) may face complex project organisation. Finding a partner institution is difficult and time-consuming (Knight, 1994). Once a partner institution has been identified, the issue of common syllabi and matching academic calendars of may arise (Kinginger et al., 1999). Also, financial costs and technical problems (Internet connexion, availability and maintenance of computer laboratories, staff training and support) may be a hindrance (O’Dowd, 2000). Computer literacy and technophobia may be two problems as well. For that matter, Prensky describes the generation born at the end of the 20th century and afterwards as ‘digital natives’ as opposed to the individuals born before who are ‘digital immigrants’. He considers that digital natives are “native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet” (Prensky, 2001: 1). As a consequence, a number of today’s teachers may need to adapt to new needs from the students and may have to be trained accordingly.

This being said, the fact the new generation of students attending education at university level today are digital natives is disputed (Donaldson and Haggström, 2006). For this reason, it is advised that online projects are conducted by technology savvy instructors or at least with the support of qualified technicians. On top of this, it is recommended that the use of the online tool is well explained to learners (with a step-by-step manual, or links to online help pages), and facilitated by supervised hands-on sessions before the project officially starts (Lee, 2009). This project therefore included training sessions on how to use the various Internet tools required for the study (Section 5.2.2). Besides, learners using online collaborative tools may experience the “psychological distance” effect (O’Dowd, 2000: 51) which pertains to users having difficulty to interact naturally with technology. Taking the example of videoconferencing, O’Dowd explains that in spite of recent technological advances, and the quality of synchronous communication
provided by current online applications, online interaction may never mimic exactly face-to-face interaction.

Furthermore, one might wonder how trustworthy the content of a post or a message may be, considering the fact that online project content can be accessed and modified by anyone (anyone from the project or anyone from the Internet, depending on the selected access). In other words, how can vandalism or “flaming” (Lundin, 2008: 442; Warschauer, 1997: 473), which is the deleting of content, the posting of incorrect information, or can rude and hostile observations be avoided? Richardson (2005) shows that in a global wiki, like Wikipedia, a variety of errors posted online were corrected within several hours. The argument raised is that the majority of contributors are honest, and “the more people you have that can both read and edit the ‘open’ document, the more likely errors will be identified and corrected” (Butcher and Taylor, 2008: 36). In an educational online toll, these misuses can be prevented by using an application which imposes a password and a login, and therefore stop vandals from intervening (Richardson, 2005). This principle of limited access can easily be set up within virtual learning environments (e.g., Moodle, Blackboard or Sakai) which can supply all discussion forums, blogs and wikis. As well as this, the presence of a moderator/instructor to help control abusive users must not be underestimated. Indeed, teachers can introduce a ‘netiquette’ to users in order to avoid unpleasant comments or frustrations; for example:

1. Remember the tool is meant to be scholastic in nature. This means that you should try to avoid writing simple opinions – back up writing with sources and information. As well as entries should be spelling and grammar checked.
2. Delete and edit other entries with care. Only edit other people’s entries if you have something constructive to add that improves and/or expands the content.
3. Treat others, the content, and the comments of others with respect.
4. Refrain from using offensive or vulgar statements or images.
5. Workload should be shared as equally as possible.
6. Everyone is to contribute in some constructive way to all “sections”.

(Adapted from Butcher and Taylor, 2008: 39)

Another challenge is to familiarise students with the act of writing with others, that is what Notari (2006: 131) refers to as “communication and comment culture”: learners may experience difficulty reverting from the solitary process of writing to the collaborative process which requires them to comment, correct, agree or disagree in a
considerate manner with what other contributors wrote. Nonetheless, “this solitary perspective fades and is replaced with a greater sense of collective pride” (Butcher and Taylor, 2008: 40). Lastly, another major challenge for teachers is to assess the work that their students posted in a forum, blog or wiki. It is essential that the end product, but also the individual contributions, and the process are evaluated (Trentin, 2008). This involves the number of postings, their quality, and how/if the students communicated together. While the amount of postings seems straightforward to assess, the measurement of quality is more problematic. This is particularly true with the infringement of copyright law, or plagiarism. Mostly because of the ease with which one can copy and paste content, students may fail to acknowledge the work of others (Heafner and Friedman, 2008).

2.5 Conclusion

Chapter 2 explored how computer-assisted language learning and new media may assist the development of foreign language skills and may foster ICC. In order to do so, the development of CALL from tutor to tool and finally social environments was presented and analysed. Furthermore, this chapter has proven how it is now accepted that working with online technologies is an effective way to develop deep learning. Online participation enables students to be engaged in their learning process as opposed to passively receiving instruction, and learners do so within a social sphere under the supervision of their teacher or instructor (Heafner and Friedman: 2008). Also, it has been demonstrated that the characteristics of the three tools used in this research project correspond to some of the elements essential to a successful Community of Practice, including:

- a virtual presence, a variety of interactions, easy participation, valuable content, connections to a broader subject field, personal and community identity and interaction, democratic participation, and evolution over time.

(Parker and Chao, 2007: 58)

In light of the technological evolution we are faced with, Web 2.0 tools such as discussion forums, blogs, and wikis have the potential to provide quality in teaching. By their nature, these online tools are quite simple to use and enable the creation of a
Community of Practice where participants can learn from each other, and develop their learning skills (Butcher and Taylor, 2008; McLoughlin and Mynard, 2009; Shih-Hsien, 2009, Wickersham and Dooley, 2006). Yet, it also been stressed that challenges remain and successful use of new technologies predominantly lies in the hand of the teachers/instructors, and students’ motivation. Finally, the positive impact of social media counterbalances the difficulties that online participants may experience (Lundin, 2008; Warschauer, 1997). The next chapter will provide an investigation of research projects in the domain of CALL and intercultural communicative competence published in peer-reviewed academic journals from 2000 to 2012. This will reveal the contribution which this thesis makes to the literature.
CHAPTER 3 – Research on ICC and CALL: Situating the study

Multimedia technology can be extremely versatile, and consequently, CALL can take diverse shapes and forms. The most important principle to keep in mind with regard to CALL is that technology is a pedagogical tool—a medium—not an end in and of itself.

Dubreil (2006: 256)

3.1 – Introduction

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 introduced the key research areas dealt with in this doctoral thesis, namely ICC and CALL in a foreign language classroom context. Chapter 2 also presented secondary issues related to teaching and learning, that is to say motivation, and autonomy. This third chapter will present research on task design and advances to date as regard to projects which aimed at raising ICC awareness via the implementation of CALL technologies. It will also give evidence of the contribution which this research project brings to previously published papers combining ICC and CALL in an educational setting. Indeed, much work has been carried out involving the application of Internet tools or social media for the purpose of intercultural development, but much more may be learnt. It will also highlight the three innovative features brought to the research area from this research project conducted with language students of French in an Irish university, namely the location, the use of a language other than English, and the combination of tools. To summarise, Chapter 3 aims at situating this study in the context of current research relating to ICC and CALL (See also Table 3.4) rather than providing a critical review of past research projects.

This chapter is composed of two main sections. The first section reviews studies combining ICC and CALL published between January 2000 and June 2012 in relevant journals and academic works. The year 2000 was chosen as it marked the implementation and later publication of the breakthrough Cultura project (Furstenberg et al., 2001). It shows the evolution of Internet technologies in ICC research from the use of unique tools (e.g., e-mail, blog) to the variety of social media available today.
The characteristics of each of the case studies analysed for this chapter (research methods adopted, Internet technologies used, nature of tasks, languages in practice, and countries involved) are available in a summary table (Table 3.4). It also highlights the importance of task design and sequencing for optimal benefits in the foreign language classroom. The second section situates this doctoral study among previous research in ICC and CALL and focuses on (1) the languages in use, (2) the online tools implemented, and (3) the context in which telecollaboration projects may take place, from an ‘ideal’ class where L2 acquisition is the main objective and involves partners from international institutions to interaction between students in a standard language classroom from one single institution where participants are enrolled in various university courses.

### 3.2 – Previous research studies on CALL and ICC

#### 3.2.1 – Focusing on research from 2000 to 2012

Selecting the journals and articles

The research journals chosen for this review were selected from the list of references read and studied for the literary review of this thesis (Chapters 1 and 2). Further journals of relevance were identified by examining publications made by leading researchers in ICC and CALL (e.g., Belz, Furstenberg, Hauck, Helm, Liaw, Müller-Hartmann, O’Dowd, Thorne), and researching other journals which were deemed relevant to the area of interest (e.g., Ac-tice, Alsic). Moreover, book publications and special editions of journals which specialised in ICC and CALL and described research projects which had not been published from the already selected journals by June 2012 were added to the selection. The languages of the journals were English and French as the author does not read other languages fluently. The 16 journals reviewed for this chapter are (in alphabetical order):

- Ac-tice,
- Alsic,
- CALICO,
- Computer Assisted Language Learning,
The 6 books and journal special editions books reviewed for this chapter are (in alphabetical order):


Once the journals and books were identified, articles and chapters were selected according to a number of criteria: the papers had to combine both CALL and research on raising awareness or improving ICC. They also had to be published between January 2000 and June 2012 in order to provide a satisfactory overview of findings. Indeed, early manifestations of CALL research raising awareness of ICC rather than a static
culture came to the fore in the beginning of the 21st century. Papers discussing culture rather than ICC were discarded (e.g., Andrews, 2000). Attention was paid not to overlook articles or chapters which did not use the exact term “intercultural communicative competence” (e.g., Helm et al., 2012 who prefer the term “third space”; Liaw (2003) who examines “cross-cultural correspondence” and “critical reflection processes”; and Polisca (2011) who discusses “cultural sensitivity and reflection of one’s own culture”) but did tackle the issue as understood by the author and defined in Chapter 1. For this reason, papers were first selected from their titles and key words searches such as “intercultural competence”, “cross-cultural”, and “CALL”. Approximately 30 key words, including the list of terms referring to ICC described in Chapter 1 (Table 1.2), were used. Publications were also selected by reading abstracts carefully, and when needed, by scanning concisely the paper. The final selection comprises empirical studies (8 literature reviews were discarded, e.g., Guth and Helm, 2011b) within an educational context rather than projects carried out for other purposes such as business relations (e.g., Brett, 2000). No discrimination was made regarding the educational level (primary, secondary or third). In the end, 65 papers depicting a total of 71 empirical studies were identified and analysed further.

Figure 3.1 – Distribution of articles per source

Figure 3.1 shows the publication of papers per source, i.e. journals or books. It indicates that most empirical studies on intercultural communicative competence using computer-assisted language learning were published in Language Learning Journal (11 articles), Computer Assisted Language Learning (6 articles), The Foreign Language Annals (6
articles), and *Language and Intercultural Communication* (6 articles). *CALICO* also published six articles since the year 2000 (5 journal articles and 1 article from the 2006 special issue).

### 3.2.2 – Task design and sequencing: Matching the properties of social media with the course’s objectives

Using new media for language teaching and learning has many benefits including relative ease of use, flexibility in time and space, synchronous and asynchronous features and the option to work in isolation or in groups (Section 2.4). However, challenges still may be encountered: in addition to students’ motivation, the success of using social media in a foreign language classroom still relies on teachers’ ability to design and plan online tasks that are pedagogically pertinent (O’Dowd and Ware, 2009). Indeed, implementing new technologies for the sole purpose of following a trend has little relevance. It is important for instructors to carefully think about their course’s objectives and how the tasks and technologies may enable students to reach these aims (Dubreil, 2006) before they implement CALL technologies in their courses. A typology of tasks and examples of sequencing on which teacher may exploit are available in the literature (Chapelle, 2001; Hauck and Youngs, 2008; O’Dowd and Ware, 2009).

From analysing case studies on telecollaboration, O’Dowd and Ware (2009) identified twelve different online task types (Table 3.1) which fit into three main categories: (1) ‘information exchange tasks’, (2) ‘comparison and analysis tasks’, and (3) ‘collaborative tasks’. These three categories gradually lead learners from an ethnocentric stage to an ethnorelative stage (Bennett, 1993), that is through a progression of their intercultural sensitivity. The first category’s activities enable participants to introduce themselves by providing some personal background information to their partners (e.g., short biographies, pastimes, details about home culture). Information exchange tasks may be introduced merely for learners to get to know each other from the outset; they may also be used with the aim of raising intercultural awareness where negotiation of meaning and enlightening discussions can take place. The second task category develops the exchanges further as participants are put in situations where they have to consider both aspects of the target culture and of their own (e.g., films, songs newspaper articles). By making learners compare and
analyse these “cultural products” (O’Dowd and Ware, 2009: 275) instructors have the choice to focus either on the cultural dimensions of the documents (e.g., word connotations), concentrate on the linguistic characteristics or on both. With this task type, learners are required to mediate between two cultures. The third task category generally includes both cultural and linguistic levels and engage students in group work. Participants are asked to create a document together (e.g., an essay or a presentation) or a multimedia product (e.g., a website or powerpoint presentation). These collaborative tasks require a significant amount of interaction and mediation between partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task types</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Information exchange</td>
<td>Authoring ‘cultural autobiographies’</td>
<td>Establishment of personal relationship with partners/increased awareness of cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carrying out virtual interviews</td>
<td>Development of ICC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging in informal discussion</td>
<td>Learner independence/development of fluency in TL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exchanging story collections</td>
<td>Increased factual/cultural knowledge about C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Comparison and analysis</td>
<td>Comparing parallel texts</td>
<td>Increased awareness of target culture and one’s own culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparing class questionnaires</td>
<td>Development of awareness of different cultural meanings and connotations of words and concepts in C1 and C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysing cultural products</td>
<td>Greater awareness of target culture/one’s own culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translating</td>
<td>Improved language awareness/development of linguistic accuracy and fluency in TL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Collaboration and product creation</td>
<td>Collaborating on product creation</td>
<td>Development of ICC/electronic literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transforming text genres</td>
<td>Improved metalinguistic awareness/linguistic accuracy and fluency in TL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carrying out ‘closed outcome’ discussions</td>
<td>Negotiation of meaning/development of linguistic accuracy and fluency in TL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making cultural translations/adaptations</td>
<td>Development of ICC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This research project includes all three types of tasks. Students were asked to exchange information about themselves (task type 1) as well as compare and analyse cultural aspects noted in documents provided by the tutor and newspaper articles (task type 2) in the online discussion forum. In addition, participants had to keep a record of their learning experience when confronted with aspects of the target culture and express their reactions and reflect on them (task type 2) in their blogs, and were required to work in groups to create a definition of French culture (task type 3) with the wiki tool. The objectives of the tasks were to increase the students’ awareness of intercultural competence while developing their linguistic proficiency. The course which was already in existence before the introduction of social media focused on several targets: reading and analysing authentic newspapers articles, debating their content with other students, and presenting a point of view on the main topic dealt with in the document in a
structured manner. Details of the tasks and their sequencing are presented in Chapter 4 (Tables 4.16 and 4.18). As the online tools were a new addition to the course, the sequencing of the tasks was planned with careful consideration. The tasks’ sequence follows a gradual exposure to intercultural encounters as recommended by researchers (Belz, 2002; O’Dowd and Ware, 2009); it includes an ‘introduction phase’, a ‘comparative phase’ and concludes with a phase requiring an ‘intense level of negotiation’ (O’Dowd and Ware, 2009: 178-9). The task sequence also comprises a ‘familiarisation’ stage (Hauck and Youngs, 2008). In other words, learners attended hands-on training sessions where the discussion forum, blog and wiki were presented to them, and they were explained how the new media’s functions could be used in order to complete the course tasks. But participants were also accustomed to the online tools’ characteristics throughout the study with the aim to develop their “multimodal communicative competence” (Hauck and Youngs, 2008: 95; Royce, 2007: 92). Students were given the opportunity to develop their understanding of the new technologies’ potential and thus “be enabled to make a gradually more informed choice of certain modes for specific intercultural communication purposes” (Hauck and Youngs, 2008: 95) that they may engage in in the future. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section 1.4.2) intercultural communication in ‘the information age’ implies an extensive understanding of discourses and Internet communication modes.

**Table 3.2** – Chapelle’s original criteria for CALL task appropriateness (Chapelle, 2001: 55)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language learning potential:</th>
<th>The degree of opportunity present for the beneficial focus on form.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learner fit:</td>
<td>The amount of opportunity for engagement with language under appropriate conditions given learner characteristics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning focus:</td>
<td>The extent to which learners’ attention is directed toward the meaning of the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity:</td>
<td>The degree of correspondence between the CALL activity and target language activities of interest to learners out of the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive impact:</td>
<td>The positive effects of the CALL activity on those who participate in it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicality:</td>
<td>The adequacy of resources to support the use of the CALL activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the task categories aforementioned, online tasks for language learning and teaching may be considered according to another set of principles. Drawing on Chapelle’s criteria for CALL task appropriateness (2001: 55; Table 3.2), Hauck and
Youngs (2008) suggest practitioners to consider five categories when designing tasks: (1) ‘meaning focus’, (2) ‘beneficial focus on form’, (3) ‘learner fit and authenticity’, (4) ‘positive impact on participant’, and (5) ‘practicality’ or ‘adequacy of resources to support use of activity’.

In this research study, learners’ attention was partially directed towards discussing cultural differences and similarities. For example, the cultural value of words and their meaning were debated at an early stage in the online forum where the meaning of “tea” in Ireland and “thé” in France were compared (meaning focus). As regards to the language learning potential, participants were asked to interact in the target language in the forum and the wiki (beneficial focus on form). In addition, the tutor provided feedback on the grammar and lexicon used by students where common mistakes or misuses were indicated and alternatives were suggested. Furthermore, the topics of discussion were closely linked to the course curriculum; newspapers articles which were studied were taken from the Français oral tutorial in which all participants were enrolled (learner fit and authenticity) and the cultural debates derived from the content of these authentic texts which were deemed of interest for the target audience (young adults). The envisaged positive effects on participants were the enhancement of their ICC where learners would build on their existing cultural knowledge from personal reflection and collaborative work (positive impact). Another intended outcome was also the development of the students’ “multimodal communicative competence” (Hauck and Youngs, 2008: 95). Finally, the resources used to support the activities were principally images, videos and websites freely available online. Most of these resources were also made available on a “resources” section of the VLE. For instance, students used images which illustrated the weekly discussion forum topics to include them in their wiki task (practicality).

3.3 – The context of the research

This research thesis follows the main research methods implemented by empirical studies investigating the acquisition of ICC by students via online devices at post-secondary level. However, it is distinctive for (1) the language used and its geographical localisation, (2) the examination of specific Internet tools (a combination of discussion
forum, blog, and wiki) and (3) for the observation of interaction in a standard university setting.

The analysis of papers published between January 2000 and June 2012 reveals that action research is the most adopted method for evaluating the development of ICC in an educational setting. Figure 3.2 indicates that action research was implemented in 48 cases; among these 48 studies, four specified explicitly that participant observation took place (e.g., O’Dowd, 2007a). 14 papers depicted case studies and ethnographic approaches were used in four instances. 4 empirical studies used a mix of several methods, e.g., action research and ethnographic approach (Jin and Erben, 2007). Six studies\(^\text{12}\) did not explicitly specify their research methods. The research project described in this thesis employs both action research and case study characteristics. More details are provided in Chapter 4.

![Research methods](image)

Figure 3.2 – Research methods

Figure 3.3 shows that the majority of studies were carried out at university level with 64 cases. This is a certainly a direct consequence of researchers opting primarily for action research, i.e., where university practitioners observe their own students. Four cases studied secondary school participants, and two studies mixed university and secondary students. No published study took place at primary level. The research project described in this thesis involves participants enrolled in a university.

\(^{12}\) The six studies are identified in Table 3.4.
3.3.1 – Location and language(s) studied: The promotion of ICC through French in an Irish university setting

Table 3.3 indicates that the vast majority of studies published involved institutions based in Europe (72) and North America (45). 8 Asian institutions were involved; 7 were located in Central and South America, 4 in Australia and only 1 from Africa. Other countries involved were Palestine (1), Russia (1), and Turkey (1). On the national level, most case studies included institutions from the United States (40), followed by Germany (21), Spain (11), France (10), and the United Kingdom (10). Only three of the 71 case studies included Irish institutions (O’Dowd, 2007a; O’Sullivan et al., 2011; Vinagre, 2007). Two studies (Hanna and de Nooy, 2003; Furesa, 2009) have not been included in the geographical data as the exact locations where the research took place were not explicitly specified in the papers even though they could be inferred from the researchers’ affiliations.
As Figure 3.4 indicates, the first language of interaction exercised in the empirical studies was English, far ahead of any other languages with 63 cases. German and Spanish came in second position with 16 occurrences, followed by French (13), and Italian (6). The other research projects promoted the use of English as a lingua franca (2), Russian (2), Japanese (1), Mandarin (1), Polish (1), and Portuguese (1). Two papers did not explicitly specify the languages that were in use (Elola and Oskoz, 2008; Hamilton and Woodward-Kron (2010) and therefore were not included in the linguistic data.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Although, the information about the institutions inferred that the languages were likely to be Spanish and English for the former paper, and English for the latter.
This research deals with a study where participants were using French as a foreign language in an Irish institution in order to develop their ICC awareness. No other publication has focused on the Irish context yet, and as such this research project may bring new insights to the current literature or confirm previous findings from a different perspective. Indeed, past studies using French were carried out within institutions based in Belgium (Fisher et al., 2004), France (Lomicka, 2006; Hauck, 2007), Portugal and Spain (Araújo e Sá, de Carlo and Melo-Pfeiffer, 2010), the United Kingdom (Audras and Chanier, 2008), the United States (Thorne, 2003), and Senegal (Fisher et al., 2004). Furthermore, this doctoral study examines a unique combination of Internet devices for developing intercultural communicative competence.

### 3.3.2 – The variety of online tools: The combination of a discussion forum, a blog and a wiki

Figure 3.5 indicates that the most examined online tools for ICC acquisition were e-mails (25 cases) and discussion forums (25 cases); these two tools have proven longevity despite the appearance of relatively new media, e.g., wikis. Chat rooms came in third position with 18 cases. Videoconference tools which were once regarded as
expensive and highly technical media, in the first decade of the twenty-first century (O’Dowd, 2000), have become more accessible with the emergence of tools such as Skype (freely available) and Adobe Connect, and were used in 11 empirical studies. Blogs were used in nine cases, followed by multimodal virtual learning environments (7 cases), concordancers (2 cases), online dictionaries (2 cases), and wikis (2 cases). Other tools comprised podcasts (1 case), MOO (1 case), and DVD-ROM (1 case).

Figure 3.5 – Distribution of tools

Figure 3.6 shows that 2006-2007 were threshold years with publications depicting a wide range of tools: blog, chat, concordancer, dictionary, discussion forum, e-mail, and videoconference. Before 2006, papers concentrated on the implementation of e-mails, discussion forums, and chat rooms only. 19 publications had focused on the use of discussion forums. Moreover, as Figure 3.7 highlights, from January 2000 to June 2012, only seven empirical studies investigated the use of three online tools for developing intercultural communicative competence. 44 studies examined the impact of a single tool, 16 scrutinised the use of two tools, and one investigated the use of four tools (Lomicka, 2006). None of the 71 empirical studies combined a discussion forum, a blog and a wiki as were employed in this doctoral research project. In addition to providing a unique Irish perspective and exploring three Internet devices, this study examines intercultural exchanges occurring within one single institution.
Figure 3.6 – Published examination of tools over time

Figure 3.7 – Combination of tools
3.3.3 – The study context: The examination of a standard Higher Education setting

This thesis investigates how elements of social media may enhance the acquisition of ICC in a ‘self-contained’ environment, in other words within one institution. Indeed, participants were sourced from one university and interacted with fellow students who were enrolled in the same French programme of study within the same institution. As Figure 3.8 indicates, this type of ‘self-contained’ intercultural interactions is under-researched, as most empirical studies (95.5%) combined exchanges between two or more institutions. In 58 instances, the educational institutions were paired with other educational institutions, e.g., students of the University of Manchester working with students of the University of Cagliari (Polisca, 2011). In seven instances, educational institutions were collaborating with non-educational partners, e.g., university students discussing with a variety of native speakers of French in online forums (Hanna and de Nooy, 2003). Only two studies in the reviewed papers published between January 2000 and June 2012 examined how intercultural communication awareness may be developed with CALL within a single institution. The published researchers facilitated exchanges via chat rooms (Truscott and Morley, 2001) and discussion forums (Fratter and Helm, 2010) between university language students and Erasmus students who came to their respective institutions, i.e., the University of Manchester and the University of Padova. This doctoral dissertation goes further in the sense that it examines not only how ICC may be exercised within one institution, but in a standard language classroom composed of students from various nationalities (including Erasmus students) and various experiences with the target language. Although this may appear as a limiting setting in the context of ICC research, it is still the norm in a large number of classrooms. Besides, this type of ‘self-contained’ project may be considered as a first step for practitioners using CALL before moving on to inter-institutions projects.
Projects allowing inter-institutions partnerships are inspiring and extremely helpful for intercultural learning and teaching. The new opportunities offered by the continually expanding collection of social media tools which can be used to facilitate this learning/teaching process are even more fascinating to explore. This being said, there are few research studies scrutinizing language students’ interaction on a smaller scale being published. This type of project may be of great benefit to understand further students’ interactions when acquiring ICC. It may also appeal to practitioners who are reluctant to work with international partners and/or who are intimidated by the logistics and costs of such projects. Indeed, Chapter 2 showed the escalating interest in Internet technologies for the purpose of language teaching and learning. However, it may have given the inaccurate impression that all third-level teachers are enthusiastic CALL practitioners. In reality a number of language teachers may remain averse towards the idea of using Internet technologies (Egbert et al., 2002). There are undeniable challenges to overcome when undertaking international telecollaboration which are highlighted by researchers who have carried out such ventures (Belz, 2002; Belz and Müller-Hartmann, 2003; O’Dowd and Ritter, 2006; O’Dowd and Ware, 2009). For instance, local factors such as different academic calendars (Belz and Müller-Hartmann, 2003) or accreditation systems (O’Dowd and Ritter, 2006) may be a hindrance. Time difference, discrepancies in technological access (Thorne, 2003), and management cost may be other impediments, as well as the teacher cooperation which implies agreeing on the class objectives, tasks design and sequencing (O’Dowd and Ritter, 2006). On the
contrary, working within one institution may enable teachers to acquire more control over their project. More publications of non inter-institutional projects using ‘non-threatening’ CALL tools may convert hesitant practitioners to use Internet applications in their language classroom and maybe later opt for more complex international projects. As Egbert et al. (2002: 112) claim, one positive experience with computer technologies may be all it takes to overcome the technology-related difficulties listed above. Furthermore, the classroom setting allows for observation of the participants’ curiosity, which is a characteristic of intercultural communicative competence acquisition:

“Byram et al. (2002) suggest that, in an immersion context, it is possible to observe curiosity in students’ constant questions and desire to try new things. In a classroom situation, this attitude is evident in the desire to improvise language use or inquire about a textbook lesson or exercise.”

(Elola and Oskoz (2008: 457)

Also, the standard classroom setting, though artificial, is believed to provide a sheltered environment in which participants may feel more comfortable interacting and making mistakes, especially in the early stages of acquiring a new proficiency (Dubreil, 2006: 251-2). Finally, the idea of “intercultural citizenship” (Byram, 2008) does not merely imply travelling or interacting beyond borders, but also welcoming individuals from a different (sub)culture (international students, fellow classmates) in one’s community (or classroom in this project) and being able to debate in a respectful manner.

3.4 - Conclusion

This chapter explored research projects published over a twelve-year period, relating to the development of ICC in language classrooms via telecollaboration or Internet technologies. After emphasising the significance of task planning and listing the main characteristics of each studies, it showed that very little research in CALL and ICC tackle ‘easy’ to set-up projects, and mainly focus on relatively ambitious collaborations involving several institutions. Then, it identified gaps within the literature that the author’s research will attempt to address. Indeed, despite the seeming preference for publishing inter-institution projects, the author believes that there is room for smaller scale studies which can inform current and future practitioners of CALL about students’
interactions and ICC development in the language classroom. In addition to investigating ICC acquisition on a micro-level, i.e., one language classroom, this doctoral dissertation will examine the participants’ intercultural development through their learning of French as a foreign language. French only accounted for 18.3% of published case studies between January 2000 and June 2012. Furthermore, the setting is an Irish university, which was only the case in 3 of the 71 aforementioned studies. Last but not least, this research examines the combination of an online discussion forum, a blog and a wiki within one case study. Chapter 4 will present the methodology adopted in order to conduct this study in a professional and reliable manner.
Table 3.4 – Summary table of research papers published between January 2000 and June 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication year</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Research methods</th>
<th>Technology Used</th>
<th>Nature of activities / exchanges</th>
<th>Languages involved</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2000</td>
<td>Müller-Hartmann</td>
<td>Ethnographic approach</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Common reading of literary texts paired with reflective tasks, introduction, problem-solving activities, and negotiation of meaning.</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>20 unspecified secondary schools ‘in the Giessen area’ (Germany), the US and Canada.</td>
<td>Secondary school students: German students of English in Germany, US and Canadian students of German (Level: 11th and 12th grade high school classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 2000</td>
<td>O’Dowd</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Videoconferencing</td>
<td>Articulating and reflecting on image of home culture, contrasting it with target culture, cultural questionnaire completion, video creation, discussion about films.</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
<td>University of Léon (Spain) and University of Northern Michigan (USA)</td>
<td>University students: Spanish students of English and US students of Spanish (Level: Upper-intermediate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 2001</td>
<td>Furstenberg et al.</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Web-based project, discussion forum</td>
<td>Cultura project: Questionnaires completion (word association, sentence completion and situation reactions), observation, and comparison, exchange of viewpoints.</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA) and Institut National des Télécommunications (France)</td>
<td>(Undergraduate) University students: US students of French and French students of English (Level: Intermediate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 2001</td>
<td>Jogan et al.</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Interaction and reflection on student-generated themes of discussion (e.g., family, daily routine, pastimes) and reflective commentary about the e-mail exchange.</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
<td>University of Tarapaca (Chile) and Albright College in Reading, Pennsylvania (USA)</td>
<td>University students: US students of Spanish and Chilean students of English (Level: Advanced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 2001</td>
<td>Liaw and Johnson</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Open discussion on topics of familiarity (e.g., holidays, hometowns, school lives, family and hobbies), and feedback report about the online experience.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University (US), Northern Arizona University (US), University of Houston (US), and Tunghai University, Taichung (Taiwan)</td>
<td>University students: ‘Freshman’ Taiwanese students of EFL, US pre-service ESL teachers (Level: Unspecified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 2001</td>
<td>Truscott and Morley</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Discussion forum</td>
<td>Exploration of cultural conflicts depicted in a narrative and discussion.</td>
<td>(Mainly) English</td>
<td>University of Manchester (UK)</td>
<td>University students: English students learning French, Spanish, Italian or German, and Erasmus students from France, Spain, Italy and Germany learning English (Level: Upper intermediate / Advanced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 2002</td>
<td>Abrams</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Discussion forum</td>
<td>Questionnaires and cultural portfolio completion, Web exploration, Internet-mediated interviews.</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Unspecified: ‘A large Midwestern university’ in the USA</td>
<td>University students: US students of German and native German, Austrian and Swiss speakers online (Level: Intermediate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Communication Medium</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Belz</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail, synchronous chat, and Web-based information exchange</td>
<td>Creation of Web pages, common reading of literature and viewing of films, discussion and analysis of same</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Justus-Liebig-Universität (Germany) and Penn State University (USA)</td>
<td>(Undergraduate) University students: German students of English and US students of German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Belz</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Discussion of texts, Web biography and Website creation.</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Unspecified: A ‘public institution’ in the US and ‘University-level classes in Europe’ (France, Germany, Spain)</td>
<td>University students: Two Germans students of TESL and one US student of German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Belz and Müller-Hartmann</td>
<td>Self-reflective case study</td>
<td>E-mail, Chat</td>
<td>Discussion of topics arising from common reading of parallel texts, and creation of a website.</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Unspecified: A ‘medium-sized university in Germany’ and ‘a large public institution in the United States’</td>
<td>Student-teachers of English at elementary or secondary level based in Germany and students of German from a ‘large public institution’ in the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Hannah and de Nooy</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Le Monde Discussion Forum</td>
<td>Topical discussion on current affairs, generic online interaction.</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>University students: English and US students of French and native speakers of French online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Hertel</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Discussion about student-generated topics (e.g., family, hobbies, and daily life) and teacher-generated topics (e.g., holidays, current events, stereotypes).</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
<td>University of Léon (Spain) and King’s College (UK)</td>
<td>University students: US students of Spanish and Mexican students of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Liaw</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Discussion about interpersonal, social/cultural, pedagogical and language learning topics. Sharing of experience or expression of beliefs, evaluation of own thinking, comparison of thoughts, agreement on viewpoint or adjustment of thinking.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Tunghai University, Taichung (Taiwan) and University of Houston-Downtown (USA)</td>
<td>(Undergraduate) University students: Taiwanese students aiming to be EFL teachers and US pre-service teachers of Spanish and English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>O’Dowd</td>
<td>Ethnographic approach Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Reflection on cultural differences, text analysis and follow-up discussion, examination of connotations and the link between idioms and cultural values.</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
<td>University of Léon (Spain) and King’s College (UK)</td>
<td>(Undergraduate) University students: English students of Spanish and Spanish students of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>Case 1 - Case 2 - Case 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Thorne</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Chat E-mail Videoconference (without sound)</td>
<td>Case 1 - Discussion and questioning on various topics, discussion triggered by viewing of the film 'La Haine'. Case 2 – Reading of texts and viewing of same films, sharing of personal biographies, and discussion. Sharing their view about intercultural experience (Case study 2).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Fisher et al.</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Discussion and opinion sharing triggered by pictures (Friends TV series, rapper Eminem, sporting activities, 11 Sept.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Itakura</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Questioning ('intercultural survey') about chosen topics including love and marriage, family, consumption habits and university life. Project report submission.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Savignon and Rothmeier</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Discussion forum ('Bulletin board')</td>
<td>Discussion on four topics: The American dream, the death penalty, drinking and driving, and the Kosovo conflict.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Belz</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Discussion and opinion sharing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>O’Dowd</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Discussion forum</td>
<td>Relationship building with students’ biographies. Discussion on stereotypes (e.g., bull fighting in Spain, US politics).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Case frequencies:**
- Case 1: 1
- Case 2: 1
- Case 3: 0

**Institutions and Levels:**
- **Case 1:** University and secondary school students: US students of French (University) and French student (Lycée) of English Level: Unspecified (18-20 year-old)
- **Case 2:** University students: US students of French and French students of engineering Level: Unspecified (18-24 year-old)
- **Case 3:** University students: US students of French and researcher Level: Unspecified (18-24 year-old)

**Institutions:**
- **University of Cambridge (UK) and unspecified secondary schools in Belgium, England, France and Senegal.**
- **Hong Kong Polytechnic University (HK) and Kagoshima University (Japan).**
- **Unspecified: A 'Gymnasium' (Germany) and a Midwestern high school' (USA).**
- **University of León (Spain) and Barnard College (USA).**
- **University students of Spanish students of EFL and US students of Spanish Level: Advanced (Spanish students) and upper-intermediate (US students).**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Content Details</th>
<th>Language(s)</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Ware</td>
<td>Participatory research and teacher research</td>
<td>Discussion forum (‘asynchronous discussion’)</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Unspecified: Institution in ‘northeastern Germany’ and institution ‘in the southwestern United States’</td>
<td>University students: Students of English from Germany and students of German from the US</td>
<td>Level: Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Ware and Kramsch</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Discussion forum (‘asynchronous discussion’)</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Unspecified: A German university and an American university</td>
<td>University students: Students of English from Germany and students of German in the US</td>
<td>Level: Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Bauer et al.</td>
<td>Case study 1</td>
<td>Discussion forum</td>
<td>English, Russian</td>
<td>Brown University (USA) and An unspecified institution in Russia</td>
<td>(Undergraduate) university students: US students of Russian and Russian students of EFL</td>
<td>Level: 3rd and 5th semester course for US students (i.e., 260 hours) and 3-6 years at Secondary level + 2 years at university for Russian students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Keranen and Bayyurt</td>
<td>Ethnographic approach</td>
<td>Discussion forum</td>
<td>English as lingua franca</td>
<td>Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla (Mexico) and Bogazici University (Turkey)</td>
<td>(Undergraduate) University students: Mexican in service EFL teachers and Turkish pre-service EFL teachers</td>
<td>Level: Unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Liaw</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Discussion forum</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>National Taichung University (Taiwan) and Sam Houston State University (USA)</td>
<td>University students: Taiwanese students of EFL and US teacher-students of ESL/bilingual education</td>
<td>Level: ‘Freshman’ (Taiwanese students) and native (US students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Lomicka</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail, discussion forum, chat with videoconference Web magazine</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>University of South Carolina (USA) and Lycée Paul Héroult (France)</td>
<td>University and secondary school students: French students of English (lycée) and US students of French (University).</td>
<td>Level: Unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Action Research</td>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Institution 1</td>
<td>Institution 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>2006 Müller-Hartmann</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail Chat</td>
<td>Discussion of Byram’s (1997) text on intercultural communicative competence, and of parallel texts. Keeping of a portfolio. Reflection on collaborative experience, and presentation of analysis.</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg (Germany) and Pennsylvania State University (USA)</td>
<td>University students: Pre- and in-service student-teachers of English based in Germany and US in-service student-teachers of German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish, and PhD students in applied linguistics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>2006 O’Dowd</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Videoconference E-mail</td>
<td>Sensitisation to ethnographic interviewing. Intercultural e-mail correspondence and four videoconferences. Production of essays based on the exchanges.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Essen University (Germany) and University of Columbus (USA)</td>
<td>University students: Students of English based in Germany, and US students of Communication Studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>2006 O’Dowd and Ritter</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Virtual learning environment (Moodle)</td>
<td>Discussion on four topics: introduction of oneself, the Pope and the media, student life and typically German and typically Australian.</td>
<td>Unspecified (evidence of student texts written in English)</td>
<td>Essen University (Germany) and Macquarie University (Australia)</td>
<td>University students: Students of English from Germany and students of German from Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>2006 Schneider and von der Emde</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>MOO Chat Discussion forum</td>
<td>Discussion of news reports, documentary films. Writing of reflection pieces on various assigned readings on foreign language learning and intercultural learning.</td>
<td>English, German</td>
<td>Vassar College, NY (USA) and University of Münster (Germany)</td>
<td>University students: US students of German and German students of applied linguistics and English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>2007 Hauck</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Creation of collaborative blogs. Publication of information about immediate and wider environments (e.g., student accommodation, home, leisure activities), commenting on cultural differences and similarities, reflection on the experience.</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>The Open University (UK) and the Université de Franche Comté (France)</td>
<td>University students: students of French from various nationalities based in the US and UK with native French speakers/students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>2007 Hauck and Lewis</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Introducing oneself, presentation of immediate (home) and wider environments (leisure activities), socialising, and submitting evaluation of the project.</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>Open University (UK), Carnegie Mellon University (USA), and Université de Franche Comté (France)</td>
<td>University students: learners of French from the UK, students of French in the US, and French native students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Data Collection Tools</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>University/Location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Jin and Erben</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Participant observation, Ethnographic approach</td>
<td>Chinese, English</td>
<td>unspecified University in the southeastern US</td>
<td>University students: US students of Chinese and native speakers of Chinese with a minimum of 5-year stay in the US. Level: Entry level (US students) and native (Chinese participants with an advanced level of English)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Discussion forum, Online dictionary, Online concordancer</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Unspecified University in Taiwan and Sam Houston State University (USA)</td>
<td>University students: US prospective EFL/bilingual education and ('Freshman') Taiwanese computer engineers. Level: 6 years of English instruction in secondary school Taiwanese students) and native (US students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007a</td>
<td>O'Dowd</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Participant observation, E-mail, Discussion forum, Online content materials, E-mail, Video-conference</td>
<td>Unspecified (evidence of texts written in English)</td>
<td>University of Duisburg-Essen (Germany), Clemson (USA) and University of Michigan (USA)</td>
<td>University students: German students of EFL and US students of German. Level: Lower-advanced (19-20 year-olds)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Suárez García and Crapotta</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Web-based project, discussion forum</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
<td>Barnard College (USA) and University of Léon (Spain)</td>
<td>University students: US students enrolled in an intermediate Spanish course, and Spanish students majoring in English philology. Level: Intermediate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Tudini</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Chat with one-to-one option</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>University of South Australia, Adelaide (Australia)</td>
<td>University students: Australian students of Italian and native speakers of Italian. Level: Intermediate (Australian students) and native (Italian)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Action Research</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Vinagre</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Writing introductory messages about oneself and interests, discussing stereotypical beliefs about both countries, comparing youth in Spain and Ireland, discussing specific films.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Nebrija University (Spain) and Trinity College Dublin (Ireland)</td>
<td>University students: Specialist learners of English in Spain and non-specialist learners of Spanish in Ireland. Level: intermediate (Irish students) and advanced (Spanish students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Audras and Chanier</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Blog Video-chat</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Carnegie Mellon University (USA), the Open University (UK), Université de France-Comté (France) and University of Geneva (Switzerland)</td>
<td>University students: US students, UK students and French students. Level: Intermediate to advanced (UK and French students) and intermediate (US students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Diehl and Prins</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Second Life Chat</td>
<td>N/A but multiple (English, French)</td>
<td>N/A Second Life</td>
<td>Second Life users living in the USA, Portugal, UK, Spain, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Guadeloupe, The Netherlands, Slovakia and Ukraine. Level: N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Elola and Oskoz</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Discussion of cultural topics (e.g., shopping practices, pop culture, the elderly). Study abroad students presented their direct observations. ‘Home’ students reflected on the observations. Cultural topics were then discussed.</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>A ‘large southwest university and a mid-size Atlantic-coast university’ (US) and a University in Seville (Spain)</td>
<td>University students: US students of Spanish based in their home university and US students of Spanish on their study-abroad programme (in Spain). Level: Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Hauck and Youngs</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Creation of collaborative blogs. Publication of information about immediate and wider environments (e.g., student accommodation, home, leisure activities), commenting on cultural differences and similarities, reflection on the experience.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Carnegie Mellon University (USA) and the Open University (UK)</td>
<td>University students: students of French from various nationalities based in the US and UK with native French speakers/students. Level: Beginner to advanced (students in US and UK) and native (French students – advanced level of English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Schuetze</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Discussion about a range of chosen topics (e.g., Football World Cup 1954, German holidays, the forest in British Columbia) and reaction from radio reports.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>University of British Columbia (Canada) and University of Kiel (Germany)</td>
<td>University students: Canadian (NS) students of German and German (NS) students of English. Level: Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Furcsa</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>University students: Hungarian learners of English (to become teachers) and US students of various undergraduate degrees. Level: Pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate (Hungarian students) and native (US students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Helm</td>
<td>Confronti project based on the Cultura model</td>
<td>English, Italian</td>
<td>The University of Padova (Italy) and the University of Pennsylvania (USA)</td>
<td>University students: Two groups of Italian students of English majoring in Modern Foreign Languages and Culture with US students. Level: Unspecified (second-year)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Blog Podcast Discussion forum</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
<td>Unspecified: A ‘northeast US University’ and ‘a university in the northern part of Spain’</td>
<td>University students: US students of Spanish among which first-year teaching assistants and secondary school teachers and Spanish students of English. Level: Advanced and native speaker of Spanish (US students) and advanced (Spanish students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Menard-Warwick</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>University of California Davis (US) and Universidad de Tarapacá (Chile)</td>
<td>University students: US students of Linguistics and Education who had teaching experience of EFL or intended to become English teachers, and Chilean students of EFL. Level: Unspecified (probably advanced)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>O’Dowd, Ware</td>
<td>Case study 1</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
<td>A University in Spain and a North-American University</td>
<td>University students: EFL students of English Philology in Spain and students of Spanish in the US. Level: C1 of the Common European Framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Case study 2</td>
<td>English, Spanish</td>
<td>A North-American University and a University in Northern Chile</td>
<td>University students: students in the US taking a third-year Spanish conversation class and students in Chile taking third-year applied English grammar class. Level: Unspecified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Platform/Tool</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Araújo e Sa, de Carlo and Melo-Pfeifer</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Galanet platform (Romance languages) Chat</td>
<td>Intercultural questioning under the theme ‘Play and humour in Romance languages’.</td>
<td>French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish</td>
<td>Université Stendhal, Grenoble 3 (France), Universidade de Aveiro (Portugal), Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona (Spain), Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain), Université de Caxino (Italy), Université Lumière Lyon 2 (France), and Université de Mons-Hainault (Belgium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Fratter and Helm</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>Construction of a website about ‘university life for Erasmus students coming to Padova and Italian students going to study abroad’</td>
<td>English, German, Italian</td>
<td>Padova University (Italy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Genet</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Soliya.net Discussion forum Blog</td>
<td>‘Soliya Connect Program’ Discussion of articles, blog keeping and commenting, video editing, and small group project.</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Informatique et Mathématiques Appliquées - ENSIMAG, (France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Guth and Marini-Maio</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Video-conference (Skype) Wiki</td>
<td>Writing personal introductions, ‘developing a wiki page providing information for foreign students’.</td>
<td>English, Italian</td>
<td>University of Padova (Italy), Dickinson College (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Hamilton and Woodward-Kron</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>DVD-ROM</td>
<td>Viewing of videotaped interviews and simulations of health-relation interactions in Australia. Reflection about own “learning experience and the influence of own cultural backgrounds on learning and communicating in health and sciences courses”.</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>University of Melbourne (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Platform/Tool</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Jauregi and Bañados</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>‘Adobe Connect’ Video-conference Blog</td>
<td>Interviewing partners, sharing views and discussing stereotypes, reviewing interviews, discussing student life, presenting books of respective countries. Spanish Untrecht University (The Netherlands), University of Concepción (Spain) University students: Dutch learners of Spanish as a Foreign Language, and pre-service teachers of Spanish as L1 from Chili Level: B2 Advanced Spanish (Dutch students) and unspecified (Chilean students).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>King</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Discussion Forum Chat</td>
<td>‘CrossCall Project’: Personal homepage creation, interviewing and discussion on specific topics English German Russian Spanish University College London (UK) and three unspecified secondary schools Secondary schools and University students: pupils learning Spanish, Russian and German, and undergraduates studying Russian as an L2, and native Spanish and German speakers studying in London. Level of pupils: AS Spanish, GCSE/A level Russian and A/ AS level German,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Liaw and Bunn-Le Master</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Discussion forum Chat</td>
<td>Reading of articles related to lifestyles, society, economy and cultures of Taiwan, and discussion about the two articles. English National Taichung University, Taichung City (Taiwan) and Sam Houston State University, Texas (USA) University students: Taiwanese students of EFL and US prospective EFL/bilingual education. Level: ‘Freshman’ Taiwanese students and native (US students)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Chun</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Discussion forum Chat</td>
<td>Completion of word association questionnaires (Cultura) as basis for discussion. Chat about the interaction. English German Unspecified: A 'large state university in the western US' and 'a university in northern Germany' University students: students of German in the US and students of English in Germany. Level: Unspecified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>2011a</td>
<td>Guth and Helm</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Videoconference (Skype) Wiki</td>
<td>Introducing oneself on a personal wiki page. Interviewing partner with Skype. Reading and summarising of newspaper articles, and discussing same. Creation of a digital collage representing a global citizen / intercultural communicator. English as a lingua franca Unspecified: A 'university in Germany' and 'a university in Italy' University students: teacher trainees of EFL based in German and undergraduate students of EFL based in Italy. Level: Unspecified.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>O’Sullivan et al.</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>Diary keeping and task-focused discussion. English German Trinity College Dublin (Ireland), University of Hildesheim (Germany) and University of Vienna (Austria) University students: students of German based in Ireland and students of English based in Germany or Austria. Level: Unspecified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Polisca</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Videoconference (Skype)</td>
<td>Task-based discussion on various topics including food, education, traditions, and folklore. Unspecified (evidence of texts written in English) University of Manchester (UK) and the University of Cagliari (Italy) University students: UK students of Italian and Italian students of Politics, Business and Economics with an English component. Level: A2, B1 and C1 (CEF) in L2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Discourse and Reflection</td>
<td>Language(s)</td>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Stickler and Emke</td>
<td>Ethnographic observation</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Discussion and reflection on various topics based on the e-tandem interactions.</td>
<td>English, German, Italian, Polish</td>
<td>Unspecified institutions in England, Germany, Italy and Poland</td>
<td>Adult learners from university and language centres based in Germany, UK, Italy and Poland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Helm et al.</td>
<td>Unspecified but both emic and etic perspectives were used</td>
<td>(Solyia Connect Program) Videoconference</td>
<td>Reading and discussion of topics of the Arab and Muslim world and the Western world.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Hebron University (Palestine) and the University of Padova (Italy)</td>
<td>University students: Students of EFL based in Palestine and students of EFL based in Italy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Creation and keeping of three blogs: a personal blog including own observations; a class blog where observation were posted after specific reading and ethnographic interviews were carried out; and a project blog where information was compiled and shared.</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>University of Granada (Spain)</td>
<td>(Undergraduate) University students: US students on their study abroad programme in Spain. Level: Intermediate (3 years of Spanish in secondary school and 1 full year in college)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Schenker</td>
<td>Action research</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>Discussion on various topics including stereotypes, popular culture, the portrayal of the target culture in media and school.</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Unspecified: ‘A large Midwestern university in the United States’ and ‘a small high school in central Germany’</td>
<td>University and secondary school students: US students of German (University) and German students of EFL (Secondary school). Level: Unspecified for US students and advanced for German students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4 – Research questions and methodology

*Action research* - Teachers become more effective when they are encouraged to examine and assess their own work and they consider ways of working differently.

Ferrance (2000: 1)

4.1 – Introduction

Chapter 4 describes the planning of the research methodology employed in the study. Indeed, conducting an academic research project requires some knowledge about the traditions of enquiry and implies respecting a number of quality standards. This chapter describes the process through which I went as researcher and teacher, and the decisions made to build a solid and unbiased project. The chapter is divided into four parts examining the research paradigms which influenced the choice of methods of inquiry, as well as presenting the selection of the data collection methods, and an illustration of the study timeline. The first section offers an informative analysis of the qualitative and quantitative paradigms by detailing the five philosophical assumptions which characterise them. It also considers the mixed methods paradigm which frames this study. The second part depicts the methodology design and the relevance to the research questions. More particularly, it explains why the study is adopting both elements of action research and case study research, how the population was sampled, and what ethical considerations were raised due to the dual position of the researcher as both practitioner and main inquirer. The second part also questions the validity of a control group and explains why one was not used in this research, discusses on what grounds the social media selected for the study were decided upon, and the choice of the language of interaction within the discussion forum, blog and wiki. The third part lists the various data collection methods used in order to obtain extensive and reliable information, namely questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, participants’ online entries and reports, along with statistics on students’ usage of the VLE. Finally, Chapter 4 concludes with a timeline of the pilot project and main study, outlining the tasks completed by students and the topics discussed.
4.2 – Research inquiry traditions

This section depicts the various traditions of enquiry which inform this study, namely the quantitative or rationalistic paradigm, the qualitative or naturalistic paradigm, and the mixed methods paradigm. To begin, what each of these paradigms implies in terms of methods to “understand the meaning of human action” (Schwandt, 2007: 248) will be explained by distinguishing the paradigms as ideal types, and the five philosophical assumptions which guide them will also be described. Further to this, it will be clarified why I have opted for a mixed method approach with a predominance of qualitative research characteristics in order to depict the participants’ subjective view of their experience using social media to enhance ICC and illuminate the findings with more objective data.

4.2.1 – Quantitative versus qualitative: Understanding the dichotomy

A clear difference between qualitative methodology and quantitative methodology relies on the type of data that is collected for the purpose of the study. Indeed, researchers often classify quantitative data as “numeric data”, and qualitative data as “non-numeric data in the form of words” (Schwandt, 2007: 248). However, this view is often considered as too simplistic (Rolfe: 2006: 305), and additional divergences have been brought forward to reveal other distinctions between the two traditions of inquiry. The research literature (Creswell, 2007; Guba, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1988) identifies five characteristics or philosophical assumptions which are still recognised in the first decade of the twenty-first century: “ontology”, “epistemology”, “axiology”, “rhetoric” and “methodology”. 
4.2.1.1 – Five philosophical assumptions

The five philosophical assumptions provide guidelines to researchers on how to conduct their study: “researchers approach their studies with a certain paradigm or worldview, a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their inquiries” (Creswell, 2007: 74). These assumptions are based upon the nature of the ‘knowable’ reality (ontological feature), the relationship between the inquirer and the one being researched (epistemological feature), the role of values (axiological feature), the type of research language (rhetorical feature), and the way the researcher inquirer goes about finding out knowledge (methodological feature) (Creswell, 2007: 75; Guba, 1990: 18).

Ontological assumption: The nature of reality

The quantitative paradigm is based on positivism (Sale et al., 2002: 44), where reality exists independently from human mental constructions: “There is an independently existing world of subjective reality that has a determinate nature that can be discovered” (Schwandt, 2001: 176). On the contrary, the qualitative paradigm is based on interpretivism (Altheide and Johnson, 1994, Sale et al., 2002: 45), and constructivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative researchers believe that reality is the product of human mental constructions resulting from interpretations of the social world: individuals perceive reality through “a pair of conceptual glasses” that are tinted according to their past experiences and values (Holt, 2002: 264). As a consequence, multiple constructed realities may exist (Leedy, 1997: 109). In brief, reality is subjective or constructed because it is seen through our perceptions (Wallace, 1998: 38-9). For this reason, effective research requires researchers to get mentally close to the researched participants in order to understand their viewpoint. This can be achieved with an extended period of observation in situ (e.g., immersion in a culture as in anthropology or investigation of classroom practices as in action-research). In practice, qualitative researchers may communicate the participants’ subjective reality by using “extensive quotes and themes in words of participants, and providing evidence of different perspectives on each theme” (Creswell, 2007: 76).
**Epistemological assumption: The relationship between the researcher and the researched**

On the epistemological level, quantitative researchers remain distant from those being researched, whereas qualitative researchers attempt to reach closeness with their participants. Indeed, quantitative researchers come to know about the social world through observation of an objective reality, and as such take a distant stance from the researched to avoid interference. One can picture this with the image of the inquirer observing an occurrence from behind a tinted mirror: “inquiry takes place as through a one way mirror” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 110). On the other hand, qualitative researchers collaborate and spend time in the field with participants, in short, they become “insiders”. As a consequence, qualitative researchers try to minimise the “distance” or “objectives separateness” (Guba and Lincoln, 1988: 94) between themselves and the individuals being researched.

**Axiological assumption: The role of values in research**

In the quantitative paradigm, it is believed that reality can be measured objectively: researchers do not interfere in the objective data collected, and their personal values do not intrude on the research process. The reader shall be reminded here, that this total objectivity is viewed as an ideal principle in the rationalistic tradition of inquiry. In the qualitative paradigm, however, biases are acknowledged as being present, and individuals may be affected by the experience of being researched. It is therefore the duty of researchers to minimise this effect by trying to be as unobtrusive as possible, by including reflexivity, and by allowing for transparency (Creswell, 2007: 76). Researchers can exercise reflexivity and transparency by identifying and reporting the prejudices or assumptions that they may have, and thus let readers judge for themselves whether these factors had an effect on the research conclusions.

**Rhetorical assumption: Methodological terms and level of formality**

As a direct consequence of the differing ontological, epistemological, and axiological approaches, quantitative and qualitative researchers tend to report their findings using dissimilar terms and level of formality. In the effort to be objective, quantitative
accounts are inclined to be impersonal and formal while qualitative researchers employ a more personal and informal language such as the use of the first-person pronoun, and an engaging literary style of narrative such as metaphors (Creswell, 2007: 77). Also, unlike quantitative researchers it is not unusual for qualitative researchers to make use of new terms based on concepts and phenomena which have presented themselves during the study to describe patterns or explain new frameworks. This being said, both paradigms have their own set of methodological terms. For instance, ‘generalisability’ and ‘internal validity’ are quantitative terms which would not appear in qualitative reports; qualitative terms such as ‘confirmability’ or ‘credibility’ would be favoured instead (Seale: 2002: 104-5).

**Methodological assumption: The process of data collection**

In the quantitative paradigm, the data collection methods are selected to maintain objectivity whereas qualitative modes of data collection seek to capture multiple realities. Quantitative methodology is deductive and produces results which can be converted into numerical data and statistically analysed; qualitative methodology on the other hand is inductive, and produces theories expressed as narratives and models (Leedy, 1997: 104-5). As Becker (1996: 66) states, quantitative researchers concentrate on *a priori* chosen procedures to be followed and test an hypothesis or a theory, whereas qualitative researchers are more flexible in their approach: they focus on questions to be answered, in other words, start with interrogations, carry on their investigation, and come up with new theories or confirm previous ones. Finally, quantitative data analysis produces results which may be statistically generalisable while qualitative data analysis may result in generalisation of theories.

**4.2.1.2 - The emergence of mixed methods**

As stated before, the dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative research is accentuated by the fact that both paradigms are depicted as ideal types, in other words exaggerated to some extent: “[…] paradigms are human constructions, and hence subject to all the errors and foibles that inevitably accompany human endeavours” (Guba, 1990: 19). Furthermore, there is a shared belief that emphasising the divide
between the two research methods may be outworn (Becker, 1996: 66; Pavlidou, 2011: 91) as the genres are “interbreeding” (Pavlidou, 2011: 92) and letting the concept of mixed methods emerge. The “paradigm wars” (Gage, 1989) which have divided researchers who swore by either one or the other have no reason to be any more. According to Wallace (1998: 38), quantitative data can reveal aspects of qualitative findings that were not obvious before, and “there need [be] no real opposition or contradiction between the two approaches. This view is also shared by more recent publications (Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin, 2008; Gorard and Smith, 2006) which state that mixed methods research is “a research paradigm whose time has come” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Now that light has been shed on the two traditions of inquiry, and the mixed methods approach, a decision had to be made as to which one is more suitable for the purpose of this study. Recent studies (Deardorff, 2006: 241) involving the participation of experts in intercultural communicative competence show that the optimum way to evaluate the acquisition of ICC is “through a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures […]. Specifically, cases studies and interviews […] followed by analysis of narrative diaries, self-report instruments, [and] observation”. This is why this research study is using a mix of the two approaches, but is predominantly qualitative, as it is guided by questions to be answered, and seeks to understand participants’ perceptions of the use of social media for acquiring awareness of ICC, in other words obtaining in-depth understanding of the ‘humanistic paradigm’ (Edge and Richards, 1998: 336). Some of the underlying questions of this doctoral project are to identify which social media are better suited for enhancing ICC, how students react to and interact with social media for enhancing ICC, what motivates students when using social media for ICC acquisition, and finding out what can be learnt from this research.

4.2.2 – The qualitative approach: Applying standards of quality

Once it has been decided to predominantly adopt the qualitative research methodology, it is important to take note of the tradition and standards to follow in order to conduct a trustworthy research project and communicate results of high-reliability. Four standards have been recognised by the research community (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Seale,
2002) to do qualitative research. These four standards draw upon the four standards of quality in quantitative research:

1. **Truth value**: How can one establish confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?

2. **Applicability**: How can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents)?

3. **Consistency**: How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?

4. **Neutrality**: How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer?

Seale (2002: 104)

In response to these standards of the quantitative tradition, equivalent terms more suitable to the qualitative researchers have been put forward. ‘Credibility’ is suggested to replace the term ‘truth value’, and ‘transferability’ is used instead of ‘applicability’. ‘Dependability’ is the third criterion, and ‘confirmability’ the fourth qualitative research standard (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). But more important than simply refining terms, these four standards determine the means to obtain compelling and reliable research projects. Credibility can be acquired in a number of ways: firstly through “a prolonged engagement in the field and persistent observation” (Seale, 2002: 314), in other words, by a familiarisation with the environment in which the study is conducted over a determined period of time. Indeed, when data are being collecting over long periods, the researcher is “in a better position to distinguish situational perceptions from more constituent trends” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000: 139).

In the case of this doctoral study, the length of the engagement in the field was over three academic semesters in a foreign language classroom context. As the teacher of the participating students and main investigator of the research, I held a privileged position enabling me to observe closely the interactions taking place. Secondly, exercising triangulation (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) helps build up credibility. How triangulation was implemented in this study is illustrated in Section 4.4. Other credibility boosters are submitting the ongoing research work to neutral peer reviewers, and including deviant cases (Seale, 1999: 79-80). When analysing data comprehensively, researchers may find
out that what initially appeared as anomalies may in fact strengthen a theory. Finally, member checks, also called respondents’ validation, which consists of showing early results such as interviews transcripts or research reports to the participants of the study is often seen as a decisive practice to establish credibility (Seale, 2002: 314). In this way, the researched individuals are given an opportunity to check, agree or disagree, with the way the researcher understood the observed phenomena. Member checks were applied in this study by submitting early data analysis obtained from two questionnaires and two semi-structured interviews to the students who were investigated in the research project, and by asking them if they thought that these findings were accurately depicting their experience (see Section 5.6). This being said, some experts believe that triangulation and member checks are flawed (Silverman: 2005: 212), and suggest instead the deviant-case analysis as described above, and the refutability principle to guaranty research credibility. The refutability principle is one solution to the problem of anecdotalism [and consists of] qualitative researchers to seek to refute their initial assumptions about their data in order to achieve objectivity […] We must overcome the temptation to jump to easy conclusions just because there is some evidence that seems to lead in an interesting direction. Instead, we must subject this evidence to every possible test. […] Then, only if we cannot refute the existence of a certain relationship are we in a position to speak about ‘objective’ knowledge. (Silverman: 2010: 278-9)

Particular attention of the risk of anecdotalism was paid throughout the research process, and theories were tested thoroughly, particularly during the data analysis, before publishing them. For instance, a journal was kept during the data collection which helped remaining aware of any biases that may have occurred, and it was consulted as part of the data analysis. Transferability, the second criteria for validity, is achieved when researchers provide sufficient information about the study context so that other researchers may replicate the study or transfer findings to similar contexts. For instance, a university foreign language teacher willing to use social media for enhancing ICC might be interested to learn from and apply the guidelines of a research study involving the same age group with similar technologies. Dependability can be achieved by an ‘auditing’ procedure carried out by experts examining researchers’ “data, methods and decisions made during a project, as well as its end product” (Seale, 2002: 105). In the full process of a doctoral thesis, this is typically done by the researcher’s supervisors, peer reviewers of publication, the examination board, and the
panel of the *Viva Voce*. Finally, confirmability may also be achieved through auditing, as this exercise requires researchers to reflect on their work, and provide “a methodologically self-critical account of how the research was done” (Seale: 2002: 105).

### 4.3 – Methodology design and relevance to research questions

This section describes the considerations that were undertaken to decide on the methods of enquiry which frame this study, namely the combination of action research and case study. It also shows the process I went through to determine the sampling strategies; my role as researcher and practitioner and the ethics issues this dual position raises; the reasons why it was decided not to use a control group; the motivation behind the selection of social media used in this project, and the language of interaction within these Internet tools.

#### 4.3.1 – Selecting the method of inquiry

Several qualitative approaches to inquiry were studied before deciding which method(s) would be more suitable for the study: narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and action research. Based on six characteristics depicted in Table 4.1, it was decided to conduct an action research project combined with some features of case study research.

#### 4.3.1.1 – Action research

Action research can be defined as “the systematic collection and analysis of data relating to the improvement of some aspect of professional practice” (Wallace, 1998: 1), which adopts a reflective cycle composed of “planning, acting, observing, and reflecting … and then re-planning, further implementation, observing and reflecting” (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 347). Researchers recognise that the two key characteristics of action research are that it is firstly conducted by practitioners, and secondly is aimed at improving
practice (Cohen et al., 2011: 344; McNiff, 2002). The first characteristic relates to the fact that the research project is carried out by individuals who are not only “outside researchers” (Nunan, 1992: 17) but who are involved in the observed study. In this doctoral research, I was both the researcher and the teacher implementing new teaching technologies (social media) in the curriculum for the purpose of enhancing students’ awareness of intercultural communicative competence. The second characteristic – seeking action – involves evaluating results, and identifying problems encountered in the course of practice, in other words learning about the practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). These measures are followed by the introduction of changes and further reflective analysis of results. Accordingly, this doctoral research study implemented action during a 12 week-pilot project, results were subsequently analysed, and changes were applied for the purpose of the main study and also evaluated. Besides, changes were also implemented at key stages during the main study. Furthermore, some researchers argue that action research is also collaborative in nature (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; Cohen et al., 2011). This view however is not universally shared. Nunan explains that while collaboration is highly appropriate, it should not be a requisite; practitioners who are not conducting collaborative research but do seek to improve practice may be considered as action researchers (Nunan, 1992: 18). I conducted this doctoral study on my own as teacher and principal investigator – under the guidance of two supervisors – but results were shared with colleagues and other practitioners at national and international conferences. Indeed, Ferrance adds that conducting action research may be beneficial for teachers as the process encourages them “to examine and assess their own work and [...] consider ways of working differently” (2000: 1). Sharing teaching practices publicly at conferences is one way to achieve this.
Table 4.1 – Contrasting characteristics of six qualitative approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Narrative research</th>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Grounded theory</th>
<th>Ethnography</th>
<th>Case study</th>
<th>Action research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Exploring the life of an individual</td>
<td>Understanding the essence of the experience</td>
<td>Developing a theory grounded in the data from the field</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group</td>
<td>Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases</td>
<td>Solving a problem or achieving a goal in current practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of problem best suited for design</strong></td>
<td>Needing to tell stories of individual experiences</td>
<td>Needing to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon</td>
<td>Grounding a theory in the views of participants</td>
<td>Describing and interpreting the shared patterns of culture of a group</td>
<td>Providing an in-depth understanding of a case or cases</td>
<td>Providing teachers an opportunity for personal examination and generation of theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discipline background</strong></td>
<td>Drawing from the humanities (anthropology, literature, history, psychology, and sociology)</td>
<td>Drawing from philosophy, psychology, and education</td>
<td>Drawing from sociology</td>
<td>Drawing from anthropology and sociology</td>
<td>Drawing from psychology, law, political science, medicine, and education</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit of analysis</strong></td>
<td>Studying one or more individuals</td>
<td>Studying several individuals that have shared the experience</td>
<td>Studying a process, action, or interaction involving many individuals</td>
<td>Studying a group that shares the same culture</td>
<td>Studying an event, a program, an activity, more than one individual</td>
<td>Studying a small group of students/clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central question</strong></td>
<td>What is the meaning of this experience for these people?</td>
<td>What theoretical constructs, themes, and patterns are evidenced in the data?</td>
<td>What is the culture of this group of people?</td>
<td>What are the characteristics of the phenomenon?</td>
<td>What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current practice?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table adapted from Creswell (2007), Leedy (1997), Cohen et al. (2011), Wallace (1998), and Gall et al. (2007).*
Other features are indicative of action research. For instance this type of enquiry is typical of a small research sample at a micro level (Cohen et al., 2011: 345) and as such makes little use of statistics, and does not aim at being prescriptive (Nunan, 1992: 18). Instead it seeks to create knowledge about practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 5) which can be of use for other practitioners:

[...] action research is primarily an approach relating to individual or small group professional development, the generalisability of the findings to other contexts will not in most cases be of primary importance. The important thing is that the process involved are helpful to the practising, teacher’s reflection, irrespective of whether they can be verified by someone else.

(Wallace, 1998: 17-18)

For these reasons, action research is a popular research method in educational contexts for classroom investigation (Cohen et al., 2011: 344; Ferrance, 2000: 1). As McNiff and Whitehead state, action research implies educational improvement with a specific research question at the centre of the project, a close relationship between the observer (teacher) and the observed (participants), as well as an informed and intentional action (2010: 34). Benson states that in action research, participants can be made aware of the research objectives (as opposed to ethnography or experimental research for instance): “[Action research] does not necessarily require the “subjects” of the research to be kept in the dark about the researcher’s purposes (2001: 183). In this study, the main subject areas of the research project were disclosed to all participants with a letter of information, and a consent form to be signed. In addition, participants could discuss any of the concerns they may have had with the principal investigator (their teacher), and they were informed about contact hours. Now that action research has been defined in its general educational context, the implications of this method in the more specific situation of computer assisted language learning (CALL) which characterises this study will be examined.

**Action research and CALL**

Beatty, who specialises in action research using CALL, suggests a three-stage model (2003) which itself draws on McLean’s (1995) model. Similarly to action research in a general educational environment, Beatty’s model comprises a planning phase
(“conceptualization”), an acting phase (“implementation”), and a reflecting phase (“interpretation”). In the initial stage, a specific problem is identified by the classroom teacher/researcher who imagines ways in which intervention might solve it (Beatty, 2003: 191). To illustrate this, Beatty gives the example of a linguistically heterogeneous class of teenagers learning English using their school CALL lab. The teacher identifies a way to improve learning by pairing a strong student with a weaker student when using the computer. The identified input(s) in this case would be changing the seating pattern as well as other possible influencing factors to improve the learning of English; and the identified outcome(s) would be a faster language learning process, and an ascending student participation (Beatty, 2003: 191). Before commencing this doctoral study, the problem identified was the absence of (or low attention paid to) ICC in an existing French class. It was then decided to input a blended learning approach to the curriculum which comprised the use of social media. Some of the identified outcomes were a change in the students’ awareness about ICC, as well as an increase in student participation in online activities both at individual and collective levels.

The second phase “implementation”, as the name indicates, relates to the introduction of some change, but more importantly, it involves teachers collecting data in order to measure the outcomes of their action. To continue on the CALL lab example provided by Beatty, an anticipated outcome could be that the students’ use of computers and English language increased. However, unexpected outcomes are not unlikely: maybe not all the student pairings were successful. Some students may have preferred to work with a student speaking the same native language as them, thus jeopardising the use of the English language by speaking their first language instead. This is what Beatty calls “identifying comparison”, where practitioners compare the anticipated outcomes with unexpected ones. This comparing procedure is followed by an analysis (“analyse comparison”) where teachers weigh the benefits and shortcomings of the changes (Beatty, 2003: 192-3), and introduce more changes to refine the implementation of the initial change, e.g., learners are allowed to choose their partners but an English-only policy is enforced. During the first semester of this study, it quickly became apparent that the discussion forum was more successful with students than the blog, for its open and collaborative features. So, during the second semester, another collaborative tool (the wiki) was introduced and replaced the blog. Furthermore, the online forum was kept, with an altered marking scheme to evaluate if the collaborative feature alone was
sufficient to increase participation. During the final reflecting stage (“interpretation”), teachers evaluate how their intervention impacted on the problem they wanted to solve from the outset, but also assess how their “own biases and priorities may influence the interpretation of the results.” (Beatty, 2003: 191). Besides judging the effectiveness of the changes, teachers judge the “cost benefit”, namely assess if the extra time involved in implementing new teaching methods is inconsequential compared to the improvement observed. The results will then “determine action” for the future (Beatty, 2003: 193).

Beatty’s action research model is particularly adequate to this study as it investigates the learning process as well as final outcomes. Furthermore, it leaves room for observing unanticipated results: “A certain openness to unexpected results is also encouraged in action research.” (Beatty, 2003: 191). This openness is complying with the inductive approach (grounded theory) that was adopted in the data analysis.

4.3.1.2 – Case study

In addition to the action research model as described in the previous section, the methodology of this study includes elements of a case study which are pertinent for the research questions and approach of the project. Before underlining which features of case study were adopted, what is understood of this qualitative research method in the literature will be briefly shown. Case studies research “explores a single entity or phenomenon (‘the case’) bounded by time and activity” e.g., a program, institution, or social group” (Creswell, 1994: 12) with researchers spending “an extended period of time on site with their research participants” (Leedy, 1997: 157). Case studies are popular in CALL research as they may shed light on the implementation of new Internet technologies by examining their effectiveness with a specific group of learners, and
developing guidelines for future use (Beatty, 2003: 209). For the purpose of this doctoral study, five elements of case studies were retained: firstly, the aim to illuminate a phenomenon or process (Gall et al., 2007) – in this case, the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence by students of French with three different social media; secondly, the researcher’s involvement with participants; thirdly, the selection of a small group; fourthly, the multiple means of data collection and the adoption of the mixed method paradigm; and finally, the openness in data analysis. When conducting a case study, practitioners often “assume an interactive role with their participants” (Leedy, 1997: 157, and also Cohen et al., 2011: 290); as a teacher of the classes examined for the study, I was undeniably closely involved with the learners who were investigated. In addition, a wide variety of data collection methods (see Section 4.4) were used in order to obtain an illuminative view from the perspective of the participants (Leedy, 1997: 157). Indeed, case study researchers, as they seek a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon, are adamant users of mixed methods, as this research is:

Case studies recognize and accept that there are many variables operating in a single case, and, hence, to catch the implications of these variables requires more than one tool for data collection and many sources of evidence. Case studies can blend numerical and qualitative data, and they are prototypical instance of mixed methods research. [...] Case studies can establish cause and effect (‘how’ and ‘why’); indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real context, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects, and that in-depth understanding is required to do justice to the case.

(Cohen et al. (2011: 289)

The wide-ranging data collection methods elicited detailed information from a small group in their natural setting (students in their classroom and in their university virtual learning environment) as opposed to a large scale population representative of the entire student community (Beatty, 2003: 208). Finally, case studies favour inductive data analysis “Case studies are often fishing expeditions in which one hopes to clarify suspicions and uncover the unexpected” (Beatty, 2003: 208), which is central to this study.
4.3.2 – Selecting the population of the study: Sample type, size and other considerations

Similarly to the conscious selection of the research methods that would fit the research objectives, the sampling of the study population was deliberately planned prior to the beginning of the project:

The selection of a sampling strategy must be governed by the criterion of suitability. The choice of which strategy to adopt must be mindful of the purposes of the research, the timescales and constraints on the research, the research design, the methods of data collection and the methodology of the research.

(Cohen et al., 2011: 163)

When considering the sampling strategy that would be suitable for the project, five factors were taken into account: the research paradigm (mixed methods but predominantly qualitative), the research methods (action research with elements of case study), the access to the sample, the relevance (or irrelevance) of the representativeness of the population, and the sample size (Cohen et al., 2011: 143). In the end, it was decided to select participants based on a mix of convenience sampling and purposive sampling.

Convenience sampling is very common in a classroom-based action research (Gall et al., 2007: 598) as teachers usually select their own students, and is also popular in case study research (Cohen et al., 2011: 156). This sampling strategy consists of choosing individuals who are of easy access to researchers, and who are available at the time of the project. The limitation of convenience sampling is that the findings extracted from the group selected may not always be used as a generalisation of the wider population. In order words, the students of this study may not be representative of all students enrolled at university level and learning French as a foreign language. This being said, this is not an issue as this project, relying predominantly on the naturalistic enquiry tradition, does not seek generalisation of results:

In much qualitative research the emphasis is placed on the uniqueness, the idiographic and exclusive distinctiveness of the phenomenon, group or individuals in question, i.e. they only represent themselves, and nothing or nobody else. [...] If, in the process, other groups find that issues raised apply to them then this is a fortunate bonus rather than a necessity.

(Cohen et al., 2011: 161)
Indeed, the case being scrutinised holds its own intrinsic value. What is crucial however is that the respondents are numerous enough to provide rich data or ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973), but not too many either or this would generate unnecessary data overload which would be time consuming and impractical to analyse (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007: 242). As Ritchie et al. (2003) claim, there is a point of decreasing return in naturalistic enquiry data collection; continuing to collect information as the study progresses may not necessarily formulate new theories on the phenomenon or activities. In brief, when deciding on the sample population, it is recommended to find the right balance between ‘data saturation’, which is reached when the collection of new data does not illuminate the issue being examined any further, and ‘data redundancy’ (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007: 245):

Within any research area, different participants can have diverse opinions. Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous. If a researcher remains faithful to the principles of qualitative research, sample size in the majority of qualitative studies should generally follow the concept of saturation. (Mason, 2010)

This issue leads us to the sample size: what is the ideal respondents’ number for this project? As this research is not predominantly aiming at representing the wider student population but rather a specific group of language learners, it is adopting a “non-probability sampling” (Leedy, 1997: 204; Cohen et al., 2011: 153) strategy. It is generally recommended that a qualitative non-probability sampling contain a minimum of thirty respondents (Borg and Gall, 1979: 194), especially if researchers intend to use “some form of statistical analysis on their data” (Cohen et al., 2011: 144). In addition, determining the sample size also includes the potentiality that a number of students may refuse to take part in the study or decide to withdraw from the project at any stage, as they are informed and entitled to. It also takes into account that some respondents may fail to fill out questionnaires entirely or return “spoiled questionnaires (e.g., missing out items, putting two ticks in a row of choices instead of only one)” (Cohen et al., 2011: 148). For all these reasons, it was decided to sample an entire class of students, which represent approximately 60 individuals who are divided between 3 or 4 tutorial groups.
In addition to the aforementioned considerations, I have opted for purposive sampling which can be briefly explained as a feature of qualitative research in which inquirers select participants on the basis of their personal judgment with the aim to “build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs” (Cohen et al., 2011: 156). After careful thought, it was decided to select university students of French enrolled in their initial year of study as opposed to another undergraduate year of study. The decision was made with the intention to introduce social media to students who had no prior knowledge of university tuition, and as such little or no preconceptions of language teaching methodologies at third level. With this choice, I used the same strategy employed by Novak and Cowling (2011) among other experts who chose to introduce social media (twitter) to university students in their first year in to make the introduction of Internet technologies easier. In addition, I followed the recommendation to introduce intercultural concepts at an early stage (e.g., before students go abroad on their Erasmus exchange programme or work experience which is part of their curriculum) when they are more inclined to open up to new perspectives:

Systematic training of learners in insiders’ and outsiders’ views of cultural phenomena should start early on with activities that require learners to adopt different ways of seeing.

(Kramsch, 1993: 229)

Besides selecting first-year students, a conscious decision was made to maintain an ‘authentic’ classroom setting to correspond with the vast majority of students’ experiences, that is to say an inter-institutions exchange was not organised as often is the case in cross-cultural studies. Instead, as explained in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2) the intercultural exchanges that are possible within an already existing class were maximised.

**Information about the participants, their programme of study and the institutional context**

The participants of this research project were students of the University of Limerick enrolled in their first year of a four-year Bachelor degree course within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences - a minority of students were on their Erasmus
exchange programme year of study. Students came from a variety of interdisciplinary degree programmes comprising majors in Economics, Languages (French, Irish), Law, Politics and International Relations, and Sociology (Table 4.2), and as such were not all putting the study of French as their primary focus. For instance, students registered for the Bachelor of Arts in European studies majored in Law or Politics and International Relations, and chose minor modules from a broad range of courses in Arts and Social Sciences, and thus tailored their degree according to their own interests.

Table 4.2 – List of courses undertaken by participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Bachelor degree</th>
<th>Major courses</th>
<th>Minor courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in European Studies</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Politics with French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sociology with French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>History with French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics and International Relations</td>
<td></td>
<td>French and Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bachelor of Arts (Joint Honours) | French | | |
| | Irish | | French |
| Economics, Politics and Law | | French |
| Sociology, Politics and Law | | French |

Bachelor of Law (Law Plus) | Law | | French |
| | Law | | French and Psychology |
| | Law | | French and German |

All participants had studied French for five or six years in secondary school and, at the exception of the Erasmus students, had passed the French subject for their Leaving Certificate, which is the compulsory examination marking the end of secondary level education in Ireland. In other words, participants had an intermediate level of French corresponding to the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Participants of the study all had in common the module “French Language and Society” (FLS) which comprised four hours of face-to-face classes: one hour of *Français oral* which I personally taught, one hour in a computer laboratory, one hour of grammar, and one hour studying cultural and literary texts. As described in the module rationale, the FLS module aimed at preparing students for the study of French at University level. This was achieved by consolidating and extending the students’ knowledge of French grammar, by developing and practising their oral French, and introducing them to aspects of French culture and to the study of French literature. The *Français oral* tutorial was the subject of this research study, and represented 15% of the FLS module during the first and third semesters, and 30% during the second semester (details of assignments in Table 4.3). The working situation was determined by the
module coordinator, and I had no control on the module description. Little leeway in the marking scheme was possible with 5% dedicated to the online activities each term. It can be noted that the discussion forum marking scheme varied from Semester 1 with 2.5% of the students’ final grade to 0% in Semester 2. This had an influence on learner’s motivation and participation, as will be seen in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

Table 4.3 – Français oral marking scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semesters</th>
<th>Assessments / Marking scheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-class group oral presentation (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In-class group oral presentation (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In-class group oral presentation (8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Le Français oral was designed to provide students with the opportunity to use their spoken French in class and written French online and as such classes do not exceed 20 students. The learning outcomes were clearly identified as follow:

On successful completion of this tutorial, students will be able to:
- Read and understand articles from French newspapers;
- Maintain a discussion on societal aspects in French;
- Make a structured oral presentation in French;
- Use argumentative skills to justify their ideas and opinion;
- Identify key aspects of French language and culture.

(Le Français oral course description)

This research project extended the identification of key aspects of French language and culture to raising awareness about ICC. For each class, students were asked to read a newspaper article provided in their tutorial booklet, and to complete a vocabulary section related to the article and make a summary of the key points raised in the text (Fiche de travail). In addition, students were asked to prepare a (class and online) debate related to the main topic of the text by formulating their argument and anticipating opposite viewpoints. A triggering question was given to all students to assist them in this task, such as “Pensez-vous que les échanges Erasmus doivent être obligatoires pour tous les étudiants?”. The topics of discussions and presentations were
linked with the themes of the course and had been decided upon by the course coordinator (with the teacher) before the beginning of the academic year. Furthermore, as part of their assessment, students had to work in small groups of two or three students to make one oral presentation to the rest of the class during the term. At the exception of the first semester, students were given the choice to select their partners for this assignment. At the beginning of the first semester, as most of the students did not know each other, groups were randomly formed by a draw. The Français oral tutorial made an extensive use of Sulis\textsuperscript{14}, the University of Limerick virtual learning environment which is a platform where students and faculty members can communicate, collaborate, teach and learn. It provides password-protected spaces that can be customised in order to meet the specific needs of the users. In the VLE, students could access the Français oral resources, discussion forum, wiki, tests and quizzes, calendar, private and group messages. Further details about the social media used for enhancing the learners’ awareness of ICC are detailed in Sections 4.3.5 and 4.5.2.

Students of the University of Limerick have to officially register in the modules of their choice during the first few weeks of the first semester. As a consequence it is not unusual to have students attending classes for a number of weeks who decide later on not to pursue specific modules if they feel they do not fulfil their needs. Other students complete the modules for the entire first semester and withdraw from the module before the second semester starts. This drop out of students did occur during this research study and is reflected in the participatory rate. 64 learners were enrolled during Semester 1, 55 learners during Semester 2, and 45 learners during Semester 3. A drop in student registration is not unusual with undergraduate students at the early stage of their course of study (Table 4.4)\textsuperscript{15}. The response rate of the three questionnaires decreased from the beginning to the end of the data collection. 55 students (or 85.9% of enrolled students) completed and returned the first questionnaire, 38 students (69.1%) filled the second questionnaire, and 19 students (42.2%) provided feedback in the third one. 19 students returned the wiki report (Appendix 12) detailing their experience with the tool at the end of Semester 2. 5 students took part to the semi-directed interview which took place in

\textsuperscript{14} Sulis is a learning management system powered by Sakai. Further information on Sakai is available at [www.sakaiproject.org](http://www.sakaiproject.org) (last accessed on 22 June 2013).

\textsuperscript{15} This is mainly due to the fact that Joint Honours students study more subjects in Year 1 than they do in the following years of their degree. They opt for a selection of these first-year subjects for the subsequent years of study.
November 2008 and 7 students participated in the second interview in April 2009. Another characteristic of the institution which influenced the research also needs to be mentioned; every student from the University of Limerick completes a work placement as part of the Cooperative education programme. This placement locally known as “coOp” was undertaken by the participants of the study during the second semester of their second year of study. This meant that the participants were likely off campus and hard to reach for feedback (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews).

Table 4.4 – Student registration in Français oral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Student registration Semester 1 (FR4141)</th>
<th>Student registration Semester 2 (FR4142)</th>
<th>Student registration Semester 3 (FR4143)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>64 students</td>
<td>55 students</td>
<td>45 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Empirical study)</td>
<td></td>
<td>15% drop rate</td>
<td>6% drop rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>71 students</td>
<td>56 students</td>
<td>55 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22% drop rate</td>
<td>2% drop rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>69 students</td>
<td>59 students</td>
<td>65 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15% drop rate</td>
<td>10% increase rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>88 students</td>
<td>79 students</td>
<td>73 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11% drop rate</td>
<td>8% drop rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.3 – Ethics and the researcher’s stance: Overt observer and peripheral participant

By choosing to conduct an essentially action-research-based project, I was both the practitioner (teacher) and researcher (Nunan, 1992: 17). This particular stance can be defined as ‘observer-as-participant’ (Cohen et al., 2011: 457). In other words, I was not a respondent like the other participating students were, but I did participate in the tasks assigned (e.g., I posted triggering messages in the discussion forum which were followed by the learners’ reactions and interactions), and my research intentions were completely overt. This close relationship with participants and the project had the advantage of putting me at the heart of the action. Indeed, as has been reported by previous observer-as-participant researchers (Knight, 1994; O’Dowd, 2006), I experienced a privileged rapport with the participants who shared their achievements and difficulties directly with me, thus providing me with first-hand information without me reminding them of my position as researcher.
### Table 4.5 – The researcher’s stances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The complete Participant</strong></td>
<td>A member of the group who conceals her/his role as an observer, whose knowledge of the group/situation may be intimate and who may gain ‘insider knowledge’, but who may be viewed with suspicion or resentment by the other members when his/her true role comes to light and who may lack the necessary objectivity to observe reliably.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The participant-as-observer</strong></td>
<td>A member of the group who reveals his/her role as an observer, whose knowledge of the group/situation may be intimate and who may gain ‘insider knowledge’, but who may lack the necessary objectivity to observe reliably and with whom confidences and confidential data may not be shared or given respectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The observer-as-participant</strong></td>
<td>Not a member of the group, but who may participate a little or peripherally to the group’s activities, and whose role as researcher is clear and overt, as unobtrusive as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The complete Observer</strong></td>
<td>Only observes (overt or covert) and is detached from the group, e.g., an outside observer, or where the observer is not covert but whose presence is unnoticed by the group e.g., an observer at a crowded rail station.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 457)

However, the dual role as teacher and researcher also had some limitations, and raised a number of ethical issues. Besides establishing a relationship with participants to gather rich data, I also strived to be objective, and was constantly aware of possible bias for the data analysis and interpretations. To begin with, partial views might have been expressed in my guiding role to raise awareness of intercultural issues through teaching and learning French as a foreign language. As a native speaker of French I am not automatically qualified to raise awareness about ICC without prejudice:

The 'best' teacher is neither the native nor the non-native speaker, but the person who can help learners see relationships between their own and other cultures, can help them acquire interest in and curiosity about 'otherness', and an awareness of themselves and their own cultures seen from other people's perspectives.

(Byram *et al.*, 2002: 10)

Accordingly, I studied and applied recommendations made by experts in the field (Byram *et al.*, 2002: Bennett, 1993) to teachers developing the intercultural dimension. I tried to remain open-minded and accept critique. The following teaching aims were my safeguards:

- Give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence;
- Prepare learners for interaction with people of other cultures;
- Enable learners to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours;
- Help learners to see that such interaction is an enriching experience.

(adapted from Byram *et al.*, 2002: 10)
Furthermore, bias may also occur in the construction of knowledge – before the information is analysed – and can be avoided by ensuring that “democratic relations exist between all participants in the research” (Hall, 1996: 29). As a consequence, all participants were treated fairly and equally without regard to their involvement in the project. Additionally, I was constantly aware of the power relationship I had over the participants by merely being their teacher giving marks for their class work. I was eager to have as many respondents as possible, but not to the extent of obtain falsified information or feedback which students felt would please me rather than feedback truly reflecting their thoughts and experiences. Thus, unpressurised collection of information was facilitated by keeping “good professional and academic conduct” (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 23). The research was overtly presented to students, and other ethical elements (Wallace, 1998: McNiff and Whitehead, 2010) which characterise academic research were applied. Indeed, the project was conducted with the approval from the university’s ethics committee, and a number of documents were presented to students at the beginning of the project: an ethics statement describing the study promising confidentiality, ensuring the right to withdraw from the research, the teacher/researcher’s availability for meeting and contact details, along with a neutral academic contact aware of the research, as well as a letter requesting and granting permission from willing participants. Moreover, when implementing the use of social media for raising awareness of ICC, it is not believed that tasks that prejudiced the students’ academic work were requested:

It is not ethical to use up our students’ time and effort on activities which do not contribute in any way to success in their studies

(Wallace, 1998: 49)

It was made sure that students understood that the use of social media was an integral part of their normal curriculum, while their participation in the research (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews) was separate, non-compulsory, and had no impact on the marking scheme.

Finally, bias might have crept in through the data examination and presentation of results. Indeed, when the practitioner is also the researcher, he or she:
may not be entirely disinterested for example in an attempt to impress a senior manager, a teacher who is an action researcher may present a rosier picture of the outcome of the action research than is really the case, or, in contrast, a teacher who may be pressing for increased resources may present the outcome more negatively than it is. Here ethics, validity and political agendas coincide.

\[(\text{Cohen et al., 2011: 359})\]

In this case, the research might have been biased by the (unconscious) desire to show funders that the doctoral scholarship was well spent or to maximise employment prospects. To avoid such inclination, self-reflection (Hall, 1996; McNiff, 2002) was included during the entire process and I put my thoughts in writing in the form of reflective notes. As McNiff and Whitehead (2010: 23) state, “Action research requires people to hold themselves accountable for what they are doing and accept responsibility for their own actions”. For this reason, I tried as much as possible to be aware of my position, be transparent in how theories emerged, and be rigorous when presenting findings. Also the decision was made to present data in two separate chapters: descriptive interpretation of the students’ experience (Chapter 5) and data analysis relating to the educational theories presented in the literature review (Chapter 6) with the aim of facilitating the reading of results.

4.3.4 – The effectiveness of social media: Questioning the validity of a control group

Decisions about the research methodology also comprise the choice to use (or not) a control group to measure the impact of the study, namely the use of a “matched group” (Leedy, 1997: 229) which is not receiving the novel treatment (e.g., use of social media for ICC acquisition in this study) and is sharing identical characteristics to the experimental group. At the end of the project, both groups are compared to evaluate the influence the new treatment had. Cohen et al. (2011: 315) identify three different types of study settings which determine the need and applicability of a control group: the ‘controlled experiment’ in laboratory conditions (commonly referred to as the pretest-postest control group design), the ‘field’ or ‘quasi experiment’, and ‘the natural experiment’. The laboratory conditions are often viewed as the ‘true’ experiments, as variables are contrived in an artificial environment and thus easily isolated, controlled and manipulated (Cohen et al., 2011: 315). True experiments require two or more
groups. The natural experiment is carried out in an authentic setting where variables cannot be isolated and controlled, while the quasi experiment is set in a natural setting where variables are controlled as much as possible, and may involve a control group. This research being set in an authentic classroom environment, it was possible to opt either for the quasi experiment or the natural experiment approaches. The examination of research studies carried out in the qualitative paradigm and computer-assisted language learning enabled me to make a decision.

To begin with, it is accepted that a complete equivalence between the experimental group and the control group is more theoretical than real, particularly in humanistic enquiry (Leedy, 1997: 229), and thus compromises the validity or results. Nunan makes a stronger claim by stating that “control groups are not adequate for research in a classroom setting because it makes it artificial, not genuine” (1992: 91-2). Indeed, when dealing with complex human beings, controlling variables is unreasonable, even though Nunan states (without naming them) that some researchers have succeeded in using control group experiment in a classroom setting. Furthermore, in the CALL context, early studies comparing a method using CALL technologies versus ‘traditional’ classrooms have been criticised for providing inconclusive results (Ellis, 1990; Nunan, 1992). From the end of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century, recommendations tend not to favour the use of an experimental group and a control group (Chapelle, 2001, 2003; Nunan, 1992; Pederson, 1987). Indeed, it is believed that:

> comparative research that attempts to illustrate the superiority of computers over some other medium for language instruction should forever be abandoned.

(Pederson (1987: 125)

Instead, experts encourage the running of a number of studies examining how CALL may be better integrated in classrooms, rather than investigating if CALL technologies actually improve language learning and teaching (Chapelle, 2003: 70) because this has already been established by research projects. Furthermore, the context of a standard third-level language teaching and learning setting which characterised this study would make the isolation of the control group very difficult. Indeed, despite being assigned to a specific class group the students enrolled in the Français oral classes often attend a different class group when they missed their scheduled class (e.g., illness) and meet on a
regular basis in other common classes. It is also not unusual that learners share the same student accommodation, thus making complete isolation extremely challenging. In view of these sentiments opposed to control groups in the specific context of authentic classrooms using CALL, and the easy contact between learners of *Français oral*, a natural experiment approach void of a control group was opted for. A variety of measurement tools (triangulation) to evaluate the effect of social media on the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence were used instead.

**4.3.5 – Choice of tools: Why use a discussion forum, blog and wiki?**

For this study, it was decided to implement the use of an online discussion forum, a blog and a wiki in the classroom. With the extraordinary abundance of new Internet technologies, temptation was high to research the effect of the newest or trendiest media on foreign language teaching and learning. However, as Levy points out:

> It would be irresponsible to be led purely by the latest technological breakthrough. Somehow, we must try and make sense of what is going on, in spite of the rate of change […]. It takes a special courage to continue to use a particular technology once it is considered to be outmoded, even if that technology is more than adequate for the task at hand.

*(Levy, 1997: 1-2)*

Instead of opting for the latest technology, tools seemed to fit the purpose of the research better were investigated (Chapelle, 2001). The tools were selected with their relevance to the acquisition of ICC in mind. In other words, tools for enabling interaction and discussion as well as encouraging group work which necessitated negotiation were sought. Technologies having the potential to support the constructivist approach, foster self-reflection, and gather students together like in a Community of Practice were also looked for. The only limitations were that the tools could easily be integrated in the class, were freely available or low-priced, and that I could be proficient enough to implement them.

The three tools were selected in accordance with the constructivist approach; they enabled learners to become active authors (Dubreil, 2006: 255), and students could learn from each other and review the interactions at any time. The discussion forum was
chosen for its ability to allow all participants to communicate and share knowledge about cultural aspects (Lomicka, 2006: 225). In addition, the forum made the option of the students taking the initiative to start discussing a new topic possible, if they were pro-active enough. This would make the interactions more learner-centred rather than being dominated by the teacher, what is known as the IRF sequence:

Classroom discourse [is usually] dominated by the ubiquitous IRF sequence of an Initiating move by the teacher, a Respond move by a student, and a Follow-up move by the teacher. Although electronic discussion is certainly not the only way to break this pattern, it does appear to be a very effective way. (Warschauer, 1997: 474)

The discussion forum was used on a weekly-basis over two semesters. Students were asked to discuss cultural aspects emerging from the reading of French newspapers articles, which was an integral part of their course work.

Choosing the blog was inspired by Byram’s (2008) suggestion of keeping a reflective portfolio as a means of tracking personal intercultural learning. The blog was introduced to be used as an online journal where learners could reflect on their own learning and exchange ideas (if they chose to make it public), write comments, opinions and questions on issues of interest or discuss topics tackled in class (Davis, 2004). Portfolios or online journals are believed to be one of the most effective ways to evaluate learners’ intercultural competence (Belz, 2002; Byram, 2008; Dubreil, 2006; O’Dowd, 2010) as it enables learners to “reflect on what they have discovered and how it affects them” (Dubreil, 2006: 254). The analysis of students’ portfolios by teachers is also considered as fairer than the analysis of other students’ activities, even though the assessment of ICC is considered controversial (Byram, 2008; Borghetti, 2011a). Indeed, instead of merely basing the ICC evaluation on a number of posts or interactions expressed in a discussion forum, for instance, teachers may evaluate the content of learners’ writing and the learning process (O’Dowd, 2010). Students of this study were encouraged to post weekly entries in their blog, which could be kept private between the teacher and each student, accessible to a number of invited class members or made entirely public. I, as teacher, also kept a blog which was made available to students so that they could view examples of what to write and what to include in their posts (photos, videos, hyperlinks) every week. This is recommended as students may not be used to self-
reflection (O’Dowd, 2010: 347). The content of the blog entries were voluntarily less structured that the discussion forum messages where a specific topic was introduced weekly. The entries posted in the teacher’s blog were suggestions rather than specific issues students had to write about; the aim was to discover “more natural, uncontaminated raw data” (Helm, 2009: 93). The blog was open for twelve weeks during the first semester.

The wiki was selected for its attractive “collaborative knowledge building feature which is a given rather than an exception” (Lundin, 2008: 434) and would make students negotiate meaning with others:

> In a wiki, people work mutually on one common artefact. [...]. We presuppose that a person’s individual knowledge is a resource for other people’s learning.

(Cress and Kimmerle, 2007: 156)

Students were gathered in small groups of seven or eight learners and were asked to define together what French culture was to them. The requirements included a word limit of four hundred words, and making references to (inter)cultural aspects discussed in class (online and the ‘traditional’ class) throughout the previous two semesters. The wiki was used over a five week-period during the second semester, after a six-week trial period.

The discussion forum and the wiki were available in the university VLE (Sulis) which is used by students and lecturers to communicate notes, organise activities, and is password protected. Even though a blog was also one of the functionalities offered by this virtual learning environment, I was dissuaded from including it in the project because of its low affordance and very basic features (poor design, absence of layout customization, complex navigation). Instead, the more functional blog-publishing service provided on www.blogger.com was opted for. It was chosen because it was easy to set-up and freely available; it offered customizable template and layouts, and provided video tutorials and users help services.
The choice of the language used by students during their online exchanges was also a matter of consideration during the planning stages of the study. My first instinct was to have a target language (French) policy only as the class was a French language class with the primary objective being the practice of communicative and debating skills. Furthermore, the project intended to raise the learners’ intercultural communicative competence which “implied that the learner [could] do this in the foreign language” (O’Dowd, 2010: 342). But I was aware that it usually is easier to express oneself in one’s native language, particularly when it is a matter of self-introspection or discussing complex concepts (Appel and Mullen, 2000; Belz, 2002; O’Dowd, 2005). Indeed, the use of the L2 can be a constraint when “learners […] reflect on their cultural understandings” (Elola and Oskoz, 2008: 460). In the literature, it is not uncommon to see projects where students write in both languages (Lomicka, 2006; Belz, 2003; Furstenberg et al., 2001; O'Dowd 2003; Ware, 2005) especially if the groups are linguistically heterogeneous. This way, one linguistic group is not more privileged than the other. The choice of the language of interaction may also depend on the students’ level of proficiency in the L2 (Dubreil, 2006: 254). In the end, it was decided to make the use of French language (L2) compulsory in the discussion forum and wiki posts, and optional in the reflective blog, in other words, learners had the choice to either use their native language or the foreign language for the blog entries. It was considered that students were proficient enough in French (after five, six or seven years of study at secondary school level) to interact, and make them practice their communicative skills as required by the curriculum, but they were given the option to use either their L1 or L2 for their introspective online journal (blog) so that their knowledge of the L2 would not be restrictive.

4.3.6 – Choice of language of interaction: Use of L1 versus L2

4.4 - Data collection methods

In addition to the careful respect of research ethics regarding the standards of quality, the method of inquiry, the sampling design, and the researcher’s position, this study applied the principle of triangulation to bring validity and reliability to the research (Creswell, 2007; Denzin, 1997; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In other words, “more than
one source of data” (Wallace, 1998: 36) was used with the aim to “explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint” (Cohen et al., 2011: 195).

Table 4.6 – Research methods’ characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Quantitative/Qualitative</th>
<th>Introspective/Empirical</th>
<th>Illuminative/heuristic or conclusive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Usually qualitative</td>
<td>Introspective</td>
<td>Usually illuminative / heuristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>Either</td>
<td>Introspective</td>
<td>Usually illuminative / heuristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Either</td>
<td>Either</td>
<td>Usually illuminative / heuristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ online entries</td>
<td>Either</td>
<td>Either</td>
<td>Usually illuminative / heuristic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dribble files</td>
<td>Usually quantitative</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Conclusive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(adapted from Wallace, 1998: 37)

Indeed, relying on a unique data collection method may bring out bias and distort reality. In addition to the concern to use several sources, I made sure to include both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods as it is recommended to measure the complexity of ICC (Deardorff, 2009: 483). The data collection methods of this study comprise three questionnaires, two semi-structured interviews, my own observations written in a reflective journal, the students’ online entries in the forum, blog and wiki, the students’ report on their wiki use, as well as dribble files (statistics recorded by the university VLE).

Interviews and questionnaires were opted for with the aim to draw information that would represent the participants’ viewpoint about the online activities – what Creswell (1998) characterises as the “emic” perspective. As such, these two data collection methods enabled us to answer one of the secondary research questions of this thesis, namely “How do students react to social media implemented in their course for the purpose of developing ICC?” (See page 6). On the contrary, notes made in the reflective journal, the analysis of the students’ entries, as well as the dribble files constituted the “etic” perspective (Ibid.) where I, the researcher, put value to the interactions taking place. These data collection methods allowed us to answer another secondary research question of this doctoral dissertation: “How do students interact within the social media implemented in their course for the purpose of developing ICC?” (See also page 6). Furthermore, semi-directed interviews were deliberately introduced after the submission of the questionnaires in order to obtain a deeper insight of the participants’ experience. Indeed, despite the inclusion of “comments” boxes in the questionnaires, it was
anticipated that further feedback from students would be produced with direct contact during interview, where students could be prompted and asked to explain their response in more depth.

4.4.1 – Questionnaires

A series of questionnaires (Appendices 9, 10 and 11; Table 4.7) was handed out to all participants at strategic times of the study in order to elicit information about their experience of using social media in the context of their French class. For instance, the first questionnaire was made available to participants at the end of the first semester, after their experience using the discussion forum and blog; therefore questions focused on the use of these social media. The second questionnaire was made available at the end of the second semester, after participants had used all three media; therefore questions concentrated on comparing the use of the discussion forum, the blog and the wiki. The third questionnaire was made available after an entire semester taught without social media. As a consequence the questions focused on comparing the learning experience with and without social media, as well as reflecting on the use of social media with greater hindsight. It had not been intended to submit a third questionnaire when ethical approval for the research was originally asked and then granted. After the second semester, I saw an opportunity to elicit deeper data from participants and sought for another approval from the Research Ethics Committee of my institution which was granted towards the end of Semester 3.

The design of the questionnaires was informed by research in data collection. As recommended by Nunan (1992: 143) and Wallace (1998: 134), the questions were worded carefully, i.e. simple language void of specialised jargon was used. The questionnaires comprised a mix of closed and open questions (Wallace, 1998: 134). Also, closed questions such as yes/no queries were collated with a “comment” box or a “please specify” space, thus providing an opportunity to participants to state their personal opinion more openly (Cohen et al., 2011: 392). Questionnaires were submitted for review to the Centre for Support Training Analyses and Research (CSTAR) before they were finalised. Furthermore, the purpose of the questionnaire was explained in
clear terms by the teacher in class, and in the information sheet distributed to the students. All questionnaires can be consulted in Appendices 9, 10 and 11.

**Table 4.7 – Questionnaires details**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of questionnaire</th>
<th>Questionnaire launch</th>
<th>Purpose of the questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot study survey</td>
<td>April 2008</td>
<td>Elicit feedback on the use of the discussion forum, blog and wiki. Test the efficacy of the questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main study – survey 1</td>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>Obtain background information about the participants. Elicit feedback on the use of the discussion forum and blog for ICC learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main study – survey 2</td>
<td>April 2009</td>
<td>Obtain background information about the participants. Elicit feedback on the use of the discussion forum and blog and wiki for ICC learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main study – survey 3</td>
<td>December 2009</td>
<td>Obtain background information about the participants. Share preliminary results with participants and elicit reaction. Collect comparative feedback on the use and non-use of social media for ICC learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.4.1.1 – Pilot project questionnaire

One questionnaire was presented to participants at the end of the pilot study, which took place over one academic term. Participating students had the option to answer the survey anonymously or to identify themselves. The questionnaire started with four closed items questions about personal facts (name, sex, age, and number of years studying French). The remainder of the questionnaire was divided into three categories: computer literacy, cultural competence, and online activities. This core questionnaire consisted of seventeen questions which, according to Beatty’s (2003: 213-4) description of questions’ types, were as follow: three “multiple choice” questions; one “multiple response”; five “yes/no” questions; six “Likert scale” questions (ranging from “excellent, very good, good, poor” to “very poor” or “extremely helpful, very helpful, helpful, a little helpful” to “not at all helpful”); one “Likert scale” question (ranging from “strongly agree, agree, disagree” to “strongly disagree”); and one open-ended or “word-response” question. The Likert scale questions varied from four to five options; five options were presented when the researcher wanted the respondents having the option to remain neutral, and four options were offered when the researcher wanted the respondents to make a statement. In order to elicit further feedback from participants, eight “comments” or “please specify” boxes were collated to a number of “yes/no” and “Likert scale” questions. The questionnaire was presented in paper copy, and electronically via e-mail.
Table 4.8 – Types of questions in surveys and questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likert scale</td>
<td>The learner selects one choice from choices such as ‘strongly agree’ through ‘strongly disagree’ that are weighted with numbers to aid analysis of the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>The learner selects one choice from up to 40 possible answers. There is no limit to the length of each answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple response</td>
<td>Similar to multiple choice except the learner is not limited to choosing one response; he/she can select none, one or more of the choices offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrix</td>
<td>This question type presents several multiple choice questions together where the learner selects one choice for each statement or question presented. This question type is used to cross-relate responses from a single item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>A list of choices must be ranked numerically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>The learner selects ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ in response to the question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended</td>
<td>The learner is free to comment on a specific issue raised in the question.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.1.2 – Main study questionnaires

Three questionnaires (Appendices 9, 10 and 11) were presented to participating students during the course of the main study. Similarly to the pilot study questionnaire, participants had the option to answer the survey anonymously or to identify themselves, thus ensuring more valid results (Wallace, 1998: 38). The main study was composed of three consecutive academic terms, and each questionnaire was submitted at the end of every term. The first questionnaire was presented in hard copy and also available online. For practical reasons, the second and third questionnaires were only available online. Indeed the second and third questionnaires were made available at a time when a number of participants were expected to be off campus, and for some to be out of the country on placements. Amendments were made to the questionnaire following analysis from the pilot study, as well as for coinciding with the schedule of the main study, i.e. over three semesters instead of one. In addition to the three general questionnaires, students were asked to complete a wiki report at the end of the second term which was also be analysed for the purpose of the main study (see Section 4.4.4).

The first questionnaire was composed of twenty-one questions in total as depicted in Table 4.9. This questionnaire focused on determining the participants’ computer literacy level, identifying if changes in their cultural competence were noticed, as well as if the social media used (discussion forum and blog), affected their learning.
Table 4.9 – Details about Questionnaire 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of questions</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closed items about personal facts</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Name (optional), sex, age, number of years studying French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert scale</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>- Strongly agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Extremely helpful / Very helpful / Helpful / A little helpful / Not at all helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Excellent / Very good / Good / Poor / Very poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0-1 year / 1-2 years / 2-3 years / 3-4 years / More than 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Announcements / Blog / Calendar / Discussion forum / Resources / Tests and Quizzes / Other(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>E.g., “Do you think that the computer lab training on Week 4 has helped you for your online activities during this semester?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>E.g., “Do you have any further comments in relation to the use of online activities?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second questionnaire consisted of twenty-two questions (Table 4.10) and aimed at evaluating the participants’ reactions to the use of the discussion forum, blog, and wiki, and if they would recommend further use of these Internet tools. It also sought to elicit their perception of the effectiveness of social media to enhance their intercultural communicative competence.

Table 4.10 – Details about Questionnaire 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of questions</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closed items about personal facts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Name (optional), sex, age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert scale</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>- Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree or disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Extremely helpful / Very helpful / Helpful / A little helpful / Not at all helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Excellent / Very good / Good / Poor / Very poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Most certainly / Certainly / I don’t know / No / Certainly not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>E.g., “Yes, it has increased / No, it remained the same / Yes, it has decreased”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>E.g., The originality / The amount of marks appointed / The ease of use …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>E.g., “Write your order of preference of the following tools: Discussion forum, Blog, and Wiki. (1 is the most liked and 3 the least liked)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>E.g., “Do you think that the percentage mark allocated to the blog represented well the amount of work involved?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Do you have any further comments in relation to the use of online activities?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third questionnaire (Appendix 11) started with a section depicting the preliminary results of the two previous semesters in order to share the data with the participants, and also to record their reaction. This initiative was influenced by Wallace’s (1998: 51) recommendation to check with surveyed participants if the researcher’s interpretation corresponds to their understanding, thus strengthening the validity of the data. The
questionnaire included fifteen questions (Table 4.11) and sought to collect information from participants comparing their experience of learning with and without social media, and to reflect on their intercultural learning with greater hindsight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of questions</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closed items about personal facts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Name (optional), sex, age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert scale</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>E.g., I would have liked to keep using online activities in the second year / I was relieved / It made no difference to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Discussion forums / Blog / Wiki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Now that you have read the summary, do you feel that your opinion has been fairly represented?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>E.g., “What would be your definition of French culture today?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.2 - Interviewing participants

Interviews were used in addition to questionnaires in order to collect further feedback from the participants of the study, and reach saturation of information, i.e. make sure that data was examined in depth. One interview was carried out at the end of the one semester-long pilot study (14 April 2008), and two interviews took place respectively at the end of the first semester (18 November 2008) and the second semester of the main study (28 April 2009) which took place over three consecutive academic semesters. The entirety of the interviews were recorded and later transcribed as texts to facilitate the data analysis. The pilot interview was audio and video recorded whereas the main study sessions were only audio recorded as all participants were not as comfortable with a video camera. Indeed, both audio and video recorders were brought for the semi-structured interviews of the main study, but at the beginning of the session, one individual expressed some reluctance at being video recorded; this option was thus eliminated in favour of the less obtrusive digital audio recorder.

When conducted cautiously, interviews may give an “emic perspective” (Creswell, 1998: 242), in other words the inside views of participants, regarding the issue being investigated. However, reaching this inside view requires some considerations before
proceeding with this data collection method: the interview type, the selection and briefing of participants, and the running of the interview.

4.4.2.1- Choosing the interview type: Semi-structured interview

Four types of interviews – the structured interview, the semi-structured interview, the open-ended interview, and the focus group - (Cohen *et al.*, 2011: 412; Silverman, 2006: 110) were considered before the research project began. After reflection, the semi-structured interview was favoured to the other types of enquiry as it was deemed more appropriate in the study context. Indeed, considering the possible unassertive nature of the young participants – first year students enrolled at university level – it was felt that a minimum of control provided by a list of specific topics to discuss as well as some prompting would be necessary to start and maintain the dialogue between the interviewer and the respondents. Prompting is understood here as “comments, examples or follow-up questions intended to encourage the interviewee to give fuller, more detailed responses” (Wallace, 1998: 147). In addition, the triggering of open questions which characterise semi-structured interviews (Wallace, 1998: 147) would leave adequate room for the participants to express themselves freely and thus allow them to reveal topics that the interviewer might have not anticipated: “Interviewees should be given as much scope as possible to reveal their views. At the same time, they should be given a structure for what to talk about” (Flick, 2006: 173).

Table 4.12 – Typology of interview strategies according to Silverman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of interview</th>
<th>Required skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structured interview</td>
<td>Neutrality; no prompting; no improvisation; training to ensure consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
<td>Some probing; rapport with interviewee; understanding the aims of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended interview</td>
<td>Flexibility; rapport with interviewee; active listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>Facilitation skills; flexibility; ability to stand back from the discussion so that group dynamics can emerge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.2.2 – Considerations for interviews

Before conducting the semi-structured interviews, two main points were considered to optimise the gathering of information: firstly the selection of interviewees and the information provided to them prior, during, and after the interview process, including
confidentiality issues; and secondly the identification of an experienced interviewer and his or her knowledge of the study, including expertise in using appropriate types of questions, tolerating pauses, and other fundamental skills.

Selecting and informing the respondents

Participants were selected during class time on a voluntary basis, two weeks before the semi-structured interview took place, and a time suitable to all to attend was agreed on. A variety of users were represented, in other words, students who did use and also students who did not use all the online tools were put forward, with the aim to represent as many points of view as possible. Eight students came forward for the pilot project semi-structured interview. Seven students volunteered to take part in the first interview of the main study, and ten students for the last interview. However only seven students attended the pilot project interview, five came to the first interview of the main study and seven to the last interview. The absentees explained that their nonappearance were due to illness or forgetfulness. Volunteers were informed of the on-campus location of the interview a week before, and were reminded again of the time and location the day before it took place.

The schedule of the semi-structured interview, and the information provided to the volunteers was partly influenced by Wallace’s (1998: 51-2) protocol which recommends making arrangements with participants in good time, giving adequate information detailing what the interview entails in advance, respecting the arrangements that were made, and thanking all volunteers for their time and help. From the outset of their French class, all students were informed that a study would be conducted in parallel with their programme of study, and that they would be asked to complete a number of questionnaires and attend interviews on a voluntary basis. Regarding the interview, more information was given to students two weeks before the scheduled date of each semi-structured interview; participants were told that the session would take place in a classroom on campus, i.e. a location both familiar and convenient for them, at a time that suited them, and that it would not last more than sixty minutes. They were also told that they would be asked to answer a series of questions regarding their experience of using social media for intercultural learning, and that any comments - positive and/or
negative - were acceptable and would not impact on their grades in any way. Finally, the fact that the interview would not be conducted by the teacher–researcher, and that the interaction would be audio recorded was disclosed to them.

**Providing a guarantee of confidentiality**

When conducting an interview it is essential to safeguard that participants will express themselves unreservedly, and one way to achieve this is to assure interviewees that their confidentiality will be cared for. Indeed, in their own eagerness to elicit in-depth data researchers may fail to acknowledge the stress the people interviewed may be under, and the reluctance to speak they may experience, if they do not wish their thoughts to be publicly linked to them (Becker, 1996: 62; Pavlidou, 2011: 139). For this reason, each interview process started with a declaration from the interviewer that no identity would be revealed in the publications or works related to the study:

> We guarantee obviously that your name won’t be made public in anyway. This recording won’t directly be made available to anyone other than Florence and me and in any publications arising out of it; your name will not be mentioned. But just for the interview it would be useful if I had names.

(Main study, semi-structured interview 2)

Furthermore, considering the educational context of the study, it was reiterated that the content of what was communicated in the interview sessions would have no consequence on the participants’ academic results. In addition to these precautions, letting an expert who was not involved in the research with the participants or teaching them – as opposed to the teacher-researcher - was another strategy which was used to elicit uninhibited feedback from the interviewees.

**The interviewer: Skills and expertise**

Semi-structured interviews do not offer an equal relationship between the inquirer and the interviewees as the researcher “introduces the topic of the interview and also critically follows up on the subject’s answers to his or her questions” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 3). However, with skills and expertise, the interviewer could follow a certain protocol and maximise interaction, and therefore obtain “dialogical
conversations” (Pavlidou: 2011: 138) or “guided conversations” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) which are more balanced interactions where both parties are in confidence and collaborate more openly. This study took into account research recommendations on how to conduct an ideal interview. The ideal protocol of a semi-structured interview accommodates for a briefing at the beginning and a debriefing at the end. It is recommended that from the outset, the purpose of the interview is stated and that practical aspects such as the use of a recording device are disclosed Nunan (1992: 152):

Thanks very much for coming along. I’m just going to ask you about seven questions to find out about how… what your reactions were to the work that Florence has been doing with you using the discussion forum, the blog and the wiki to support your learning about French culture in the français oral classes […]

(Main study, semi-structured interview 2)

Before the interview comes to a close, the interviewer summarises the main points discussed, rephrases what he or she understood from the participants’ comments, and checks if it is correctly interpreted. Finally, as recommended by (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 128-9) the session concludes with an invitation to more comments from interviewees. This was applied in this study:

One of the limitations of this sort of type of interview is that you answer the questions you’re asked and not the questions you are not asked. So I want to ask you now if you have any other comments to make: are there any reactions you had to using the discussion forum, the tests and quizzes and the blog, that you haven’t had a chance to say because you haven’t been asked the question? Can I just ask you to think about that for a minute and I will ask you if you have any comments on any aspect of that at all, to add. Ok?

(Main study, semi-structured interview 1)

Interview skills include being able to listen, avoid interruption, and allow for silences and pauses (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 10, 166), thus encouraging the persons interviewed to give more details on a subject; and not being afraid to ask naïve questions even when the answer seems obvious so that the interviewees have the opportunity to give their own viewpoint (Flick et al., 2004: 2012-3). Further skills include the use of a range of open and non-leading questions (Table 4.13).

The three interviews of the pilot and main studies were conducted by Professor Angela Chambers who is a co-supervisor of this doctoral research. She is an experienced academic specialised in sociolinguistics and computer-assisted language learning
(CALL). Professor Chambers had performed many interviews in the course of her academic duties, and was very familiar with interview procedure and recommended code of conduct. She had no contact with the participants in the context of their use of social media for intercultural learning, but had obvious inside knowledge of the study. For all these reasons, Professor Chambers was assigned the responsibility of running the semi-structured interviews. I was also present during the semi-directed interviews in order to take note of the non-visual participants’ reactions such as body language and make sure that as little as possible feedback would be lost. Participants nodding in agreement with other participants were not be recorded by the audio equipment but included in the data analysis thanks to my observation. I did not intervene during the interviews unless it was felt necessary. For example, during the first interview of the main study, there was a misunderstanding between the interviewer and the participants about the ‘class discussions’. The interviewer asked a question about the interactions with Erasmus students in the class discussions, meaning the *online* class discussion. But the learners understood the discussions that occurred in the actual physical classrooms and were giving information that was not representing their online experience without Professor Chambers realising this. At this moment, I interrupted the interview to make sure that everybody was talking about the same thing.

**Range of questions**

The interviewer’s use of questions may be a determining factor in obtaining rich information. Interviews rely on human interactions, in other words on qualitative features, as opposed to quantitative or scientific properties; this being said, there are ways to safeguard an unbiased and data rich semi-structured interview. In this study, Professor Chambers availed of a variety of question types (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 135-6) to facilitate this (Table 4.13).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Interview Questions</th>
<th>Examples taken from this study’s semi-structured interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introductory Questions.</strong> “Can you tell me about…?”; “Do you remember an occasion when…?”</td>
<td>“If you could just give us your name, the course you are on and then very briefly tell us which of those three tools you used and how much? That is the discussion forum, the blog and the wiki. Did you use it not at all, a bit or a lot? And then I will ask you more questions after that, ok?” (Main study – interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up Questions. The subjects’ answers may be extended through the curious, persistent, and critical attitude of the interviewer. […] Also a mere nor, or “mm” or just a pause can invite the subject to go on with the description.</td>
<td>“Mm mm [pause] So you thought it was better having it than not having it really? [pause] Mm mm. Any, other comments on that?” (Main study – interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing questions. “Could you say something more about that?”; “Can you give a more detailed description of what happened?” The interviewer here pursues the answers, probing their content, but without stating what dimensions are to be taken into account.</td>
<td>“Could you give me an example of a topic that, say, you chose to start?” (Main study – interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifying questions. “What did you actually do when you felt a mounting anxiety?”; “How did your body react?” In an interview with many general statements, the interviewer can attempt to get more precise descriptions by asking, “Have you also experienced this yourself?”</td>
<td>“Good, good, what did you like about it?” (Main study - interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct questions. The interviewer here directly introduces topics and dimensions, for example: “Have you ever received money for good grades?” Such direct questions may be preferably be postponed until the later parts of the interview, after the subjects have given their own spontaneous descriptions.</td>
<td>“Did you find that the discussion forum helped you to learn about culture?” (Pilot project interview)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect questions. Here the interviewer may apply projective questions such as “How do you believe other pupils regard the competition for grades?” The answer may refer to the attitudes of others […]. Careful further questioning will be necessary here to interpret the answer.</td>
<td>“So tell me what happens, there you are sitting, busy working and in come Florence’s resources, what did you do? You can be quite honest.” (Main study - interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structuring questions. The interviewer is responsible for the course of the interview and should indicate when a theme has been exhausted. The interviewer may directly and politely break off long answers that are irrelevant to the investigation, for example by briefly stating his or her understanding of an answer, and then saying, “I would now like to introduce another topic…”</td>
<td>“Let’s move on to the blog now, ok? Did that help you to learn about culture?” (Main study - interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting questions. The degree of interpretation may involve merely rephrasing an answer, such as “You then mean that…?” or “Does the expression… cover what you have just expressed?”</td>
<td>“Alright. Thanks very much. I want to move on now to talk about the language […]. Let’s talk first, what about the class discussion in French. Was that ok?” (Main study – interview 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.4.3 – Teacher observation: Diary, journal or field notes?**

The collection of “observational data” (Cohen et al., 2011: 457) is the third type of method that was used in this study. My position as both researcher and teacher enabled me a close relationship with the participants and the development of the project. I took advantage of this privileged relationship by taking notes during the entire process. It
must be specified that my observation was overt, namely students knew that they were routinely scrutinised. This data collection method enabled me to discern dynamics and information that might have not appeared in the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, in other words I seized the opportunity to “look at what [was] taking place in situ rather than relying on second-hand accounts” (Cohen et al., 2011: 456). This is particularly informative in action research as it allows for reflection on teaching and learning practices (Brock, et al. 1992: 295).

There is no standard definition describing note-taking in a research context, and terms vary from “observation” (Cohen et al., 2011: 456), “diary”, “journal” (Wallace, 1998: 62), to “field notes” (Schwandt, 2007:115; Silverman, 2010: 229). Diaries and journals depict the writing of the inquirer’s personal observations, ideas, reactions, impressions, and hypotheses. Field notes also contain factual data collected by the principal investigator but are predominantly associated with ethnographic inquiry (Silverman, 2010: 229). Besides, Wallace makes a distinction between a diary which is kept private and a journal which, according to him, is written with the intention to share its content (1998: 62). To avoid confusion, the generic term ‘observation’ or ‘teacher observation’ will be kept to refer to the facts and impressions that I constructed chronologically and kept in both hard and electronic copies. Wallace claims that such observations “tend to be qualitative or illuminative/heuristic because they reveal people’s attitude and private thoughts” (Wallace, 1998: 46); I argue that they can also be quantitative, as the pieces of information collected can also be hard facts such as events. Indeed, the written observations made throughout the study include details such as class attendance statistics and reference to incidents (e.g., the closure of blogs from the service provider) along with personal thoughts, and informal comments made by participants before, during, and after class, or during office hours.

4.4.4 – Participants’ messages and submitted reports

In addition to questionnaires, interviews and teacher observation, the data analysed for this study also includes the messages posted by participants in the discussion forum, blog and wiki, and the “dribble files” (Mann, 2006: 131), i.e. the information gathered by the VLE such as logging of student access, frequency and time of activities carried
out online. Indeed, the VLE used for the purpose of this study keeps a record of metadata accessible by the administrator (the teacher-researcher in this instance) and creates statistical information which can provide appreciation about student online practice. Furthermore, participants were asked, at the end of the second semester, to submit a report based on their experience with the wiki tool which will be investigated. The report was composed of five closed and open-ended questions, and was returned by participants once their wiki project was completed:

1. Was the wiki easy to use?
2. Specify the advantages / disadvantages of the wiki.
3. Did you learn from the other students’ postings?
4. Did it help remembering the cultural aspects raised during the term?
5. Any other comments?

4.4.5 – Analysis of the participants’ entries: Using thematic coding

As seen in the previous segments (Sections 4.4.1 to 4.4.4), the data produced by participants throughout the study was composed of their online entries in the three tools, as well as the feedback they provided in the questionnaires, the semi-directed interviews, their wiki report, and the teacher’s notes. The semi-directed interviews were transcribed, thus making all the data textual, with the aim to facilitate the analysis process. The data analysis consisted of “thematic content analysis” or TCA (Anderson, 2007; Bergström, 2007) which is also referred to as “coding” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Creswell, 2009; Saldaña, 2009). This section will explain what this method entails and how it was practised for the present study.

Coding may be understood as a descriptive presentation of the qualitative data being examined (Anderson, 2007). The descriptions may consist of tags or labels, namely, a word or a short phrase that captures the essence of the portions of texts selected (Saldaña, 2009). Indeed, the purpose of assigning labels is “to attach meaning to the pieces of data” (Creswell, 2009: 176). The literature indicates that the coding procedure is composed of two main phases. Firstly, the data is decoded (Saldaña, 2009: 4) by researchers, i.e. the labels created at the early stages of the analysis are essentially descriptive and require “little or no inference beyond the piece of data itself” (Creswell, Ibid.). Researchers here are merely reflecting on the information in order to grasp its
core meaning. Whereas, during the second phase, researchers are encoding (Saldaña, 
Ibid.) the data. They interpret the information and as such provide “some degree of 
inference beyond the data” (Ibid.), and as a consequence patterns and themes start to 
eremerge. Though using different terms, Bergström (2007) acknowledges the same two-
tiered procedure by describing the first phase as “seeing”, and the second phase as 
“seeing as”.

The examination of the participants’ data carried out for this thesis followed the same 
process of analysis in two phases. The initial codes were either descriptive and gave an 
overview of the chunk of information selected or were “in vivo” (Glaser and Strauss), 
i.e they originated directly from what the participants said. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data</th>
<th>Descriptive code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“People who are unable to use a computer might struggle.” (Aurélien)</td>
<td>Technical challenge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data</th>
<th>In vivo code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The wiki was very different to anything I had ever done on the computer before. It was really interesting and fun.” (Emmanuelle)</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fun

The subsequent codes showed more analytic reflection. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw data</th>
<th>Interpretative code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“There is a collective rather than individual effort, which may be unfair but can also promote teamwork and produces a wider knowledge base” (Nolwenn).</td>
<td>Community of practice / Cognitive presence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative research methodologists disagree on the amount of data that should be 
coded. A number of researchers (e.g., Lofland et al. 2006; Poland, 2002) believe that 
every pieces of information collected is worthy of consideration while others (e.g., 
Seidman, 2006) consider that only the most significant portions of the data should be 
examined. Following Saldaña’s advice addressed to neophyte qualitative researchers, I 
coded the total body of the data collected:

I have learned from years of qualitative data analysis that, only with experience, I 
now feel more secure knowing and feeling what is important in the data record and what 
is not […]. The beginning of my fieldwork career, however, was a major learning curve for me, and I coded anything and everything that was collected. I advise the same for novices to qualitative research. You, too, will eventually discover from experience what matters and what doesn’t in the data corpus. (Of
course, there will always be brief passages of minor or trivial consequence scattered throughout interviews and field notes. Code these N/A – not applicable).

(2009: 15)

In addition to implementing the above guidelines, pre-coding or “preliminary jotting” (Creswell, 2007; Saldaña, 2009) was carried out. In other words, I started the labelling process as the data was collected or transcribed; I did not wait for the fieldwork to be completed fully. This was also done in accordance with action research which prescribes ongoing analysis. The coding may not have been final then, but they later facilitated the analysis as they enabled me to document what had struck me when first discovering the data. These preliminary interpretations might have been forgotten or lost otherwise (Saldaña, 2009: 18).

4.5 – Empirical study timeline

Aspects about planning the research have been presented in the previous sections of this chapter. Now, the timeline of the project will be showed, detailing the introduction of the various social media in the classroom, the tasks performed by participants, and the collection of data. The main study which was conducted over three academic semesters was preceded by a one-semester-long pilot study. The objectives of the pilot study were to test the research “hypotheses, subjects, procedures and analysis methodologies” (Beatty, 2003: 199) on a smaller scale in order to identify problems with the methodology or if the research topic had to be refined. As the timeline reveals, some adjustments were made after results were analysed from the pilot study, in particular regarding the schedule of the social media, and means to collect questionnaires in order to increase the rate of response.
4.5.1 - Pilot study

The pilot study took place over the 2008 Spring semester (13 weeks) with 44 consenting participants divided into four groups (A, B, C, D). The topics of intercultural discussion included a number of aspects about French society thought to be of interest to the participants’ age group, and were limited by the curriculum. An overview of the topics tackled during the pilot project and the tasks completed by students can be found in Table 4.14.

Time was allocated in the Week 2 class to explain the purpose and the sequence of the new online activities to the students. All participants received an information sheet which described how to log onto the online space created for them, and what was required from them. As a number of students had already used Sulis (the university VLE) the previous semester in classes other than French, and as weekly student training sessions were organised by the University Library, no course dedicated to the introduction of the VLE was deemed necessary. Indeed, “Such an approach can save an immense amount of time in learner training” (Levy and Stockwell, 2006: 31). Ten texts were studied throughout the semester, so an equal number of online debates were opened in the online Class discussions forum. Each debate was opened for a limited duration of seven days in order to entice the students to react promptly. Messages could be posted at any time during this period. All messages posted on the VLE had to be written in French. At the beginning of each week, a message was posted in the Class discussions forum reminding the students what the text to be studied was, and invited them to talk about the cultural aspects that they had noticed. In addition to this open online debate, two designated students had to summarise the main ideas of the text analysed in the face-to-face class and the arguments of the debate taking place afterwards. Each group had its exclusive discussion forum which meant that, for instance, only students of group A had access to the discussion forum A. Depending on the group, some students anticipated the class debate by posting messages before the actual class (Group C) whereas the students of groups A, B and D preferred to write their opinions after the in-class debate had taken place. Lessons learnt from the pilot study include the need to provide more guidance to students regarding the use of the
blog and wiki, the importance of linking the classroom tasks with the online tasks, and the necessity to improve the return of questionnaires.

**Table 4.14 – Overview of topics discussed and tasks (Pilot project)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic(s) of discussion</th>
<th>Title of newspaper article</th>
<th>Question triggering debate in class and online</th>
<th>In-class and online tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Draw of groups for the oral presentations. Introduction to the online activities.</td>
<td>Etudiant Erasmus : ma cité-U va craquer</td>
<td>Vivre seul ou en colocation (à l'étranger) ?</td>
<td>Read the article and summarise the main ideas of the text. Note the cultural aspects you notice. Log in the VLE and navigate through the pages. Introduce yourself in the discussion forum Create your blog page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student life, student accommodation, Erasmus exchange programme, language learning</td>
<td>Les parents désarmés face à la génération gothique</td>
<td>Le mouvement gothique est-il qu'un phénomène de mode ou l'expression d'un mal-être ?</td>
<td>Read the article and summarise the main ideas of the text. Prepare arguments for the class and online debate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Goth teenagers, Goth music, Goth clothes, identity seeking, rebellion,</td>
<td>Le sport, pas la guerre…</td>
<td>Quelles peuvent être les dérives du sport ?</td>
<td>Prepare your oral presentation if you are scheduled this week. Note the cultural aspects you notice. Compare with the cultural aspects raised by your classmates and post your reactions. Update your blog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The culture of sports, sports as leisure versus competition</td>
<td>Joëlle Menrath, coauteure d'un rapport sur nos comportements avec le téléphone mobile</td>
<td>Le téléphone portable favorise-t-il la communication ?</td>
<td>Note the cultural aspects you notice. Compare with the cultural aspects raised by your classmates and post your reactions. Update your blog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mobile phone usage, communication</td>
<td>Téléréalité : Les paradis de la débilité</td>
<td>La télé-réalité est-elle l'expression de la régression de la civilisation ?</td>
<td>Same as above + Start /contribute to your group definition of French culture in the wiki.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Television, reality TV, representation of society</td>
<td>Quelques gestes pour alléger nos poubelles</td>
<td>Sommes-nous suffisamment respectueux de notre environnement?</td>
<td>Same as above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Environment, recycling, everyday gestures to protect the earth</td>
<td>Un constat alarmant</td>
<td>La société est-elle hypocrite face à l'alcool ?</td>
<td>Same as above. Watch the you tube video “Couleurs sous les drapeaux” about the French army Test your comprehension in the Tests and Quizzes section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Alcohol consumption, hypocrisy, disease, hospital</td>
<td>La violence est souvent le seul mode d'expression dans ces quartiers</td>
<td>La violence : le seul mode d'expression ans les quartiers sensibles ?</td>
<td>Same as above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The French suburbs, verbal and physical violence, society classes, patriarchy</td>
<td>L'armée peine à faire une place aux recrues issues de l'immigration</td>
<td>Le racisme : un mal inévitable ?</td>
<td>Same as above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The French army, immigration, racism</td>
<td>Sorée fabuleuse pour le lancement du sixième tome d’Harry Potter</td>
<td>L’univers fantastique peut-il être néfaste ?</td>
<td>Read the article and summarise the main ideas of the text. Prepare arguments for the class and online debate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Harry Potter phenomenon, reading, science fiction</td>
<td>Un joueur conteste le « hasard programmé » des jeux de grattage</td>
<td>Les jeux d’argent rendent-ils dépendants ?</td>
<td>Prepare your oral presentation if you are scheduled this week. Note the cultural aspects you notice. Compare with the cultural aspects raised by your classmates and post your reactions. Update your blog. Complete the wiki definition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.15 - Pilot project timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before the pilot</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>Week 13</th>
<th>After the pilot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethic committee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information sheet and consent form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation of discussion forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation of blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation of wiki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observation, recording of dribble files and participants’ online entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire (hard copy only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transcription of semi-structured interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.2 – Main study

The main study took place over three academic semesters (Autumn 2008, Spring 2008, and Autumn 2009) with approximately 60 consenting participants. The number of participants varied depending on the semester of study, as some participants dropped the project or the French course altogether (this is common with first-year students). During each semester the Français oral classes represented one weekly face-to-face hour of study. The participants were in four small groups of approximately fifteen students and the topics covered included the practice of sport, the use of mobile phones, the gothic generation, respect for the environment, Erasmus exchange programme, reality TV, alcoholism, violence in the suburbs, and the army. The aim of the class was to develop the students’ understanding of societal aspects of France (and to some extent of other French-speaking countries\(^1\)), to build up their grammar and vocabulary, to prepare them to debate in public, and to increase their summarising and debating skills. In order to achieve these objectives, the structure of the class was identical from week to week. At the end of each class, an article from a French newspaper dealing with an issue about French society was given to the students so that they had a whole week to read it, complete vocabulary exercises linked to the same article, and prepare arguments to debate on the main issue that the document tackled. In the next class, the first ten minutes were dedicated to the correction of the vocabulary exercises, then the students summarised the content of the text and highlighted the main points that they had understood. During all these activities, aspects of French culture and society were constantly stressed and compared to the Irish way of life. After this, a group of two or three students made an oral presentation which consisted of giving their point of view about the text by answering a question selected by the teacher and module coordinator before the course started. For example, the students who did a presentation about a text dealing with alcohol had to respond to the following question: Selon vous, l’alcoolisme est-il un problème sous-estimé? (“In your opinion, is alcoholism an underestimated problem?). Finally the students’ work opened up a debate within the whole group and the students gave their opinion in an argumentative way.

\(^1\) Other French-speaking countries in Europe, the Caribbean and Africa are studied in greater detail elsewhere in the programme.
The students’ handbook, in which the texts for the whole semester and the vocabulary exercises were provided, also included a section entitled *Bilan des connaissances* (Knowledge assessment). This was completed by the students who were willing to keep a record of their learning and was not assessed by the teacher. This *Bilan des connaissances* has been included for a number of years in the students’ handbook, but only a small number used it. From this failure, the idea of integrating the blog was partially developed. In addition to their usual class as described above, the students were given weekly assignments on Sulis to reflect on their cultural learning. The space created for the project aimed at supplementing the face-to-face class with the three social media (discussion forum, blog and wiki). The discussion forum was online from Week 3 to Week 13 during the first semester and from Week 1 to Week 12 during the second semester, and was composed of two parts: *Questions* where the participants could ask any questions about practical issues and contribute a reply, and *Class discussions* where they could discuss the cultural aspects of the texts they were reading, summarise the cultural content of what has been discussed in the previous face-to-face class, and participate in online debates with the students of their respective groups. The blog which was also used from Week 2 to Week 13, was a personal work used as a diary or a record of the students’ cultural and linguistic learning, and therefore was not accessible to the other students unless the original blogger decided to make it publicly available. The wiki was introduced in Week 6 with the aim of developing a definition of French culture by each group.

An overview of the topics tackled during the main study and the tasks completed by students can be found in Tables 4.16 and 4.18. Online tasks were altered slightly and training sessions on how to use the social media were reinforced after analysis of the pilot project. In-depth results and data analysis from the main study can be found in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

### 4.5.2.1 – Semester 1

As learnt from the pilot study, Semester 1 (and Semester 2) started with reinforced sessions that prepared participants to use the technology, as well as reflect upon their own culture and have greater perspective (Elola and Oskoz, 2008: 461). Clear
guidelines were given to students with examples of messages to post. Students were asked to write a minimum of one entry per topic in the discussion forum, and one message per week in their blog. They were encouraged to refer to the previous messages posted rather than only expressing their viewpoint. Students were awarded 5% of the mark of the module for their participation in the forum (2.5%) and blog (2.5%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic(s) of discussion</th>
<th>Title of newspaper article</th>
<th>Question triggering debate in class and online</th>
<th>In-class and online tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No classes as students do not have their tutorial classes timetable yet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Description of curriculum. Instruction to buy booklet of articles. Draw of groups for oral presentations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Session in computer lab. Introduction to the virtual learning environment, online forum and blog.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 4    | Television, reading, communication, stereotypes, food and eating habit, cultural differences. | La télévision tue-t-elle l’envie de lire ? | Watch the video of your mock oral presentation and note how you can improve your performance. Adopt one point of view (in favour or against TV) and take part to the class debate about TV. Read the testimony of a foreigner learning the difference between “tea” and “dinner” and practice online discussion with the online debate about the eating habit “tea” vs “dinner”. Update your blog. | Introduce yourself in the online forum. Create and customise your blog page. Post a first message (e.g., “For me French culture is…”)

| 5    | Television, reading, communication, stereotypes, food and eating habit, cultural differences. | La télévision tue-t-elle l’envie de lire ? |                                             | Read the article and summarise the main ideas of the text. Note the cultural aspects you notice. Prepare arguments for a mock oral group presentation. Practice online discussion with the online debate about stereotypes. React to Frapar’d cartoon about French stereotypes. Update your blog. |
| 6    | Television, reading, communication, stereotypes, food and eating habit, cultural differences. | La télévision tue-t-elle l’envie de lire ? |                                             | Watch the video of your mock oral presentation and note how you can improve your performance. Adopt one point of view (in favour or against TV) and take part to the class debate about TV. Read the testimony of a foreigner learning the difference between “tea” and “dinner” and practice online discussion with the online debate about the eating habit “tea” vs “dinner”. Update your blog. |
| 7    | Economy, everyday consumption | Comment consommer moins cher | Pensez-vous que l’Euro a changé les habitudes de consommation ? | Read the article and summarise the main ideas of the text. |
| 8    | Internet, social media, Facebook, issues of privacy | Avec Facebook, on papote sur le Web comme à la machine à café | La vie privée des internautes peut-elle être préservée ? | Prepare arguments for the class and online debate. |
| 9    | Tattoos, fashion, identity and peer pressure | Des durs, des doux, des tatoués | Le tatouage : forme d’expression ou phénomène de mode ? | Prepare your oral presentation if you are scheduled this week. Note the cultural aspects you notice in the text. |
| 10   | Driving legal age, options to learn driving | Le permis de conduire à 16 ans ? | A votre avis, la conduite accompagnée est-elle plus efficace que l’apprentissage traditionnel ? | Compare with the cultural aspects raised by your classmates and post your reactions. |
| 11   | Studying abroad, foreign language learning, intercultural exchanges | Etudier une année en Europe grâce au programme d’échanges Erasmus | Pensez-vous que les échanges Erasmus doivent être obligatoires pour tous les étudiants ? | Click on the hyperlink provided in the online forum to navigate through French websites or videos related to the topic of the week. Update your blog. |
| 12   | The disabled, respect, society | Double épreuve pour les handicapés | D’après-vous, notre société est-elle adaptée aux handicapés ? |                          |
Table 4.17 - Main study timeline – Semester 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before the study</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>Week 13</th>
<th>After Semester 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethic committee Approval</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sheet and consent form</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training sessions on how to use the virtual learning environment organised by library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of forum in class</td>
<td>Blog training 1</td>
<td>Blog training 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of discussion forum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of blog</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation, recording of dribble files and participants’ online entries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire (hard copy and online)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription of semi-structured interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of questionnaire 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.2.2 – Semester 2

The procedure of the classes was very similar to the first semester, with the exception that the blog was replaced by the wiki.

Table 4.18 – Overview of topics discussed and tasks (Semester 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic(s) of discussion</th>
<th>Title of newspaper article</th>
<th>Question triggering debate in class and online</th>
<th>In-class and online tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Draw of groups for the oral presentations. Reminder of the research, and introduction to the new online activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student life, student accommodation, Erasmus exchange programme, language learning</td>
<td>Étudiant Erasmus : ma cité-U va craquer</td>
<td>Vivre seul ou en colocation (à l'étranger) ?</td>
<td>Read the article and summarise the main ideas of the text. Prepare arguments for the class and online debate. Prepare your oral presentation if you are scheduled this week. Note the cultural aspects you notice. Compare with the cultural aspects raised by your classmates and post your reactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Session in computer lab. Introduction to wiki.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Practice using the wiki. Insert text, edit layout, upload picture. Follow the instructions for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The culture of sports, sports as leisure versus competition</td>
<td>Le sport, pas la guerre…</td>
<td>Quelles peuvent être les dérives du sport ?</td>
<td>Read the article and summarise the main ideas of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Goth teenagers, Goth music, Goth clothes, identity seeking, rebellion,</td>
<td>Les parents désarmés face à la génération gothique</td>
<td>Le mouvement gothique est-il qu’un phénomène de mode ou l’expression d’un mal-être ?</td>
<td>Prepare arguments for the class and online debate. Prepare your oral presentation if you are scheduled this week. Note the cultural aspects you notice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Environment, recycling, everyday gestures to protect the earth</td>
<td>Quelques gestes pour alléger nos poubelles</td>
<td>Sommes-nous suffisamment respectueux de notre environnement ?</td>
<td>Note the cultural aspects you notice. Compare with the cultural aspects raised by your classmates and post your reactions. Practice using the wiki.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Television, reality TV, representation of society</td>
<td>Télé-réalité : Les paradis de la débilité</td>
<td>La télé-réalité est-elle l’expression de la régression de la civilisation ?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bank Holiday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Alcohol consumption, hypocrisy, disease, hospital</td>
<td>Un constat alarmant</td>
<td>La société est-elle hypocrite face à l'alcool ?</td>
<td>Read the article and summarise the main ideas of the text. Prepare arguments for the class and online debate. Prepare your oral presentation if you are scheduled this week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mobile phone usage, communication</td>
<td>Joëlle Menrath, coauteure d’un rapport sur nos comportements avec le téléphone mobile</td>
<td>Le téléphone portable favorise-t-il la communication ?</td>
<td>Note the cultural aspects you notice. Compare with the cultural aspects raised by your classmates and post your reactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The French suburbs, verbal and physical violence, society classes, patriarchy</td>
<td>La violence est souvent le seul mode d’expression dans ces quartiers</td>
<td>La violence : le seul mode d’expression ans les quartiers sensibles ?</td>
<td>Note the cultural aspects you notice. Compare with the cultural aspects raised by your classmates and post your reactions. Start/contribute to your group definition of French culture in the wiki.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Complete the wiki definition and return wiki report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Complete the wiki definition and return wiki report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students were awarded 5% for their participation in the virtual learning environment: discussion forum (0%) and wiki (5%). Following the success of the discussion forum during the first semester, the marking scheme was altered to test if the amount of marks attributed to the tool was a motivating factor.
Table 4.19 - Main study timeline – Semester 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>Week 13</th>
<th>After Semester 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Wiki training session</strong></td>
<td><strong>Trial use of wiki</strong></td>
<td><strong>Definition of culture in wiki</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Transcription of semi-structured interview</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Observation, recording of dribble files and participants’ online entries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Questionnaire (hard copy and online)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interview</strong></td>
<td><strong>Data analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Design of questionnaire 3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.2.3 – Semester 3

During the third semester, students experienced the *Français oral* classes without social media for the first time. A questionnaire was submitted to them at the end of the semester in which preliminary results of the study were included. Participants were asked to comment on them, compare their experience of social media with six-month hindsight, and state what they remembered from the online activities pertaining to intercultural issues. The questionnaire was only available online and no semi-structured interview was organised for practical reasons, as students were not easy to bring together due to other commitments (closeness to exams, preparation to leave for the Erasmus programme).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.20 - Main study timeline – Semester 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1 to week 12</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No social media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

185
4.6 - Conclusion

This chapter presented how a relevant methodology has been drawn up for the purpose of this research study. From the examination of previous research in the discipline of CALL/SMALL, key components including ethics, standards of quality, methods of inquiry, sampling strategies, and data collection methods have been meticulously selected and the process demonstrated (Figure 4.2). Moreover, a detailed outline of the research context has been presented in order to facilitate the reading of the empirical study results. The next two chapters will present the participants’ reactions and patterns of interaction pertaining to the use of social media for acquiring ICC which will be illuminated with the researcher’s observations.

---

**Research objectives:**
1. Investigate how elements of social media can enhance the teaching and learning of intercultural awareness.
2. Integrate resources in the Français oral classes, and evaluate learners’ interactions within the new learning environment.
3. Analyse outcomes in comparison to related research.

**Paradigm:**
Mixed of qualitative and quantitative methods

**Research methods:**
Action research
Case study

**Data collection methods:**
Questionnaires
Semi-structured interviews and transcriptions
Observation
Participants’ messages
Dribble files
Wiki report

**Research questions:**
1. How is culture linked to language teaching and learning and what is ICC?
2. How do social media develop awareness of ICC?
3. How can intercultural communicative competence be developed online in an educational context?
4. How do fundamental concepts in language learning and education (motivation, autonomy, deep learning) relate to the teaching of ICC with social media?
5. What recommendations from this study set in a standard third-level teaching and learning setting may benefit other practitioners in foreign language education?

**Research sub-questions:**
1. Can ICC be assessed in an educational context? If yes, how?
2. Which social media are better suited for enhancing ICC?
3. How do students react to social media implemented in their course for the purpose of developing ICC?
4. How do students interact within the social media implemented in their course for the purpose of developing ICC?

**Sampling strategies:**
Non-probability
Convenience and Purposive sampling

**Researcher’s stance:**
Observer-as-participant

**Evaluation and standards of quality:**
Credibility
Transferability
Dependability
Confirmability

Figure 4.2 - Summary of the research design
CHAPTER 5 – Data analysis: the students’ reaction and interaction

Any more comment about the online activities?

- “Thank you for helping to make my study of French culture more interesting! The online activities, particularly the discussion forums, are a very good idea and were very valuable tools for learning about different aspects of French culture, while improving your written French at the same time.” (Anonymous student)

- “Please bring back the online activities! :)” (Emmanuelle)

- “Seriously, abandon it.” (Patrice)

5.1 Introduction

The data analysis of this thesis is divided between Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. This chapter may be referred to as an “analytical (objective) narrative” and Chapter 6 as a “reflective (literary) narrative” (Leedy, 1997: 166). In other words, Chapter 5 predominantly gives facts or raw information while the next chapter portrays the researcher’s interpretation and personal analysis of the data collected throughout the study. This chapter is composed of the feedback\(^{17}\) obtained from students in the questionnaires, semi-directed interviews, and the wiki report. The researcher’s opinion, while undeniably present, is kept to a minimum thus leaving the interpretation of results open to the reader. Chapter 5 also introduces ideas that will be analysed in more depth in Chapter 6. As recommended by Creswell (2007, see also Section 4.2.1.1) direct quotations are provided and the analytical themes are drawn from the words of the participants. In addition, some data from the dribble files and notes taken from the researcher’s diary are included.

This chapter comprises five parts which respectively describe the project context, provide students’ comments on the acquisition of ICC, their experience of working with social media, an analysis of the participants’ online interaction, and results from the

\(^{17}\) As there will be a very substantial number of quotations from students in this thesis, it would be too intrusive to follow the editorial practice of including [sic]. Therefore, the transcripts are reproduced without annotation.
members’ check (the term is explained in Section 4.2.2). The first section indicates the numerical response of students to the study, namely the participation rate and the number of students who completed the questionnaires, attended the semi-directed interviews and returned the wiki report. It also gives details regarding the profile of learners (course of study, age, gender, computer literacy) who took part in the research project. Section 5.3 gives insight into the participants’ ICC development, starting with general comments about the usefulness of social media in that context and then focusing on each online application used, i.e. the discussion forum, blog and wiki. Section 5.4 shows the students’ point of view regarding the benefits and challenges of learning online with the specific tools implemented in the study. It also addresses the issues of motivation, autonomy and reflection in a “Community of Practice” (Wenger, 2009) which were introduced in Chapter 2. Section 5.5 proposes an analysis of the students’ interaction in the discussion forum, the blog and the wiki, and highlights which feature of each tool facilitated the participants’ development of ICC. For instance, the discussion forum was an effective means to prolong the intercultural debates started in class while the blog was a space where learners reflected on a wider range of issues than expected. Section 5.5 also concentrates on the students’ views on culture and intercultural communicative competence. It shows that their understanding of the concept developed significantly, notably with a higher recognition of “little c” components. Finally, the last part of Chapter 5 demonstrates that the majority of participants validated the preliminary results presented to them by the researcher towards the end of the empirical study.

### 5.2 Project context

The research project was carried out in the University of Limerick, Ireland over a three semester period between September 2008 and December 2009. Each semester was composed of 12 teaching weeks. At the beginning of the study, the participants were first-year students on degree programmes on the Bachelor of Arts in European Studies (25), the Bachelor of Arts in Joint Honours which includes the study of Economics, Languages, Law, Politics and Sociology (29), the Bachelor of Law (8) and on the Erasmus exchange programme (2). Therefore, the significance of the French module in
the students’ programme varied according to their degree course. All the Irish students selected for the study had passed the French Higher Level Leaving Certificate examination with a minimum C3 grade\textsuperscript{18}, which means their level in the language was varied from intermediate upwards (equivalent to B1 level of the Common European Framework of References for Languages).

As explained in Section 4.5.2, the course opted for a blended learning approach where online activities with a discussion forum, a blog and a wiki were introduced in addition to the face-to-face tutorials. But other read-only applications were also used by the students during the semesters. Students were asked to comment on their participation in these applications (e.g., the resources for the common mistakes and tests and quizzes (Section 5.4.3). The teacher was the sole person able to add information or modify the content of ‘announcements’, ‘resources’ and ‘tests and quizzes’. The ‘announcements’ tool was regularly used to distribute information and send out notification to the students about activities, e.g., welcoming the students at the beginning of the semester, encouraging them to continue posting comments, alerting them that the wiki had started, and pointing out that a quiz on cultural traits had begun. The ‘resources’ tool was used to store and frequently update documents for the use of the learners (texts to study, dates and names for oral presentations, information sheet about the use of the virtual learning environment, correction of grammatical errors in the discussion forum). Finally, in Week 8, a video link was posted in addition to the usual invitation to discuss cultural aspects in the discussion forum. Students were asked to react to a text about Facebook during tutorial time, and the video depicted the testimony of young French students discussing their use of online social media. The same week, the ‘tests and quizzes’ application was added. Here students could check their comprehension of the video and learn about cultural aspects by completing an informal test created by the teacher. Another quiz was offered in Week 10 to enable participants to test their knowledge on cultural issues that were discussed throughout the semester.

\textsuperscript{18} The Leaving Certificate is a Baccalauréat-type examination which marks the end of secondary school education in Ireland and the amount of points obtained determines entry to third-level education.
5.2.1 Students’ participation

Students’ participation was very satisfactory at the start of the project: the dribble files and teacher observation show that during Semester 1, all 64 students (100%) logged to Sulis and consulted the discussion forum. The forum was the most used application with 49 students (76.5%\(^\text{19}\)) actively posting messages. A total of 219 messages were exchanged during Semester 1 (174 student messages and 45 posts made by the instructor). On average, 3.5 messages were posted by active students during Semester 1 when the forum was open for 12 weeks and included 9 different topics of debate (Table 4.16). The least active student posted 1 message and the most active student posted 9 messages. However participation in the online activities decreased from Semester 1 to Semester 2. The learners’ feedback revealed 6 reasons explaining this diminution (Table 5.1). During Semester 2, 51 students (92.7%) consulted the online forum and 23 of them (41.8%) actively shared information in it. The online discussions generated 70 messages during Semester 2 (54 student messages and 16 prompts and feedback from the teacher). The forum was also open for 12 weeks during Semester 2, and included 8 different topics of debate (Table 4.18). The least active student posted 1 entry in the forum and the most active student posted 4 entries, making it an average of 2.3 messages per active participant. Students whose participation in the discussion forums decreased from Semester 1 to Semester 2 claimed that “there was a lot more projects to keep up with, [thus making it] harder to contribute to them” (Anonymous female student)\(^\text{20}\) or that “the novelty wore off in semester two and [their] participation dropped” (Emmanuelle) as a consequence. It was noted that participation varied greatly depending on the tools/tasks.

\(^{19}\) N.B. Percentage figures emanating from questionnaires data may vary slightly. This is because some students skipped a number of questions or some answers were invalid. Statistics are calculated from the total of individual answers provided in each question (e.g. 52) rather than the total of enrolled students (e.g. 64).

\(^{20}\) In order to preserve the participants’ anonymity, their names have been changed. All students whose identity was revealed to the researcher were given French names. Sometimes, students chose not to identify themselves (they were given the option not to indicate their name in the questionnaires) and are only referred to by their gender. French names have been adopted instead of Irish names in order to avoid repetitions of names.
### Table 5.1 – Reasons provided by students regarding their decrease in online participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of participation’s decrease</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in marking scheme</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload from main degree modules</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time and effort required by the tasks or “laziness” (Ariane)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ forgetfulness, or reduction of reminders and prompts from the tutor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstanding of the tasks or difficulty to link the online activities and the class objectives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The novelty wore off or the topics of discussion were less interesting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison, the blog attracted significantly less contribution from participants: 47 students (85.4%) created a blog but only 11 students (20%) wrote more than one entry when the guidelines recommended writing at least once weekly for a 10 week period. The wiki history function indicates that students seemed highly involved in defining French culture as 45 students (81.8%) participated and posted 484 entries over 4 weeks. The least active student posted 1 entry in the wiki and the most active one posted 38 entries; on average 10.7 entries were uploaded per active participant. Learners who were divided into 8 groups were asked to write a circa 400 word-long definition of French culture with the wiki tool. All 8 definitions exceeded the word limit with an average of 1,040 words. This may imply that students were remarkably motivated by the task. However, students’ comments (Section 5.3.4) show that the wiki editing feature was problematic and partly resulted in the overflow of words. Furthermore, these quantitative measures of student online participation may not provide the full extent of student interactions. As a consequence, the content and quality of the messages posted by students in the various online tools will be discussed in Section 5.5.4. Such analysis may also enable us to observe if there is any evidence that the students’ ICC developed during the study.

### 5.2.2 Students’ profile

The first parts of Questionnaire 1 and 2 (Appendices 9 and 10) focused on eliciting personal information about the participants, such as their age, gender, language proficiency, and computer and social media literacy. Data shows that at the beginning of the study, learners’ ages ranged from 17 to 40, with a median age of 18.8. According to Questionnaire 1, the vast majority were 19 and under: 9% of students were 17 years of age; 47.2% were 18, 32.7% were 19, 7.2% were 20, and only 1.8% was 40. Student registration figures indicate that the majority of students were female (over 78%) during
all three semesters. Students were predominantly Irish (90.1% during Semester 1, 91.1% during Semester 2 and 92.2% during Semester 3). Teacher observation reveals that among these Irish nationals, one had a French parent, and one had an Italian parent. In addition, one Italian student and one Spanish student were enrolled for the three semesters, and one Spanish student attended Semesters 1 and 2. Students reported to have been studying French as a foreign language between 5 and 7 years.

The students’ computer literacy and Internet access were self-assessed in Questionnaires 1 and 2. All participants but one stated to be familiar with Word processing, and in general had been using it for 3-4 years (72%). They were all Internet users; the majority of them (92.2%) had been for 2-4 years. At the beginning of the project, only 2 students (3.7%) attested not to have used any social networking sites. The social media users generally had an active Bebo account (68.3%). Facebook came in second position (26.6%), followed by MSN Messenger (16.6%), My Space (3.33%) and Tuenti (1.6%). They were using social media for a relatively short time: 12.9% for less than a year; 31.4% for 1-2 years and also for 2-3 years, and 20.4% for 3-4 years or more. After spending two semesters doing online activities, 65% of students felt that their computer skills had improved as a result.

In anticipation of students experiencing difficulties with social media, class time was allocated at the beginning of Semester 1 to explain the purpose and the sequence of the new online activities. During the hands-on session, all participants were shown how to log to the university virtual learning environment (Sulis), how to use the discussion forum, and how to create a blog. They were also given an information sheet which described all the tasks required for the duration of the study; this document was also uploaded on the VLE so that students could consult it at any time. In addition, students were advised of general training sessions about using Sulis taking place in the library on a regular basis. According to Questionnaire 1, 86% of students felt that the in-class training session was helpful: “It helped me to understand how to actually use the activities” (Emmanuelle). Most of the students who replied “no” or skipped the question commented that they could not provide an answer because they had not attended this particular class. 2 students expressed their wish that there were more sessions organised: “Would have been lost without it. Maybe two next time would
really help” (Cédric). Resulting from this situation, an extra session was added for students who felt they needed more assistance, and several sessions on how to use the wiki were held during Semester 2. This information confirms Donaldson’s and Haggström’s (2006) belief that the new generation of students who are using social media in their everyday life – sometimes called the “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) - are not always prepared to use Internet technologies for language learning (Section 2.4.6). This is also exemplified by a comment during the first semi-directed interview where a student described the university as a “techno college” which forced her to adjust. As a consequence, this study confirms that training sessions should not be overlooked. Besides social media literacy, access to Internet has been reported to impact on student participation in the online activities. 21.7% of participants did not have access to the Internet outside of the university campus or their connexion was too slow to work in ideal conditions. 37.5% of these students explained that it affected their participation; watching videos was an issue, for example.

5.3 Acquisition of ICC with social media: The students’ reaction

5.3.1 Online activities for developing ICC: General comments

As part of the process of making participants aware of their ICC, students had to reflect on their cultural knowledge and linguistic competence. In Questionnaire 1, they were asked “During your French studies (in secondary school and third-level education), have you been taught aspects of French culture other than in the Français oral tutorial?” 25 students (48.1%) felt that they had been exposed to French culture and 27 students (51.9%) stated they had not, mainly because the curriculum was exam-oriented: “In secondary school the emphasis was on the exam papers, and simply passing the exam, rather than learning about French culture” (Agnès). The majority of learners who claimed to be aware of aspects of French culture listed examples of “little c” culture (Halverson, 1985; as explained in Section 1.2.1 and Table 1.1) or anthropological culture as being features taught to them in secondary school. The most cited features were French food, music, film and sport (Table 5.2). Three students said that they had
personal insight of the French way of life on top of their textbook knowledge because they lived with French families or had first-hand accounts from native speakers:

“I travelled to France in the summer of 2006 where I partook in a French exchange in Antibes for two weeks, where I lived with a French family and was immersed in their daily life and culture” (Laura)

“In our final year, a French girl moved to our school and our teacher would get her to join our class once a week to tell us about life in France as well as practise our French” (Alice)

“In secondary school […] we went on an exchange to France where we stayed with French families” (Anonymous female student)

Another learner explained that studying a French novel during her university literature module enabled her to learn about parts of France: “When studying Marius I got an insight into the culture of Marseille!” (Ariane) However, none of these four students did give precise examples of what they understood by French culture. Further analysis in Section 5.5.4 will show if the participants’ view of French culture grew and included more “little c” aspects towards the end of the study and were more specific.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Number of entries</th>
<th>Selected quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“In school (secondary) we organised French breakfast” (Maëlle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“We did projects about French culture in secondary school ranging from food to music to pastimes” (Charlotte)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“In second-level our teacher showed us the French film <em>Les Choristes</em>” (Alice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Our teacher in secondary school found it very important to introduce us to the culture and everyday life in France, e.g., she called out headlines from Le Monde as a dictation exercise and we discussed them afterwards” (Kirstin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School system</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“In secondary school we learned a bit on the French education system” (Carla)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport, pastimes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Mostly through projects in transition year on French sport.” (Oscar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“French celebrities - in University” (Rolande)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“In the grammar class we read the play Marius” (Edith)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National anthem</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“national anthem, pastimes” (Isabelle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“School system and religion in France - in secondary school” (Rolande)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“In secondary school, […] we would compare French and Irish traditions” (Laura)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“French culture covered in each chapter of textbook e.g., French food in chapter on food, French transport in transport etc.” (Charles)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(data from Questionnaire 1)

Students were also asked if they felt that their cultural competence had increased during the study. Data from questionnaire 1 shows that students considered that their cultural knowledge had improved within the duration of the project (Figure 5.1). The same question was asked to participants in Questionnaire 2 and the majority of participants confirmed that they still felt that the online activities contributed to the

21 The term ‘intercultural communicative competence’ was deliberately avoided to prevent student confusion.
development of their cultural skills. It may seem obvious that learners doing activities pertaining to culture for a few months period will indubitably increase their cultural awareness, thus a further analysis on what students actually learned and through which process they did so will be carried out in Section 5.5.4. In Questionnaire 1, 32 students (61.5%) stated that their cultural knowledge was “good” or “very good” before the study started and the figure went up with 52 students (100%) claiming the same at the end of the first semester. At the end of Semester 2, 4 students (17.4%) said that they strongly agreed with the statement “The online activities helped my understanding of (French) culture”. 12 students (52.2%) agreed with the same statement, 4 students (17.4%) remained neutral, no student disagreed, and 3 students (13%) strongly disagreed. Students commented that the online activities were helpful in that they “really encouraged [them] to research and find out more about French culture” (Emmanuelle) or that they were “always good to get people’s opinions and pick up new words and phrases” (Anonymous female student). The students who did not think the activities were helpful did not comment in the questionnaire.

![Figure 5.1](image)

Figure 5.1 – Comparison of cultural knowledge before and after Semester 1 (data from Questionnaire 1)

Furthermore, students were asked if they felt that the online cultural reflection enabled them to learn about their own culture in addition to the target culture. 6 students (11.5%) strongly agreed and 41 students (78.8%) agreed to the statement. According to
them the process of learning about French culture inherently made them think about their own culture and compare it with the target culture:

“It helps in terms of making comparisons with your own culture. It is an eye opener” (Cédric)

“It allows me to compare Ireland with France and makes me take notice of some aspects of Irish culture which I haven’t noticed before” (Sandrine)

“Yes because it makes you think about aspects of another culture and then relate it to you own” (Karine)

“I have learned that things I thought weren’t very unusual in Ireland are very different to other countries. Eg: habits, etc.” (Anonymous female student)

3 students (9.6%) disagreed with the statement. One participant claimed that there was not much difference between French culture and other cultures: “A lot of the aspects of French culture are international” (Anonymous female student). Another participant explained that she personally did not find she had learned much from the experience but that it may have benefited individuals who are not well-travelled: “I don't think it really makes a difference, but then again to someone who hasn’t travelled that much I could see how it could be interesting to them” (Charlotte). Finally, learners were asked if they believed that the online activities helped to improve their French language. 3 students (13 %) strongly agreed, 9 students (39.1%) agreed, and 7 (30.4%) remained neutral. 2 students (8.7%) disagreed and 2 students (8.7%) strongly disagreed. Learners who felt that the online activities contributed to improve their French language mentioned that the act of typing reinforced their writing skills as well as learning French keyboard shortcuts for accents:

“The discussion forum has made me more confident in my writing and usage of French. I feel that it has been the most effective part of the module in improving my written French. I enjoy the fact that it is a more relaxed way of practising French than homework or tests” (Caroline)

“It was good practice to write in French using the computer on a weekly basis” (Sabrina)

The students who answered negatively mentioned that social media activities were “not as intensive as class work but more enjoyable all the same” but that eventually “study is most effective” (Charles).

The next section focuses on each individual tool and how, according to participants, they contributed to raising their awareness of ICC. Students clearly expressed that the
Blog was their least favourite application but were more divided as far as the discussion forum and wiki were concerned. Overall, the discussion forum was the most liked activity (Figure 5.2). In Questionnaire 2, learners were asked to “write [their] order of preference of the following tools: discussion forum, blog and wiki (1 is most liked and 3 the least liked)”. 11 students (47.8%) put the discussion forum in first place, 9 students (39.1%) chose the wiki as their favourite social media and 3 students (13%) put the blog as number 1. 11 students (17.8%) placed the discussion forum as their second favourite tool, 8 students (34.8%) put the wiki in second place and 4 students (17.4%) put the blog as number 2. 1 student (4.3%) stated that the discussion forum was his/her least favourite tool, 6 students (26.1%) put the wiki in third place and 16 students (69.6%) placed the blog in last position. Participants confirmed their feelings about the tools in Questionnaire 3 but were more pronounced: the discussion forum reached first place more clearly, followed by the wiki, and the blog was again strongly depicted as the least liked tool.

Figure 5.2 – Social media listed in order of preference (data from Questionnaire 2)
5.3.2 Developing ICC with the discussion forum

The discussion forum was a place where students could discuss the cultural aspects of the texts they were reading, and participate in online debates with the students of their respective groups. The language of interaction was French. At the beginning of each week, the teacher posted a message on the discussion forum reminding the students what the text to be studied for the face-to-face class was, and invited them to talk about the cultural aspects that they had noticed. At the beginning of Semester 1, before participants were given the texts to read for their course study, learners were also prompted to introduce themselves, react to a document on French stereotypes (Appendix 13) and comment on a testimony (Appendix 14) revealing how words may convey different meanings depending on the culture they are used in (e.g., the words “tea” and “dinner”). Each class group had its exclusive discussion forum which meant that, for instance, only students of group A had access to the discussion forum A. Depending on the group, some students anticipated the class debate by posting messages before the actual class whereas others preferred to write their opinions after the in-class debate had taken place.

73% of the students who responded to the first questionnaire expressed their enthusiasm after working with the discussion forum (Figure 5.3): 2 students (3.8%) said that the forum was “extremely helpful” in improving their cultural competence, 17 (32.6%) students claimed that it was “very helpful” and 19 students (36.5%) stated that it was “helpful”. 6 students (11.5%) said that the online discussions were “little helpful” in their ICC acquisition and 2 students (3.8%) answered that it was “not helpful at all”. 6 of the students who responded (11.5%) confessed not using the discussion forum.
The participants who responded positively to the online forum activities provided a variety of reasons for their keen interest. Firstly, they explained that the tool enabled them to share with and learn from their peers: “Using a discussion forum allows you to interact with fellow students and see their ideas and interact thoughts and knowledge” (Laura). Besides, the open feature of the forum made learning possible even when students were not actively writing messages: “It is interesting to read what other people have written and gives an insight into the culture of France” (Paul). Students also indicated some signs of appreciation because the discussion forum gave them an opportunity of exchange never offered to them before: “It's the first time I have spoken on France and its aspects to other students” (Aurélien). In addition, a number of students found the environment less intimidating than a face-to-face conversation: “I loved the discussion forum as it allowed everyone to contribute and let you see what your classmates thought and it was less daunting than speaking in front of a class of strangers” (Anonymous student). The students who answered negatively about the forum activities explained that they “probably did not participate enough for it to be helpful!” (Rolande) and although they enjoyed the online debates, they were not convinced that they “necessarily learn[ed] lots about France from it” (Charles).

In their second year of undergraduate study, students continued to attend the Français oral classes as part of their curriculum, but this time the online activities were not implemented. When asked to compare their experience between Year 1 and Year 2, 7 students (50%) declared missing the discussion forum activities and commented that the
weekly online discussions were an activity they used to eagerly await: “The discussion forums were a great tool […]. Last year, I found myself looking forward to them each week” (Emmanuelle). In addition to learning from their peers, students felt that the teacher’s acknowledgment contributed to a positive experience: “They were useful. Seeing other people’s views is always a help and I liked the tutor feedback” (Cédric). 5 students (35.7%) answered that they did not miss the online forum, and 2 students (14.3%) admitted not having used the discussion forum. One learner commented that “it was hard to express opinions in that manner, where they were being viewed by other students. As well, not that many people used them but I suppose that was our fault” (Anonymous male student). Another student also commented on the low participation but explained that having a choice to use the forum was preferable to being deprived from it:

“Yes, I would have liked if [the discussion forum] had been a voluntary option which did not count towards our grade. Although I, and other students, might not have contributed a lot to it if it had been available, I would have liked to have the option of writing in it when I had some free time in order to improve my written French and my knowledge of French culture.” (Anonymous female student).

This comment reinforces the students’ positive disposition towards the discussion forum and its many benefits in the foreign language classroom. Indeed, generally speaking, participants explained that the marks awarded towards each online activity was a high motivating factor, but the student’s quotation above illustrate the fact that some learners were ready to keep using the discussion forum even if no grade was awarded. As the next section will show, students did not share the same opinion for the blogging activity.

5.3.3 Developing ICC with the blog

The blog enabled the students to keep a chronological web log of their personal learning progress during Semester 1. Students were not prompted by a message posted by the teacher every week as was the case with the discussion forum. Instead, they were required to work independently and more freely. This being said, they could follow the tutor’s blog which was updated every week to set an example. Students could comment on cultural learning taking place in the academic context but were also encouraged to
bring in other experiences, e.g., information acquired in their everyday life or encounters with foreigners. Students had the option to write their blog entries in French or in English. Contrary to the online discussion forum, the blog was not automatically available to all the members of the group. They had to share it with their teacher but could choose to share their blog with the others during the semester or to keep it private. Very few students who created a blog page made it publicly accessible or invited other students to sign up to their blog. Yet, as we shall see in Section 5.5.2, the comments made in the blog enable to comprehend a little bit about the participants’ learning process. Furthermore, comments in the questionnaires and group interviews enable us to evaluate to some extent the success or otherwise of the blog.

The students’ reactions to the blog show a more limited enthusiasm than with the discussion forum. 34% of the students who responded to Questionnaire 1 expressed having a positive disposition towards the blog after working with it (Figure 5.4): no student said that the blog was “extremely helpful” in improving their cultural competence, 2 students (4%) claimed that it was “very helpful” and 15 students (30%) stated that it was “helpful”. 19 students (38%) said that the blog was “a little helpful” in their ICC acquisition and 8 students (16%) answered that it was “not helpful at all”. 6 of the students who responded (12%) admitted not using the blog.

![Figure 5.4 – Contribution of the blog for ICC acquisition](image)

Students who enjoyed the blog said that they did so because it “allowed [them] to express [their] personal thoughts on French culture” (Agnès) without being constrained
by specific topics. For some, contributing to the blog was also a personal incentive to satisfy their curiosity and compile their ideas in a stimulating environment:

“Although I did not get to post as many entries to my blog as I would have liked, I found that it was very helpful in adding to my interest in French culture and is a very innovative way of studying the culture of France.” (Caroline)

One student mentioned that she was pleased to comment on other students’ page: “It allowed me to give feedback” (Isabelle). A number of students who did not feel that the blog was helpful to raise their awareness of ICC said that the main reason was because they “didn’t use it enough so it hasn’t improved [their] cultural competence a lot” (Bérengère). But a large number of other causes were raised; students often compared the more beneficial discussion forum to illustrate their arguments. To begin with, participants felt that writing in the blog was redundant with the online forum tasks: “I felt I was repeating myself and writing the exact same thing as in the forum discussions” (Julie); they preferred instead to write in the online forum which was more engaging:

“I found that I did not use the blog at all very much. The discussion forum was a lot more helpful and appealing and therefore I felt I would just be repeating myself if I wrote in the blog.” (Emmanuelle)

“You are not able to interact with people because everyone makes theirs private.” (Karine)

Several students also mentioned that they felt at a loss without specific guidelines: “I didn’t know what to write about” (Amandine) or “It was a chore to sit down every week and make up things to write about” (Karine). Besides, many students opted to write their blog in English because it was easier for them, but they found out afterwards that this was detrimental:

“Would have been better if it was all in French” (Bastien)

“I found the discussion forum more helpful than this, as writing in English, while easier, didn’t enrich my knowledge of France and its culture” (Kirstin)

In addition, learners blamed the workload added to other classes and explained that they had to prioritise where to spend their valuable time. For many, the blog was not considered as a priority: “I only wrote one entry in the blog as I found it too time-consuming on top of the other class work” (Anonymous female student). Lastly, several peripheral factors impeded the learning experience with the blog. As opposed to the
discussion forum and wiki, the blog was not an integrated tool of Sulis. Participants used an external application made available on [http://www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com). This being said, a hyperlink directing to the site was added to the students’ Sulis homepage so that they could access the site with one click (similarly to the other two social media) without having to remember the URL. This source was selected because it was free and provided user-friendly features as well as online user support. However, this implied an extra password to memorise for participants and less control from the teacher. Several students complained that they could not access their page because they had lost their password and/or that their personal page had been shut down by the provider. Indeed, not long after almost 50 blogs were created with similar titles and themes in a very short time, it seems that some of the students’ pages were automatically reported as spam and were closed down. Recovering the pages took lengthy e-mail exchanges with the provider for several days and even weeks in some cases; this frustrated and discouraged a number of participants in the process as their comments indicate:

“While I did have a blog at the start, I ran into difficulty accessing it and let it slide and didn't take part in it, I used the discussion forum instead.” (Alice)

“I set up a blog numerous times and it just would not work :(” (Apolline)

“The blog was a nightmare to work.” (Anonymous female student)

When asked in Questionnaire 3 if they missed the blog, students gave an unequivocal answer: they did not. Only 1 student (7.1%) stated that he wished the blog was still part of the course. 9 students (64.3%) said they did not miss the blog, and 4 students (28.6%) simply answered that they had never used the blog in the first place.

### 5.3.4 Developing ICC with the wiki

The wiki was chosen in order to enable students to work together in small groups with the aim to defining French culture. While messages on the discussion forum were displayed in chronological order, messages posted by one person on the wiki could be modified by the other participants when they choose the ‘modify’ option or could be commented on with the ‘comment’ option. These features made it possible to create a single written work to which each learner could contribute. In order to encourage
participation, the teacher posted specific questions at the beginning of the wiki project to trigger some reaction and provide some guidance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Définir la culture française</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions à se poser</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Est-il facile de trouver des différences entre la culture française et la culture de votre pays ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. La culture française est-elle singulière ou plurielle ? / Est-il possible d’avoir une variété de cultures dans une même communauté ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pensez-vous que la culture d’un pays est supérieure à celle d’un autre ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exemples de caractéristiques culturelles :</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aspects linguistiques (métaphores, expressions différentes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Comportements et attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Croyances et valeurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Connotations des mots</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The content of the learners’ definitions of French culture and the learning process via the wiki will be discussed further in Section 5.5.3 and Section 5.5.4.

According to Questionnaire 2, the participants’ experience with the wiki was reasonably satisfactory (Figure 5.5): no student said that the wiki was “extremely helpful” in improving their cultural competence, 7 students (30.4%) stated that it was “very helpful” and 10 students (43.5%) claimed that it was “helpful”. 3 students (13%) reported that the wiki was “a little helpful” in their ICC acquisition and 3 students (13%) answered that it was “not helpful at all”. No data from Questionnaire 2 revealed how many polled students did not take part in the wiki project. The dribble files indicate that 10 students (18.2%) did not contribute to the wiki definition. Nonetheless, comments made by students showed some mixed feelings about the wiki’s technical properties and purpose which both impeded the development of their ICC. Participants who found the wiki helpful explained that the application was stimulating and encouraged them to be pro-active: “It made me research aspects of French culture that I otherwise would not have done” (Anonymous female student). Students also praised the collaborative characteristic of the wiki to develop knowledge as well as giving them the liberty to write on topics of their own choosing:

“I felt it helped because I was always reading what everyone else had wrote and learning from it.” (Ariane)

“It is a funny way to get knowledge about French culture, with the help of other people.” (Cassandra)
“The wiki was very different to anything I had ever done on the computer before. It was really interesting and fun.” (Emmanuelle)

“I thought the fact that the wiki was very open was helpful. You were free to choose any aspect of French culture to write about which meant it appealed to a wider variety of students.” (Anonymous female student)

On the contrary, some students said that working as part of a group made the task arduous. Some students believed that it benefitted either the technology-savvy learners or the lazy ones while others were challenged by the fact that they had to edit other students’ contributions. This may explain why the definitions produced by learners all exceeded the word count guideline:

“At least with the blog last semester everyone got to say their bit, with [the] wiki the loudest person or the person who was best at using computers got to dictate what material was included.” (Karine)

“It was possible for some people to put on more effort than others.” (Kristin)

“Did not like the idea of correcting or changing other people’s work – especially since I wasn’t sure if my corrections were correct. Was very difficult to get it under 400 words as that would have meant deleting other people’s work, which I was uncomfortable with.” (Marc)

“I thought that being asked to correct and/or comment on others work was the most stressful part of the whole thing, particularly in the second semester where we had to comment on the other groups’ wiki, as well as correct mistakes we may have seen in our own groups”. (Anonymous male student)

The editing feature was also problematic if several students were modifying the document at the same time. Indeed, the wiki does not allow multiple edits
simultaneously. The person saving his/her version first has their work secured while the others have to start again from the newer version. This shortcoming was explained to students during the various wiki training sessions; learners were advised to type their contribution in a separate location (e.g., a Word document) rather than typing it directly in the wiki, to then copy and paste it in the wiki before saving it when ready in order to avoid loss of material. Despite these safety measures, some students became disconcerted and complained about losing their work:

“Sometimes if two people are typing under the same heading, one person’s work is in danger of being erased.” (Caroline)

“No, it really wasn’t easy to use! It was very complicated. I am quiet good when it comes to computers but I just could not figure out Wiki at all! I had to type everything in Microsoft word and then copy and paste. I kept losing work that I had typed. In general, Wiki was very frustrating.” (Apolline)

“I personally found the editing a little tricky as I kept losing my information which I had typed in. Other than that, I did find it very interesting and it encouraged me to further research French culture.” (Emmanuelle)

This being said, the amount of complaints about the complexity of the wiki remained quite low, especially for the students who did not skip the wiki training tutorials. 15 of the students (79%) who completed the wiki report stated that the tool was easy to use:

“Yes, it was very straightforward.” (Sophie)

“Yes, because it is very easy to get to know the basic options it offers and once you get to know them, you can develop your Wiki without any problem.” (Cassandra)

“I thought that the wiki was fairly easy to use – one only needed to get used to the process of editing and saving correctly.” (Raphaëlle)

More seriously, a small number of students stated that they did not understand the objectives of using a wiki and stressed that, as a direct consequence, it did little to improve their ICC:

“I really didn't understand it and unfortunately I found it didn’t improve my knowledge of French culture.” (Anonymous female student)

“There wasn't really any point to the wiki at all. It just added extra stress.” (Patrice)

Finally, in Questionnaire 3, 5 students (35.7%) stated that they missed the wiki in their second year of study and wished it was still part of the curriculum. 7 students (50%) admitted not missing it and 2 students (14.3%) explained that they had not used the wiki. 17 (89.5%) of the students who completed the wiki report claimed that the tool
was instrumental in helping them remember the cultural aspects discussed throughout
the term.

5.4 Reflection on online learning

5.4.1 Students’ comments on learning with social media

Besides expressing their opinion about using the discussion forum, blog and wiki for ICC acquisition, learners were asked to reflect on the general use of social media in the French class. According to Questionnaire 2, 14 students (60.9%) agreed that the online exercises were a positive addition to the face-to-face tutorials and complemented the course study. 3 students (13%) disagreed and 6 students (26.1%) remained neutral. The participants who welcomed the Internet-based tasks explained that they “helped [them] get to know [their] classmates better” (Charles) and contributed to create a friendly learning atmosphere. They were also a beneficial addition to the tutorials by aiding them to “understand if you didn't understand the first time [in class]” (Anonymous female student). Students’ feedback reveals more about how participants reacted to the introduction of social media in their foreign language classroom.

When combining students’ open comments made in all the questionnaires and semi-directed interviews, six categories of advantages and five of disadvantages when using social media in the French language classroom can be drawn up (Table 5.3 and Table 5.4). The advantage that was mentioned the most is the fact that social media are interactive and thus enable participants to share knowledge, work as part of a team and gain a different perspective on the issues discussed. On the issue of collaborative work, one student wrote a comment which reminds us of the “wisdom of the masses” concept (Wheeler et al., 2008: 989) which was discussed in Section 2.2.4: “There is a collective rather than individual effort, which may be unfair but can also promote teamwork and produces a wider knowledge base” (Nolwenn). Students were adamant that intercommunication was instrumental in raising their awareness and was particularly beneficial to the learning of culture. Secondly, students stressed the fact that working online is very convenient: one can access the activities from anywhere, at any time and
is guaranteed to find the information when they need it as opposed to with a hard copy which can be inadvertently misplaced. Furthermore, doing tasks online makes it possible to surf the Internet while working and gather information effortlessly for their posts. In addition, social media are more appealing and innovative than standard ways of learning (e.g., attending a lecture or reading a course book). As a consequence, students enjoyed the experience, qualifying it as “fun” (Magalie), “relaxed” (Caroline) and “refreshing” (Aurélien); they even sometimes forgot that they were actually working on assignments. Some students who were usually dreading speaking in front of their peers felt comfortable enough to express their opinion online. Students also found themselves motivated to complete the tasks due to this enjoyable atmosphere. They were driven to research information rather than passively taking it in; they believed that they learnt better as a direct consequence of looking up the information themselves. Students also found that using social media improved their computer skills and familiarised them with technologies that were new to them - the blog and wiki especially. It prepared them for using Internet applications in different contexts, which some felt will benefit them when they prospect the job market. Finally, as anticipated in Section 2.4.1, most students found the discussion forum, blog and wiki user-friendly and very accessible once some guidelines were provided.

Students listed fewer shortcomings than benefits to using social media in a language learning context. A number of students even felt that there were none: “I don’t think there are any disadvantages” (Tiphaine). The most recurring disadvantage cited by participants was the fact that it was easy to forget to log on to Sulis and contribute to the various activities. A small number of students did not seem to always see the online tasks as integral parts of the course study, but rather as an add-on. With the exception of the weekly discussion forums which were directly linked to the topics debated in class, it seems that the online applications suffered from this, despite regular online and in-class reminders sent from the tutor.
Table 5.3 – Advantages of learning with social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of advantages</th>
<th>Selection of students’ comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Interacting with peers enables to share knowledge, work as part of a team and gain a different perspective on the issues discussed</td>
<td>“You get other people’s opinions. You learn of other people's experiences” (Pénélope)&lt;br&gt;“It improves your awareness” (Edith)&lt;br&gt;“There is a collective rather than individual effort, which may be unfair but can also promote teamwork and produces a wider knowledge base.” (Nolwenn)&lt;br&gt;“It is a group project, which encourages co-operation / It is an interactive and interesting way to learn about French culture outside of the classroom.” (Caroline)&lt;br&gt;“You get to see other people’s perspective on cultures and learn things you previously had little or no knowledge of.” (Anonymous female student)&lt;br&gt;“I got to see what my classmates thought of certain issues, something not always possible in the classroom situation. It was an opportunity to work together as a team. It was an opportunity to learn new things and benefit from other students’ stories and experiences.” (Kirstin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Modern and convenient area which guarantees access of everything from anywhere at anytime</td>
<td>“It is a more modern way of learning” (Tiphaine)&lt;br&gt;“It’s more convenient.” (Luc)&lt;br&gt;“You don't have to always be in class to take part; you could be at home or away for the weekend and still get to participate.” (Charlotte)&lt;br&gt;“You have the internet at your fingertips and it is therefore easier to research. You get to view other people’s views on the topics.” (Paul)&lt;br&gt;“Impossible to lose the information (like you would lose a sheet of paper). Easily accessed.” (Rolande)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – A fun, appealing and non-threatening environment</td>
<td>“You can cover a lot outside of class in a ‘fun environment’ (Internet)” (Magalie)&lt;br&gt;“Its a fun way of studying!” (Ariane)&lt;br&gt;“I feel that interacting online with others is far better than sitting down and reading a book or even just listening to it in a lecture. It encouraged me to participate more than i would if it was done any other way” (Léon)&lt;br&gt;“The Wiki was a very enjoyable experience and was a way of studying without actually realising we were learning so much as the format was easy to use and easy to understand.” (Jean-Baptiste)&lt;br&gt;“They provide the student with a more relaxed and interesting setting in which to learn about culture than the average classroom situation can provide […]. The discussion forum on Sulis and the blog are also very effective tools as I feel that they appeal more to the average student than a classroom situation, as they are more modern and innovative concepts.” (Caroline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Highly motivating media which encourage to look up for information and attain better retention of knowledge</td>
<td>“It is an interactive way to learn and it is funnier than in a normal class. It motivates students” (Cassandra)&lt;br&gt;“It makes it more fun and interesting. It’s very modern (technology wise) and it encourages students to learn” (Julie)&lt;br&gt;“You have to do research for the wiki yourself, you learn better this way I think.” (Rolande)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Improvement of computer technologies which may be useful in different contexts</td>
<td>“Good because every job nowadays is technological, it gets us used to using + doing French stuff on computers” (Marc)&lt;br&gt;“I think the main advantage is that we can use the Wiki for other projects in the future either for French or for any other subjects.” (Edwige)&lt;br&gt;“It improved our IT knowledge, different way of learning to anything I had done before” (Aurore)&lt;br&gt;“Advantages would be it increases both your knowledge on the topic and your computer skills.” (Sophie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – Ease of use</td>
<td>“They are easy to use so it makes learning easier.” (Bérengère)&lt;br&gt;“It was straightforward and explained to us at the start of the semester.” (Marc)&lt;br&gt;“It was easy to use. There was lots of time to get the work done; it could be done easily from home.” (Rolande)&lt;br&gt;“Yes, once I got used to it, it was very easy to use; very easily accessible and user-friendly.” (Kirstin)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second aspect that students believed was a drawback is the time and effort needed to complete the tasks. Writing in a foreign language may take up a significant of time for some students and is tiring. Furthermore, one student pointed out that the academic workload increased in Year 2 and that the online activities, though useful in Year 1, might be less suitable from then on:

“I found the online activities very helpful, however I think that perhaps they should be included in first year modules only, as the workload increases considerably in second year across all subjects.” (Anonymous female student)

Participants also raised the fact that social media implies a dependence on computers and Internet connexion which indirectly discriminates against students who do not own a laptop, do not have a fast broadband or are not used to such technology. Lastly, some students mentioned that the time-delay in getting a response from other participants can cause some apprehension. This being said, this was usually short-lived and went away once someone else interacted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of disadvantages</th>
<th>Selection of students’ comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 – Easy to forget | “Forget to do it on a regular basis.” (Sandrine)  
“Hard to get the time when not specifically questioned on it. Can even forget to do it sometimes.” (Marc)  
“It’s easy to forget it is a resource there to be used” (Rolande)  
“It’s difficult to remember to use it.” (Bastien) |
| 2 – Time-consuming and tiring | “Can be difficult if you’ve don’t know how to do the activities. It takes up a lot of time” (Aurore)  
“Difficult to maintain concentration as you can get tired.” (Maëlle)  
“Sometimes it takes hours for me to write in French so that I couldn’t really participate that much.” (Edwige)  
“I found the online activities very helpful, however I think that perhaps they should be included in first year modules only, as the workload increases considerably in second year across all subjects, so students may not appreciate the added pressure of doing these online activities as well.” (Anonymous female student)  
“I think having the time to do it.” (Magalie) |
| 3 – Dependence on computers and Internet | “If you don’t have your own laptop it’s difficult to find the time to learn about the culture.” (Bérengère)  
“If the internet is down, you can’t access it.” (Patricia)  
“May not have access to internet” (Anonymous female student)  
“Hard to upload material, dependence on computer.” (Charles) |
| 4 – Computer literacy | “Some people aren’t good on computers” (Anonymous student)  
“Some things [are] complicated.” (Luc)  
“People who are unable to use a computer might struggle.” (Aurélien) |
| 5 – Time-delay | “I was the only person for, like, a week to put anything on it [wiki] and I was wondering if it was up to me to get everyone in the group to pass. But then people started putting things up and it was good.” (Eléonore) |
As students’ comments demonstrate, the general use of social media in a language learning context seems to have been predominantly positive despite some identified shortcomings such as forgetfulness, commitment, and access difficulty. At the end of Semester 2, 15 students (65.2%) commented that they wanted to continue doing online activities in the future. Only one student (4.3%) said otherwise. In addition, students made some suggestions to improve the online activities. Some advised that all the activities should be accessible from the same VLE. During the study, contrary to the discussion forum and wiki, the blog was external to the university VLE and this made its access more difficult: “If the blog was linked in Sulis I would be more inclined to use it” (Anonymous student). Others advocated the use of social media, such as Facebook, which are already used by the majority of students and should not require special training sessions:

“It’s hard to learn how to use the new websites in which the online activities are on so maybe they could be added to sites that students are already familiar with.” (Bérengère)

“I think a social networking site like bebo or facebook would be a much better idea that Wiki. Most students go on bebo or facebook every day and so its easy to use and understand.” (Apolline)

When students started their second year of study and realised that the Français oral class would not include any online interaction, many of them were disappointed. 7 students (50%) mentioned in Questionnaire 3 that they wished social media were still implemented:

“I found that there was definitely something missing in the oral classes this year. I enjoyed 1st year's classes much more […]. It would be great if Sulis was introduced again next semester. […]. I feel that I am not learning a lot in my oral class this semester unfortunately.” (Patricia)

4 students (28.6%) said that they were relieved because the assigned work was more significant in other classes:

“Although I enjoyed the online activities in first year, the workload in all of my subjects this semester was very heavy and therefore I was slightly relieved that we would not be continuing with the activities this year, as it reduced some of this pressure.” (Anonymous female student)

3 students (21.4%) claimed that it made no difference to them: “If given a choice I would have chosen to continue with it. However I was not unduly upset by its removal” (Cédric). Still in Year 3, 7 students (50%) stated that they preferred learning with online
activities, 5 students (35.7%) were more satisfied without them and 2 students (14.3%) were undecided. Interestingly, when asked which learning methods was more useful instead of which one they preferred – with or without social media – students conceded that learning with social media was more beneficial for ICC learning: 9 students (64.3%) agreed, 1 student (7.1%) disagreed and 4 students (28.6%) remained unsure.

5.4.2 Motivation: Prompting strategic students

Students’ autonomy and motivation are fundamental concepts in language learning and education that are also addressed in this thesis (see theoretical backgrounds in Section 2.3.4 and Section 2.3.5). Analysis of students’ feedback gives insight as to what motivated learners to take part in the online activities. As we shall see further in Section 6.2.1 data reveal that students were very strategic and that the marking scheme was a key incentive to their participation. In Questionnaire 2, participants were asked to list the aspects of the study which prompted them to contribute, starting from the most motivating factor. The ‘amount of marks appointed’ to each online tool came as a strong first with 10 students (43.5%) selecting it as the most motivating factor. Visibly, students prioritised their work and energy where they could improve their grade before anything else. The students’ dissatisfaction about the non-attribution of marks to the discussion forum during Semester 2 illustrates this. During Semester 1, 2.5% of the students’ final grades were awarded to their contribution in the discussion forum and another 2.5% were awarded to the blog tasks. During Semester 2, no mark was appointed to the discussion forum activities and 5% were attributed to the wiki assignment. The change in the marking scheme was a deliberate choice made by the tutor. The objective was to measure if the students’ enthusiasm for the forum interaction noted during the first term would carry on despite this modification, and if learners were principally motivated by the benefits of learning with the social medium that they praised, i.e. interacting with and learning from their peers in an informal and non-threatening environment. Students’ comments show that the need for marking gratification takes precedence before the learning opportunities:

“I thought that maybe there should have been some marks for participation in the discussion forum this semester also.” (Anonymous female student)
“If the online activities are restored, as I believe they should be, I would welcome if the work put in would continue to be graded and contribute towards a final exam. This would encourage participation and therefore enhance the learning opportunities.” (Cédric)

“Given that the discussion forums (in sem 2) have no marks, it seems unfair that it is a continuous exercise that many students took part in yet there work is unrecognised.” (Anonymous female student)

20 students (87%) were satisfied with the marking scheme of the discussion forum during Semester 1, while only 9 students (39.1%) were feeling the same for the marking scheme of the same tool during Semester 2. As said, the marking scheme came first. The other elements which motivated students, in order of influence were 2) the opportunity to practise their French (writing, reading, listening and speaking), 3) the ease of use, 4) feedback from tutor, 5) the originality and novelty of the tool, 6) the opportunity to work as part of a group, 7) the opportunity to work individually, 8) feedback from other students and finally 9) the opportunity to develop new skills. Last but not least, a major motivating factor which seems to have been fundamental was if the online tasks met students’ expectations of the course. In other words, whether or not students considered if the online tasks fulfilled the objectives of the course had a crucial role in their participation rate. More on this will be discussed in Chapter 6 (Section 6.2.1).

### 5.4.3 Autonomy and tutor role

Students’ autonomy was displayed in various forms during the course of the empirical study. Within the online activities, the teacher held the role of facilitator or “guide on the side” (see Section 2.3.3) rather than occupying a dominant position and thus allowing the students to control their learning process (Holec, 1981). For instance, during Semester 1, students posted 173 messages in the discussion forum and the tutor only posted 42 entries. During Semester 2, participants posted 54 messages and the teacher wrote 31. The teacher’s posts consisted of an opening statement every week inviting students to respond, and feedback on their entries. The teacher always started the weekly discussions by posting a prompting message and students rarely digressed from the topic, took control by asking more questions or commented on each other’s messages which may show little initiative. More on this will be discussed in Section
6.2.1. In the other online applications, students were in charge of their learning and the teacher was guiding them throughout the entire process with personal feedback (blog) and general comments (blog and wiki).

In the various questionnaires and semi-directed interviews, students expressed how much they valued feedback from their tutor. Linguistic mistakes or misuses made in the discussion forum were reported in a document made available in the ‘resources’ sections of Sulis, and corrections or alternative answers were suggested. The feedback was general and did not address any student in particular to avoid stigmatisation. For some students obtaining comments by the tutor was paramount and they eagerly waited for the feedback to be uploaded on the VLE: “Feedback is imperative, it gives something to work towards” (Charles). Others, on the other hand, attached little importance to the feedback and ignored it deliberately: “I didn’t look at it” (Théodorine). According to Questionnaire 2, 4 students (17.4%) found that the feedback document was “extremely helpful”, 9 students (39.1%) considered it “very helpful” and 5 students (21.7%) thought it was “helpful”. 5 students claimed that it was “a little helpful” and no participant stated that it was “not at all helpful”. 15 students of the 38 who completed the questionnaire skipped this question. Students commented that they liked the fact that the document providing feedback raised mistakes made by the group rather than by individuals:

“I thought it was better than if it had been addressed individually, you can see everyone’s common mistakes and you don’t feel too intimidated by your own mistakes then.” (Caroline)

In addition to the discussion forum, blog and wiki, students could learn autonomously with the ‘tests and quizzes’ section which was made available in Sulis. This optional activity tested the students’ proficiency in French cultural aspects raised and debated in the Francais oral class. 20 students put their knowledge to the test this way. According to Questionnaire 1, 1 student (4.7%) found this exercise “very helpful” for their intercultural competence in French, 5 participants (23.8%) claimed it was helpful, and 5 (23.8%) said it was “a little helpful”. 10 of the learners (47.7%) who answered the questionnaire explained that they did not avail of this facility.
5.4.4 Reflection and deep learning in a Community of Practice

Participants of the study working online created a “Community of Practice” (Garrison et al., 2000, Wenger, 2009) where they shared their interest for learning French as a foreign language and interacted in order to improve their ICC. Section 2.3.2 indicated that CoPs - which are part of the learning context of this research project though not the main focus - are characterised by collective learning; participants’ comments confirm that the online activities enabled them to learn from their peers:

“I learned some very interesting facts about French culture from other students’ postings.” (Caroline)

“There were definitely things to be learnt from other students postings as we all had a subject which we dealt with in more detail than others.” (Jean-Baptiste)

“The other postings were a god source of information, and increased my awareness of different aspects of French culture.” (Sophie)

Data from the wiki report also illustrate this: 17 students (89.5%) stated that creating a definition of French culture with their classmates enabled them to learn from other students. However, as comments during the semi-directed interviews indicate, participants were divided regarding the impact their Spanish Erasmus students had on their learning experience:

“I thought it was a good idea that we had Erasmus students for a different perspective…” (Bastien)

“I was in a different group and there was a Spanish girl as well. I didn’t really see any difference on the wiki or anything but in class when we were doing the texts and stuff the presentations you could see different cultural aspects from her point of view and that was interesting to see.” (Sabrina)

“They didn’t really offer anything online, I don’t think. It’s not as if they were adding information.” (Karine)

Rather than focusing on the participants’ nationalities, the diversity of experience from each individual may be more enriching, for instance the testimonies of classmates who have visited France:

“Yeah I really liked the class discussions because I think, like, people give presentations and you discuss it, like… […] just different people have such different ideas and like a load of people in our class have been to France so like they have observed while they were there…” (Kayla)
In addition to learning from the other participants, students commented that the online exchanges made them reflect upon the new information they gathered and think about how it fitted with their existing knowledge:

“Because it makes you stop, think and have your own thoughts on the subjects.” (Adeline)

“I found [the online activities] very helpful. It made you explore the aspect being discussed and think about it.” (Julie)

“I think with online activities ie. discussion forums was far more beneficial […]. With the discussion forum it was another chance to practice writing French and made us formulate ideas therefore we thought about what we were learning more.” (Karine)

“Not only did [the wiki] help remembering the cultural aspects raised during the term, but it also allowed us to develop with depth some of them in particular.” (Raphaëlle)

Whether or not the process of thinking that took place may be characterised as “deep learning” (Weigel, 2002) or “high-order learning” (Butcher and Taylor, 2008) is presented in Section 6.2.3.

5.5 Acquisition of ICC with social media: The students’ interaction

5.5.1 Analysis of students’ interaction in the discussion forum

Data revealed that students found that the discussion forum was beneficial to raise their awareness of ICC (Figure 5.3). Now, it will be shown which topics of debate attracted the most participation and how students interacted to determine how the discussion forum contributed to their learning experience. To begin with, the themes debated every week received various responses from students in terms of numbers. As Table 5.5 indicates, when excluding the online discussions where students acquainted with each other, the top 5 of the subjects debated were (1) the use of Facebook and privacy issues (24 messages), (2) French people’s dispositions towards tattoos (23 posts), (3) the Erasmus exchange programme (20 messages), (4) stereotypes and prejudices (17 messages), and (5) French people’s shopping habit in the economic downturn (14 posts). Unsurprisingly, the topics which received most reactions were introduced during Semester 1, when the students’ participation was higher. The high interest in the above subjects may suggest that these topics had a higher impact on participants. However,
further enquiry carried out in the final questionnaire shows that 6 months after the study, students had a better recollection of different topics.

**Table 5.5 – Numerical rank of online discussion topics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Title of articles (publisher and debate week)</th>
<th>Themes discussed</th>
<th>Number of posts in DF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>N/A (Semester 1, Week 4)</td>
<td>Students introduced themselves to their respective groups.</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Avec Facebook, on papote sur le Web comme à la machine à café (<em>Le Monde</em>, Semester 1, Week 8)</td>
<td>Internet, social media, Facebook, issues of privacy.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Des durs, des doux, des tatoués (<em>Le Monde</em>, Semester 1, Week 9)</td>
<td>Tattoos, fashion, identity and peer pressure.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Etudier une année en Europe grâce au programme d’échanges Erasmus (<em>Le Monde</em>, Semester 1, Week 11)</td>
<td>Erasmus programme, studying abroad, foreign language learning, cultural differences.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Untitled cartoon by Frapar (Semester 1, Week 5)</td>
<td>Stereotypes and prejudices.</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>N/A (Semester 2, Weeks 2 and 3)</td>
<td>Students introduced themselves to their new respective groups.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Comment consommer moins cher? (<em>L’Express</em>, Semester 1, Week 7)</td>
<td>Economy, everyday consumption, shopping habits.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>« Tea » for dinner (<em>Word reference</em>, Semester 1, Week 6)</td>
<td>Word connotations (“tea” vs “dinner”), food and eating habit.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Les parents désarmés face à la génération gothique (<em>Le Figaro</em>, Semester 2, Week 5)</td>
<td>The Goth movement among teenagers, identity seeking, rebellion.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Le permis de conduire à 16 ans ? (<em>L’Express</em>, Semester 1, Week 10)</td>
<td>Driving legal age, options and cost of learning to drive.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Télé-réalité : Les paradis de la débilité (<em>Le Télégramme</em>, Semester 2, Week 7)</td>
<td>Television, reality TV, representation of society.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>Double épreuve pour les handicapés (<em>Libération</em>, Semester 1, Week 12)</td>
<td>The disabled, respect, society.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Le sport, pas la guerre… (<em>L’Express</em>, Semester 2, Week 4)</td>
<td>Sports culture, sports as leisure versus competition.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Quelques gestes pour alléger nos poubelles (<em>La Croix</em>, Semester 2, Week 6)</td>
<td>Environment, recycling, everyday gestures to protect the earth.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>Un constat alarmant (<em>Le Figaro</em>, Semester 2, Week 9)</td>
<td>Binge drinking, alcohol consumption.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Questionnaire 3, students were asked to indicate a number of cultural facts they remembered from their reading and online discussions. Instead of specific facts, students listed the general topics they recollected. The responses provided by the students who answered this question indicate that they remembered all the themes of debates. The top 5 topics were: (1) binge drinking and alcohol consumption (7 mentions in Questionnaire 3), (2) the driving legal age (6 mentions), (3) the Goth movement among teenagers (4 mentions), followed by (4) stereotypes and prejudices (3 mentions) and (5) the Erasmus exchange programme (3 mentions). This renders the reason of students’ interest difficult to identify. Other factors than the topics of discussion may have influenced students’ participation. Section 5.2.1 revealed, for example, that the workload of other classes had a significant impact on students’ participation (Table 5.1).
Regarding interaction, two patterns emerge from the close examination of students’ messages in the forum. The teacher triggering questions or messages were posted before the start of each weekly conversation, thus leaving participants the freedom to post messages before or after their dedicated face-to-face tutorial. The dribble files indicate that students predominantly interacted in the online discussion forum after their respective tutorial had taken place (Figure 5.6). This may indicate that the online forum was complementing the traditional tutorial sessions by allowing students to continue the debate that took place in class, and the asynchronous feature of the discussion forum enabled them to further their opinion in a less time-constrained environment. It may also mean that students felt more confident to express ideas in the target language once the content of each newspaper article and vocabulary had been explained.

In addition to this, the analysis of students’ messages helps to identify how participants did learn from exchanging with their peers. Students’ feedback (Section 5.3.2) indicated that learners felt the opportunity to interact with their classmates in the online forum had a high influence on increasing their cultural knowledge but gave little indication of how this was made possible. The analysis of students’ posts, on the contrary, shows that participants learned by reading and adding information; very little negotiation of meaning actually took place. Indeed, students only replied to each other’s personal viewpoints on an occasional basis: 7 instances in all 228 messages posted. This is evidenced by the use of phrases such as: « Je dois dire que je suis d’accord avec
Instead, students replied to the primary message posted by the teacher inviting them to discuss the topic of the week. To do so, they either responded to the teacher’s trigger without any reference to other students or built on the general information already written and made general acknowledgments to their peers and previous posts, using expressions such as: « Salut tout le monde!! » (Raphaëlle) or « Comme les autres étudiants… » (Karine). To recapitulate, the students’ learning through written interaction was not clearly observable, but did occur (as students stated in Section 5.3.2 and Table 5.3). The assimilation of new knowledge was internalised or expressed through general references to other postings.

5.5.2 Analysis of students’ interaction in the blog

As indicated in Section 5.2.1, the blog attracted little interest from the students involved in the study: despite 47 blogs being created only 11 of these were composed of more than one entry. Regardless of the low response of participants, an examination of the blogs was carried out; it provides some insights as to how students learnt by completing their task in their reflective diaries. The analysis focused on the blog containing more than one entry as the others had zero content or merely included a message where their authors introduced themselves and the objectives of the blog. The aim here is not to assess the bloggers’ intercultural communicative competence but to measure if the blog was a useful platform where users could reflect on their personal learning development, and more specifically intercultural learning.

In the 11 blogs created by the most active users, a total of 38 entries were written. 5 posts were introductory messages where students talked about themselves (age, course of study, family, interests and past times). 2 entries explained the objectives of the blog task. For example:

« La vie en France! Qu’est-ce que je vais écrire dans ce blog? Je vais écrire qu’est-ce que je pense de les habitudes et de la culture françaises et qu’est-ce que je j’apprendre avec les présentations orales sur beaucoup de thèmes importantes dans la société, la économie, l’éducation, la politique, etcetera » (Cassandra)

The other entries focused on the students’ thinking and opinions. The themes students reflected on included topics discussed in class and the online forum (22 references),
topics linked to other French classes or academic issues (7), and topics emerging from other sources like their personal reading (6). The topics are described in more detail in Table 5.6. The blog was principally introduced in order to enable students to keep track of their personal intercultural learning in a reflective portfolio. In actual fact, students used the blog for various purposes. They used it as a way to (1) capture their general language learning process as opposed to focusing on their intercultural learning process (e.g., difficulties with grammar and how they overcame these challenges), and also to (2) discuss their observation and impressions of cultural facts/behaviours:

(1) “Today was catch up on French day. Last week in our grammar class we did loads of past tense and I was really lost. Luckily [name of Language Support Unit instructor] was running a workshop so I went to that from 2-4 today. It was unbelievably helpful. […] It cleared up a lot of issues” (Karine)

(2) « D’après ce texte [Consommer moins cher], le prix est plus important que la marque d’un produit pour de beaucoup de Français. Moi, je pense que généralement, nous avons la même attitude ici en Irlande, et en plus je crois que c’est une bonne chose. A mon avis, il faut que nous cherchions le prix le plus économique parce que recemment, les prix de tous les produits que l’on en a besoin (par exemple, les produits a augmente beaucoup, a cause crisis economique » (Aurore)

In addition, learners posted entries in their blog in order to (3) practice the argumentation of their Français oral presentations (e.g., on learning to drive in France) or to (4) practice formal essay writing in the target language in anticipation of other assignments of their French modules (e.g., study of the novel L’aventure ambiguë by Cheikh Hamidou Kane). They, however, generally tried to include cultural components in their compositions:

(3) « La conduite accompagnée est-elle plus efficace que l’apprentissage traditionnel? Tout d’abord, je dois avouer que je n’étais pas d’accord avec le système français quand ma prof nous en a parlé. Mais après avoir lu le texte et fait des recherches sur le sujet, je pense que c’est meilleur que l’apprentissage traditionnel. […] En conclusion, je crois que la conduite accompagnée est un bon système. […] Finalement le système français est meilleure que la notre, puisque ici on peut conduire a la maison après avoir raté l’épreuve pratique ! » (Marc)

(4) « L’image de la douleur sur la première page est un thème principal qui va courir à travers le livre, la douleur physique ainsi que la douleur religieuse. Kane prend aussi les choses à l’extrême et cela est évident à partir du deuxième paragraphe lorsque le maître “tenait l’oreille de Samba” […] Finalement on voit un aspect de la culture en page 19 quand Kane se concentre sur l’utilisation du mot “bois”. Confusément le mot signifie “école” dans leur culture » (Ariane)

As a consequence, the register and tone of writing in the blog posts differed. 4 blogs were very formal and written with style taken into consideration and structure resembling the one of a short essay. They were composed of an introduction, several
arguments and a conclusion, and paragraphs were usually connected with link words (Appendix 14). The other 7 blogs were quite informal (Appendix 15) with approximate paragraph structure, liberal use of punctuation (usually lots of exclamation marks) and the inclusion of unexpected personal gems of information: “La procrastination. Boyfriend’s birthday last night. Tired and hungover. Sunday evening. No work done. 😊” (Rolande). The more formal messages had a tendency to be prolonged with circa 250 words while the informal messages were usually 50-100 words in length. Furthermore, students availed of the option to write in the target language or in English. 6 blogs had a discourse in French only, 1 blog was written in English only, and 4 online diaries used a mix of the two languages. The blogs written in French only were more formal than the other messages and, as mentioned earlier, were generally structured like short essays. This may indicate that the students who chose to contribute in French were as concerned about their linguistic proficiency as they were of the expression of their ideas.

Table 5.6 – Topics of personal reflection in the blogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics emerging from the class readings and discussions</th>
<th>Word connotation, e.g., tea vs dinner (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily consumption in the recession (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook, social media and privacy (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tattoos, fashion identity (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning to drive in France (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erasmus programme, cultural differences (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The disabled in society (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereotypes and prejudices (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics linked to other French classes or ‘academic’ issues</td>
<td>Francophone literature lecture (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar workshop (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workload, assignments, pressure, procrastination (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bank Holidays, relief from college (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics emerging from other sources</td>
<td>Personal reading - Harry Potter in French (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussions with friends (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remarks drawn on personal intercultural knowledge (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, it was noted that interaction in the blogs was limited. At the exception of one student (Isabelle, see Section 5.3.3), learners did not comment on each other’s blogs even if the author made it publicly available or restricted the access to other class members. This is quite surprising since a number of students clearly expected some interaction: they included short messages where they introduced themselves and occasional comments indicated that the authors were addressing their readership:

“I also found the harry potter book in french so I might even brave enough to read it! Who knows?? Stay tuned for more and maybe even next week I might have actually started it haha!! xxx” (Edith)
The only comments made were posted by the teacher in order to encourage the bloggers to continue their online reflection or prompting them to clarify some of their remarks.

5.5.3 Analysis of students’ interaction in the wiki

As stated in Section 5.3.4, students found that completing their tasks in the wiki was generally a stimulating experience as they had the freedom to present topics of their choosing. They also enjoyed reading the contributions of their peers and working with them despite the reluctance of a small number of students to edit their classmates’ contribution. Besides, it was assumed that learners failed to keep their group definition under 400 words because they merely added information rather than also modify the work of others:

“Was very difficult to get it under 400 words as that would have meant deleting other people’s work, which I was uncomfortable with.” (Marc)

“[The wiki] gave you ideas and allowed you to expand and possibly improve on what [other students] wrote” (Isabelle)

This hypothesis could possibly be confirmed by the fact that students did not make use of the “Add comment” section to negotiate rewording or changes with their fellow students. However, a close examination of the wiki history reveals that this theory does not present an accurate picture of the participants’ interaction. It is true that some students contributed to the wiki task by only adding pieces of information, but concluding that no real collaboration between students occurred would be erroneous. In fact, several students did edit other learners’ posts. More interestingly, students also took on different roles and used different aspects of their knowledge to make the wiki definition richer. Several students took the initiative to take the role of editor by adding titles to sections or changing fonts while some uploaded images to illustrate the arguments presented or modified the paragraph structures. Other students took the role of grammar and spelling inspectors, and indeed some students added information. But they did not all only add information to a section that they had written previously, some also nuanced what other contributors had written.
The reason why students went over the prescribed word limit can also be explained by another factor. In addition to giving their definition of French culture, students provided their understanding of culture in general. Moreover, they described what made them think this way, for instance they compared cultural aspects in France and Ireland and exposed their conclusions. They also grounded their arguments with several references to elements such as facts learnt from the class discussions, newspaper readings or knowledge drawn from other experiences. The following example shows student’s discovery that language and culture are closely linked and that learning a foreign language makes you see the world with a different perspective:

« Il y a des métaphores ou des comparaisons différentes en français […] Ce semestre nous avons appris beaucoup de paroles différentes et phrases que nous ne trouverions pas dans la langue anglaise. Je crois que quand vous étudiez une langue différente vous voyez le monde par les yeux différents, avec les métaphores et comparaisons différentes vous pouvez voir le monde différemment et je crois aussi que ceci me donne une meilleure compréhension de la culture française » (Extract from the definition of class 3A – Group 1)

In brief, learners put down in words the reflective process that they were asked to accomplish in their blogs. The rich content of the wiki definitions will be presented in Section 5.5.4 to illustrate the students’ development of ICC. To conclude on learners’ interaction in the three social media, it is safe to state that it reached its peak in the wiki. Students’ collaboration was not easily observable when learners worked on defining French culture because the analysis of the outcome (the definition) is not sufficient to understand the process students went through to reach it. The examination of each step leading to the final definition is much more illuminating. The wiki history clearly shows that participants interacted more as a collective in the wiki than in any of the other social media introduced in the course of the study.

5.5.4 Analysis of student’s messages throughout the study: Evidence of change

This section will concentrate on the analysis of students’ messages posted online as part of their course tasks. The aim is not to formally assess if the participants’ ICC improved as a consequence of introducing online activities on cultural awareness. Indeed, the objectivity of such an endeavour remains ethically questionable (Section 1.5.2), particularly in a short time period of two academic semesters. In lieu, this section
intends to observe what elements of the ICC models described at the beginning of this thesis (Section 1.4) were developed or expressed by participants. It also aspires to identify which tasks and social media enabled learners to articulate their intercultural skills.

To begin with, the students’ understanding of French culture will be examined. The final task of the project involved participants to give their definition of the concept. Students created rich and comprehensive definitions that encompassed a wide number of “big C” and “little c” elements (these terms are presented in Section 1.2.1). When the students’ definitions provided at the end of the study are compared with the learners’ understanding of French culture at an earlier stage of the study, a noticeable change can be observed. Though Table 5.2 shows that students initially considered culture as being composed of both “big C” elements and “little c” components, their understanding of culture was more limited. Their initial references to “big C” elements comprised mentions to the literary, visual and performing arts. Their knowledge of “little c” components included references to sporting events, religion, gastronomy and the French educational system. Also one mention was made of French traditions, but learners refrained from giving specifics. In their later wiki definitions, students added 13 new elements (Figure 5.7). They added the notions of history (e.g., “la Bastille”, “les colonies”, “Les guerres mondiales”), geography (e.g., “les départements”, “la Francophonie”), and politics (e.g., “Sarkozy”, recent environmental reforms). They also included the language element (“le français”, “le Breton”, “l’occitan”, “les accents”, “la façon de prononcer le mots”) which was surprisingly not mentioned before. Students included a wider variety of art forms as well. They listed television (e.g., “la télé réalité”), painting (e.g., “Delacroix”, “Monet”) and architecture (e.g., “la Tour Eiffel, l’Arc de Triomphe”), in addition to film and cinema which were previously mentioned, in the visual arts category; and added fashion (“E.g., “Chanel”, “Dior”, “le magazine Elle”) and dance (“Can-Can”) to music as part of the performing arts. Moreover, they included literary arts by mentioning novels they were studying and other authors they knew (e.g., Marius de Pagnol, de Beauvoir, Camus).

In addition to these ‘civilisation’ aspects, students enumerated 6 new “little c” components. They added the significance of values (e.g., youth sport values as
presented in the text “Le sport, pas la guerre…” and customs or habits (e.g., eating time in the evening, meal composition). They also mentioned how the visualisation of meaning may differ from one culture to another, such as with metaphors or figures of speech (e.g., “Il me prend la tête”, “jeter aux orties”, “… du lard ou du cochon”). Moreover, they gave examples of social practices (e.g., “la bise”, “les réunions de famille”), communication styles (e.g., eye contact, handshake, “Mademoiselle”) and mentioned beliefs (3 mentions but no example given). Many of the students’ observations of “little c” elements derived directly from their reading and analysis of newspapers articles and/or the online discussions that followed.

Figure 5.7 – Observable change in student’s definition of culture

This observation of change in students’ understanding of culture within a 4-5 month period may not be sufficient to indicate that learners gained greater knowledge of the concept from the social media activities. Indeed, as specified in Section 1.5.2, this type of measurement alone “may not accurately reflect the impact of a particular intervention but may be the result of a combination of factors (Deardorff, 2008: 252-3). In other words, students’ task completion with the discussion forum, blog and wiki may not be
the main factor of the development of how learners view culture. However, the fact that many observations made by participants in the wiki were illustrated by examples drawn from the group online discussions and their own blog reflections comforts this theory.

Furthermore, extracts of the students’ definitions provide an extensive comprehension of culture which quite remarkably resembles the definitions of expert researchers described in Chapter 1:

« La culture française est un groupe de personnes qui partagent la même langue, croyance, coutumes, valeurs […] et styles de vie » (Extract from the definition of class 3D – group 1)

“The total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behaviours, social habits, etc. of the members of a particular society” (Richards et al., 1992: 94)

Or,

« Certains aspects culturels propres à un pays n’ont parfois de signification que pour le pays concerné » (Extract from the definition of class 3B – group 2)

“The shared meanings of a social group” (Byram, 1997: 39)

And also,

« C’est clair que la culture française est plurielle, car il y a différentes religions, cultures et langues à cause des différentes nationalités […]. Il est possible d’avoir une variété de culture dans une même communauté » (Extract from the definition of class 3A – group 2)

“Culture is heterogeneous […]. Members of the same discourse community all have different biographies and life experiences, they may differ in age, gender, or ethnicity. They may have different political opinions” (Kramsch, 1998: 9-10)

This noteworthy level of understanding of the concept of culture by the participants of the study, however, does not preclude the possibility that their awareness of ICC may be limited. In order to evaluate if students showed some of the qualities that intercultural mediators hold, such as signs/skills of discovery, reflection, interpretation, and empathy some elements of the ICC models presented in Chapter 1 will be used.

Starting with Bennett’s Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Figure 1.1), the students’ level of ICC will be estimated. To do so, the reflections made by learners in the discussion forum in Week 5 during the first semester will be scrutinised. Students were asked to react to a document (Appendix 12) representing several stereotypical images of French people. Some of their answers gave an indication of their intercultural
competence; seemingly, participants were both at ethnocentric and ethnorelative stages. No students were in the ‘denial’ or ‘defense’ phases, and one student showed characteristics of ‘minimization’. This student identified more universal trait than dissimilarities between C1 and C2, particularly in terms of “transcendent characteristics” (Bennett, 1993), i.e. the fact that human beings share the same fundamental features:

«Je veux dire que je ne suis pas d'accord avec cette représentation de les français. D'abord je suis allé en france l'année dernier et les jeunes été vraiment amicaux[ux]!! […]
Ensuite c'est vrai sans aucun doute que les jeunes sont très globalisés - c'est à dire que n’importe où l'on soit dans le monde, on voit les mêmes choses... les français ne sont pas différents!!! » (Salomé)

The ethnorelative stage was more represented with students presenting signs of ‘acceptance’ and ‘adaptation’. At the ‘acceptance’ stage, learners acknowledge difference and accept it “as a necessary and preferable human condition” (Bennett, 1993: 117-8). Kirstin illustrates this:

“Oui, c’est vrai que les français sont associer avec ces concepts mais, qui dit que c’est une mauvaise chose ?! Les gens pensent que c’est insultant mais, pourquoi ?! A mon avis, ces images et ces idées donnent [à] la France et [aux] français quelque chose [d’]unique et intéressant ! Elles donnent un sens d’e l’identité » (Kirstin)

Finally, learners who have reached the ‘adaptation’ stage maintain and also embrace aspects of other cultures. In addition, they have the ability to understand and identify with the L2/C2 speakers’ feelings. These skills are exemplified by Edwige’s comments:

« Il n’est pas vrai que tous les français sont comme ça. Je pense que les stéréotypes nous donnent une idée d’otre pays qui peut être vrai ou non. Probablement c’est une partie de la vérité, mais ce n’est pas suffisant pour connaître otre culture. Je déteste quand je dis être italienne parce que tout le monde pense au ‘mafia’, ‘pizza’ ou ‘pasta’ !!! » (Edwige)

Finally, no students exhibited signs of ‘integration’ which is the final stage of Bennett’s DMIS model. These findings indicate that a relatively wide range of cultural knowledge was represented among participants from the outset of the study. Thus thought-provoking interactions between learners were enabled. The extent to which the online exchanges of varied cultural cognizance facilitated learners to express their ICC will now be explored.

Six characteristics of ICC will be used as a measure: Byram’s five savoirs (1997), namely ‘savoir faire’, ‘savoirs’, ‘savoir comprendre’, ‘savoir s’engager’ and ‘savoir
être’; and Deardorff’s internal outcome (2006). Kramsch’s third place (1993) is also included as a reference equivalent to Byram’s ‘savoir s’engager’. The first savoir which is examined -‘savoir faire’ - is characterised by “cultural practices knowledge acquisition”, and the “skills of discovery and interaction” (1997: 73). In the context of this study, interaction includes both dealings with people and interaction with documents/texts. Evidence of these skills was manifested in all three social media:

**Discovery:**
“This week in the french class, we were discussing the way of learning how to drive in france, and the differences between there and Ireland and it was very interesting! I particularly enjoyed it as I recently got a car and am learning to drive. It was interesting to hear that there is actually no such thing as a ‘provisional licence’ in france!” (Aurore, blog)

**Discovery:**
« Aussi bien que les autres aspects de la culture française il va sans dire qu’il est important d’examiner comment les français communiqu[ent]. Une tradition unique et vraiment interessant […] est s’embrasser sur les deux joues » (Class 3B – group 2, wiki)

**Discovery and interaction:**
« Pour cette discussion j’ai posé la question à mes amis; quels aspects ou différences culturels avez-vous noté pendant vos voyages ? Ce sont des exemples de leurs réponses: Au Brésil, il est normal que deux personnes partagent l’une bière, parce que la bière devient chaude rapidement. En Irlande, chacun a leur propre bière […] » (Anne-Laure, discussion forum)

**Discovery and interaction:**

The expression of discovery skills was primarily found in the discussion forum. Every week, students mentioned cultural facts that they were learning from the newspaper articles. Week 6 was an exception; the debates were particularly rich as the theme of discussion was on word connotations and misunderstandings/peculiar cultural encounters. The next savoir is simply called ‘savoir’ and can be identified when learners show knowledge of social groups in their own culture as well as in other cultures (Ibid.: 58). Participants of the study had the opportunity to grasp this concept with a newspaper article depicting young adults practising sports. The document exposed how belonging to a sporting community may be concomitant with specific values, and how a section of French youth practising individual sports were differentiating themselves from the general trend, i.e. by adopting a leisurely approach as opposed to a competitive one, and thus creating a sub-culture:
« Le sport est un aspect de la culture. Comme nous avons vu dans la classe il y a une sub-culture de jeunes qui [est] une valeur important[e] du sport. Ils participent au sport pour le plaisir, pas [pour] gagner. Le but principal est de surmonter les défis » (Class 3A – group 1, wiki)

Students also drew on others sources or personal knowledge to manifest their ‘savoir’. They viewed culture as composed of several identities, based for instance on ethnicity, religion, and localisation:

« Maintenant, la France est un pays très cosmopolit[e] avec beaucoup de races et de religions. Par conséquent, la culture française est plurielle à cause de la pluralité des personnes et des croyances » (Class 34 – group 1, wiki)

« En France comme dans tous les autres pays, il y a plusieurs cultures […] Par exemple, il y a une autre culture dans la ville de Paris et les pays de l’Auvergne. Il existe une expression français[e] qui décrit les aspects de la culture des villes […] et de la vie du village rural ; ‘la France profonde’ » (Class 3B – group 1, wiki)

‘Savoir’ was expressed exclusively in the wiki. The third savoir – ‘savoir comprendre’ – is typified by learners who interpret symbols and events of other cultures and relate them to their C1 and personal experience. Again, this savoir was only observable in the wiki contributions. One group illustrated their ‘savoir comprendre’ competence by drawing on personal knowledge/experience as well as on an article from Le Figaro on alcohol consumption in France and Europe. Many students were surprised to learn that alcoholism was a concerning issue in France and re-evaluated their belief that all French people were moderate wine drinkers. They also compared this information with their assumption that Ireland was the primary drinking-culture country in Europe by far.

« En France, les gens aiment passer beaucoup du temps avec leur famille. Par exemple le dîner est un[e] occasion important[e] pour eux ; ils bavardent, ils rient ! Ce n’est pas vraiment le cas en Irlande. En Irlande, les familles mangent souvent séparément devant la télé, en lisant le journal. C’est absolument un[e] expérience meilleur[e] en France! On ne doit pas généraliser trop car bien sûr chaque famille est différente en France et en Irlande. Pourtant, il faut avouer que la famille est vue plus comme une institution en France » (Class 3A – group 2, wiki)

« Une autre différence entre l’Irlande et la France est l’importance de l’alcool dans le pays. Les Français comprennent les mots « toujours avec modération »! Cependant, en même temps un français sur dix est malade de l’alcool ! Selon l’éthylomètre européen la consommation d’alcool est plus important dans l’Irlande (14,45 litres d’alcool par habitant et par an) que dans la France (13,54). Malgré cette petite différence où l’Irlande surpasse la France, on doit dire qu’il y a des chiffres alarmants sur l’alcoolisme en France. D’après le document officiel présenté par Hervé Chabatier, cinq millions de personnes dans la France ont une consommation abusive, et deux millions d’entre elles sont carrément dépendantes de cette ‘drogue’ » (Class 3A – group 2, wiki)
Next in line is ‘savoir s’engager’ which can be assimilated to Kramsch’s third place where learners “look critically at their own culture as well as the culture that is the focus of classroom study” (Kramsch, 1999: 853). ‘Savoir s’engager’ is expressed through critical observation, reflection, interpretation, comparison, and mediation (Ibid., 1993). At the exception of mediation, these skills were illustrated in the online forum messages and in blog entries. All the observations noted originated from the class discussions (stereotypes and prejudices, and learning to drive in France at 16):

**Observation and comparison:**
« Les images sont des idées stéréotypiques de la France et les français: la guerre, le vin, la romance. Je ne suis pas d’accord avec cette représentation des français. Tout le monde croit que les français s’adonnent [au] vin. Nous avons le même problème en Irlande parce-que tout le monde dit que nous nous adonnons à [la] Guinness. Ce n’est pas vrai en Irlande ou en France […]. Cette supposition est très embêtante !!! Comme l’idée que tous les irlandais sont ‘leprechauns’, dans cette représentation l’homme porte un béret, une chemise rayée et il fume. En réalité, personne porte comme ça ! Mais, je pense que cette caricature de Frapar est un peu amusant[e] !! Pour conclure, je crois que la représentation est fausse » (Sabrina, discussion forum)

**Observation and reflection:**
“After reading this text I believe that arguments for and against the driving licence being issued to 16 year olds in France are equally valid […]. I learned a great deal about life in France. I did not realise how serious road carnage was in France and am surprised that the authorities would consider implementing this proposal. However I am impressed that they would hold young people in such a high regard as to consider allowing 16 year olds to obtain a driving licence” (Sabrina, blog)

**Observation, reflection, interpretation and comparison:**
« Tout d’abord je dois avouer que je n’étais pas d’accord avec le système français quand ma prof nous en a parlé. Mais après avoir lu ce texte et fait des recherches sur le sujet, je pense que c’est meilleur que l’apprentissage traditionnel. En France, tous les élèves doivent assister aux cours de la sécurité routière. Apres, avec cette attestation scolaire, le adolescent – s’il ou elle veut conduire – peut se présenter à l’examen du « code », qui est une formation théorique. C’est seulement après ça que le jeune est permis de conduire. Il ou elle doit parcourir au moins trois mille kilomètres accompagné d’un adulte expérimenté. Finalement, a l’âge de dix-huit ans le candidat peut se présenter a l’épreuve pratique du permis de conduire. Bien sûr, il y a des gens qui disent que les jeunes de seize ans ne sont pas murs, qu’ils sont dangereux sur la route. Mais sans doute, la solution est de les éduquer sur la sécurité routière, de les donner la formation pour qu’ils aient la confiance et la compétence le plus tôt possible ! En conclusion, je crois que la conduite accompagnée est un bon système. Sans doute, tout le monde conduit tôt ou tard et on ne peut pas nier le fait que quand on a plus d’expérience, on fait moins d’erreurs au volant et donc, il y a moins d’accidents sur les routes. Finalement, le système français est meilleur que la notre, puisque ici on peut conduire à la maison après avoir raté l’épreuve pratique ! » (Marc, blog)

The blog seemed particularly adapted for reflective purposes (when it was actually availed of). Byram’s final savoir – ‘savoir être’ – is evidenced by attitudes of curiosity
and openness, and readiness to suspend disbelief other cultures and one’s own culture (Byram, 1997: 73). Edith exemplifies this:

« Bonjour!!! This week we learned about Erasmus now I really want to go now to improve my French and really get to experience French culture » (Edith, blog)

Finally, Deardorff’s internal outcome which usually is internalised, and as such not easily discernible, was noticed in the study as participants were required to articulate their thinking process. The internal outcome comprises qualities of adaptability, flexibility, and empathy. Students showed signs of flexibility and empathy by acknowledging social groups and by emphasising the idea of respect and the need for and benefits from diverse cultures while maintaining one’s own identity:

« Le sens de culture est très fort et quand on visite le pays, on sent la fierté. Mais la culture d’un pays n’est pas supérieure à celle d’un autre. Peut-être le sens de la culture est plus fort dans certains des pays mais il n’est pas plus important. C’est la diversité que c’est important. On doit protéger toutes les cultures et garder l’individualisme. » (Class 3D – Group 1, wiki)

« Aujourd’hui nous vivons dans une société multiculturelle mais en le même temps chaque pays a une culture propre. » (Class 3C – Group 2, wiki)

« Il est vrai que le monde devient de plus en plus multiculturel car il est plus facile de voyager de nos jours. A cause de ça, la société peut comprendre la culture et les traditions des autres pays, et chaque [culture] est unique et spéciale. Evidemment, c’est les coutumes et les traditions qui rendent un pays unique. Aucun pays n’est pas supérieur, chaque pays est différent et célèbre des événements différents quant à la nationalité » (Class 3A – group 2, wiki)

These final contributions expose a high level of intercultural understanding and openness-mindedness which went beyond the expectations of this study, designed to raising awareness of ICC.

5.6 Validation of results

As part of the methodology of this research, a ‘member check’ was initiated (Section 4.2.2). In other words, participants were shown early results of the study and asked to react to them. Preliminary results were included at the beginning of Questionnaire 3 (Appendix 11), and students were given the opportunity to check, validate or express their disapproval of the conclusions made by the researcher. After reading the summary
of results, 13 students (92.9%) claimed that they believed their opinion had been fairly represented:

“I agree with many of the findings presented. The computer-aided activities are certainly less daunting than speaking in front of a group and the activities broadened my views of both French culture and my own culture.” (Anonymous female student)

“Yes, as I was part of the majority of students who said that the online activities were helpful and interesting. I agree with all of the positive comments about these activities. I found the discussion forums to be the most helpful, reflecting the findings of the survey. I do also agree though that they can be rather time consuming.” (Anonymous female student)

“I [agree] that my opinion has been fairly represented especially with regards the use of the blog which I didn't find useful at all.” (Patricia)

Only one student who disagreed with the findings gave an explanation:

“Personally, I don’t feel that online projects such as Wiki were helpful at all. It was difficult to understand what exactly the objective was.” (Apolline)

In addition, students were asked if they were surprised by any of the findings. 14 students provided comments. Half of the students said that they were not surprised:

“The results corresponded with my personal opinion to a great extent.” (Anonymous female student). Two students commented that they expected the grade to be the most motivating factor: “I am surprised that the grade % was only second on the motivating factor, I thought it would be first.” (Karine). Indeed, the preliminary results in Questionnaire 3 wrongly put the grade as second factor for motivation. Further data analysis presented in Section 5.4.2 confirmed that the marking scheme was the number one motivating factor for the participants of the study. The fact that these students were surprised by the wrong preliminary results on motivation stresses again the importance that students allocate to mark gratification. Also, 2 students were taken aback by their peers complaining about their difficulty with Internet access to justify lack of contribution to the activities:

“I think that students blaming faulty internet connections on campus is fairly ridiculous, there are enough computer labs etc. to surely find a working one.” (Karine)

“The unreliability of internet access on campus! I find it a very efficient service.” (Charles)

Two other students were surprised that the majority of their peers were willing to continue using social media for language learning in the future. Contrary to what the findings described, they found the experience confusing:

“I was extremely surprised that people found online exercises helpful because there was a lot of confusion in class and out of class as to what exactly these exercises were for.” (Apolline)
“I’m surprised that some students said they wanted the internet work to be part of the course. I missed a class which explained how and what we were to do with the blog in first year and therefore could not understand it. It was quite hard to work.”  
(Anonymous female student)

Similarly to the statement made by the participant who disagreed with the preliminary results, these last two comments emphasise once more that understanding the objectives of the online activities may be a key motivational factor (Section 5.4.2) and that training sessions should not be overlooked (Section 5.2.2). This being said, tutors cannot force students to attend them. In addition, one student commented about the improvement of French cultural competence: “was surprised so many people felt it improved knowledge of french culture; don’t think it improved mine so much” (Anonymous female student). The last student reacted to a remark made by a student who said that the online activities were stressful and that was reported in the preliminary results:

“I am not very surprised with the findings. The belief that the activities caused an increased amount of stress slightly surprised me however. I personally felt that the activities could be undertaken in an informal and stress-free environment”.  
(Anonymous female student)

Indeed, the general feedback provided by learners indicated that the online activities provided a relaxed and enjoyable environment to work in. Interestingly, the student who expressed dismay with the use of social media made a number of highly negative comments in the questionnaires (but never mentioned any difficulty to the teacher during the empirical study). This student’s comments often contrasted with the feelings expressed by the other participants. This deviant case will be studied further in Section 6.2.1 in order to shed more light on the results obtained.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter described the participants’ perspectives on their learning experience with social media for acquiring ICC. Their feedback shows mixed reviews as regards to the benefits of implementing Internet tools in their French class, but indicates an evident preference for working with the discussion forum. The low participation in the blog tasks emphasised the fact that twenty-first century learners are not all “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001: 1), and that teacher guidance as well as clear objectives were perceived
as key incentives. In addition, students expressed their enthusiasm towards online activities which were closely linked with their tutorial and offered a pleasant and non-threatening space to interact in. They welcomed user-friendly applications which enabled them to work collaboratively and increase their knowledge by information sharing. Students also recommended the use of tools fully integrated into their VLE in order to avoid confusion, and encouraged the use of popular or familiar media like Facebook. Furthermore, Chapter 5 also gave insight as to what motivated students, i.e. a fair marking scheme and activities which met their expectations of the course.

Finally, the analysis of students’ messages posted in the discussion forum, blog and wiki indicated that the three social media contributed to enhance the participants’ ICC. Though the discussion forum was the favourite tool for students (Figure 5.2), further analysis shows that the wiki included the most evidence of ICC awareness. But this undeniably would not have been possible without the preceding activities in the weekly online discussions and personal blog. The discussion forum was particularly suited for sharing new cultural discoveries and reviewing their significance in an inviting and friendly space. Despite the technical difficulties and the lack of motivation from students to use the blog, the reflective diary proved to assist active bloggers in reflecting on their learning, whether it was focusing on the linguistic or intercultural dimension, or on writing skills. The wiki was an ideal tool to circumscribe the knowledge and skills that were acquired and exercised in both the discussion forum and blog. Overall, the exercises where students compared the target language cultural aspects with their own culture seemed to have been the most effective in making the students reflect. Also, students seemed to have benefitted the most from the tasks when they involved collaboration.

This being said, a small number of students stated that they did not believe that their intercultural competence was enhanced by the online activities, notably in the absence of high engagement from some of the Erasmus students. This may show a shortcoming of this study: participants who are at an advanced ethnorelative stage (Bennett, 1993) from the beginning of the project may not benefit as much from the proposed tasks as other learners, especially when the exchanges with the international students are limited. In the next chapter, conclusions will be made regarding theoretical approaches in foreign language learning with CALL/SMALL. In particular, Chapter 6 will deal further
with student motivation and autonomy, learning in a CoP, and deep learning. It will also address the issue of assessing ICC and investigate further the teacher predicament as regards to providing grammar feedback in an informal setting.
CHAPTER 6 – Data analysis: Linking back to the theory

Qualitative data analysis depends on an intimate relationship between researcher and data. In effect, the analysis – that is to say, the discovery of theory within the data – is a construction of the researcher, brought about his/her knowledge of the data and the capacity to identify codes and concepts within it.

Pole and Lampard (2002: 206)

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter will continue to present the analysis of the data collected during the study. Following the participants’ viewpoints on the project, it will provide the researcher’s perspective on the data analysis with the aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the case study. The themes and structure of the chapter are relatively close to the ones presented in Section 5.4, but here the students’ reactions are compared with the study outcomes with related research presented in the literature review chapters (Chapters 1, 2, and 3). Section 6.2.1 establishes connections between the students’ motivation and autonomy with theories on the matter; it also analyses a deviant case and draws on key research models. Besides further describing the factors that motivated participants of the study, Chapter 6 investigates if deep learning occurred through the building of a Community of Practice (Section 6.2.2 and Section 6.2.3). Section 6.2.4 presents the concerns raised by the author regarding the assessment of the participants’ ICC level as well as a number of recommendations. Finally, Section 6.2.5 addresses the concepts of prescriptive and descriptive grammatical feedback in online writing tools, using the discussion forum as an example.
6.2 Relation between fundamental concepts in language learning and the teaching of ICC with social media

6.2.1 Motivation and autonomy

Students’ motivation/participation varied greatly during the study. This was particularly noticeable as regards to the blog use which was availed of by a relatively small number of participants compared to the other social media. As seen in Chapter 5, the three social media had the potential to assist students in their ICC acquisition. Yet, 27 students (54%) felt that the blog was “little helpful” or “not helpful at all” (see Section 5.3.3). Furthermore, a drop in motivation was also observed during the second semester of the study when the discussion forum lost its appeal: 2.5% of the students’ final grade; and this despite students praising the qualities of the forum at the end of the preceding semester. This section will shed light on students’ motivation in this research project; concepts of motivation and autonomy described in Chapter 2 will be used as a reference.

Why was the blog not enticing? Some students claimed that its purpose was not clearly explained and that they did not know what to write in their blog. Others stated that they understood that they had to keep a record of their learning of French culture and give their impressions, and yet failed to do so; the workload from other assignments was pointed out as a factor. But were these the only actual reasons? An understanding of Farrington’s model and a closer look at a deviant case, i.e. a student who stood out from the rest of the participants, may provide an answer (the concept of a deviant case and the usefulness of including one in the data analysis are explained in Section 4.2.2). First of all, failing to identify the objective of a task or activity is inherently failing to work autonomously. Indeed, as Holec explains, students cannot “take charge of their own learning” (1981: 3) unless they are able to determine the objectives of a particular exercise. This is the very first out of five requirements of learner autonomy (see Section 2.3.5). This may be a crucial reason why students did not contribute to the blog activities. This being said, the objectives of the blog were explained to students during the blog training sessions, and participants could find instructions in Sulis, if they missed the hands-on workshops. They could also talk to the teacher. But very few did
manifest their confusion. The answers may be a lack of commitment or the level of difficulty of the tasks.

Secondly, what about the students who did understand the task but still failed to create or maintain their blog active? Rolande, a student who managed to set-up a personal blog, where she posted the following entry, exemplifies this pattern:

«Je viens de trouver ceci sur sulis!! “Quand mon blog est créé, je peux le personnaliser avec des commentaires et des photos/vidéos. L’objectif est d’écrire tout ce que j’apprends sur la culture française. […] Je peux écrire mes réactions et observations sur le blog.” Le blog fait tellement plus de sens pour moi maintenant ! ☺
» (Rolande)

After some concerns about what she was expected to write in her blog, Rolande found the blog guidelines made available by the teacher in Sulis. Her message indicates that she found relief in finally having identified the requirement of the activity. Yet, this entry was her last one. It is conceivable that the workload from other assignments was too heavy and she had to prioritise her energy in completing other tasks, like in the discussion forum. This was mentioned by several students in Section 5.3.3. But in this case, why was the discussion forum preferred to the blog? What appeal did the online forum have that the blog did not? Students provided a valuable answer in their questionnaires and interviews feedback. They stated that the forum was more structured and easier to adhere to thanks to the tutor’s presence and the weekly triggers. This seems to confirm the theory of Farrington’s model (1986) regarding the tutor role in CALL. According to this model developed in the nineteen-eighties, computer activities were more effective when the teacher was managing the learning. Mazzolini and Maddison (2003) refined this theory almost two decades later by comparing three types of tutor roles: “sage on stage”, “guide on the side” and “ghost in the wings” (these terms are explained in Section 2.3.3). The tutor role in the blog composition was minimal; it was only manifested through short comments on the learners’ entries. As a consequence, students who did not post entries did not receive personal feedback or prompts from the teacher. This could be considered as a weakness in the study design and explain the low student participation. Despite the tutor’s actual (and discreet) guidance and presence, it seems that students felt the tutor was absent. The tutor role of this study (in the blog) could be compared to the “ghost in the wings” approach which is thought not to be as effective as the “guide on the side” method. As such, this study confirms that both Farrington’s model and the theory recommending teachers to adopt
a “guide on the side” role may not be outdated and could be applied in SMALL contexts. It strengthens the idea that the tutor role is pivotal in providing learners with confidence and autonomy so that the online learner-centred activities take place successfully. Students need to be given the means to become autonomous.

Thirdly, some students who seemed to have understood the online tasks refrained from participating for another reason. The observation of a deviant case named Patrice may provide an explanation. Patrice is considered as an unusual case as his feedback about the online activities – the blog and wiki more particularly - was extremely and exclusively negative.

“There wasn't really any point to the wiki at all. It just added extra stress to me and to everybody else in the course.” (Patrice)

“Seriously, abandon it.” (Patrice)

Patrice’s comments were echoed by a small number of students. It seems that unless they saw the point or benefit in the tasks, they did not want to engage in them, or did so reluctantly:

“The online activities were in honesty a complete waste of time. [It] was completely pointless” (Anonymous female student)

Patrice’s further comments may explain their absence of motivation. His remarks indicate that he was misled by the title of the tutorial Français oral which made him believe that the sole focus was on developing oral skills:

“It's not fair to have these parts of the course in an ORAL module, it doesn't make any sense in the slightest” (Patrice)

“It's an ORAL class. CONCENTRATE ON ORAL SKILLS MORE AND A LOT LESS ON COMPUTER SKILLS” (Patrice)

In other words, Patrice did not see the online activities as fitting with the course objective. If the tutorial was named differently, his views on social media for language learning may have differed significantly. Patrice’s negative comments may not have been directed towards the use of social media but on their use in a context that he misinterpreted as focusing exclusively on speaking ability. This deviant case is a good reminder that the purpose and suitability of one task may be obvious to the teacher, but
unless it also is to students, it risks being dismissed; and this to the detriment of learners.

Finally, why did the students’ participation in the discussion forum drop between Semester 1 and Semester 2? Students’ feedback clearly indicates that the change in the marking scheme was a key factor (Table 5.1). In second language acquisition, the phenomenon where learners’ motivation is characterised by a pragmatic drive, such as obtaining a good grade, rather than by a positive disposition towards the target language/culture and its speakers is called “instrumental motivation” (Gardner and McIntyre, 1991, see also Section 2.3.4). It is often considered that instrumentally motivated students learn less than those who are driven by a general openness towards the L2/C2 (Gardner, 1985). It is difficult to assess if participants of this study were solely instrumentally motivated. However, the students ethnorelative views observed in their contributions (Section 6.2.4) propose that they were also integratively motivated. In brief, this study indicates that in a formal language learning setting, grade rewards remain necessary factors in maintaining the motivation of learners even if they are integratively driven.

6.2.2 Learning in a Community of Practice

Chapter 5 suggested that students felt they did learn from interacting with their peers – a typical characteristic of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 2009) or community of enquiry (Garrison et al., 2000). This being said, CoPs are more complex than merely working and learning with others. The exchanges between participants will be examined in order to determine if the participants’ online learning group may be qualified as a Community of Practice. They will be analysed with the concepts of “social presence”, “cognitive presence” and “teacher presence” (Garrison and Anderson, 2003; Garrison and Vaughan, 2008; see also Section 2.3.2).

In a Community of Practice, learners must feel that the environment is non-threatening and that trust between members has been established. A friendly learning setting where students are bonding typifies the concept of ‘social presence’. This was observed in all three social media, but was probably more pronounced in the discussion forum.
messages. A sense of camaraderie was palpable and evidenced by several elements. The tone of discussion was informal with the adoption of a casual register and liberal use of punctuation. Students also felt free to customise their posts by changing colours and fonts, as well as adding emoticons as illustrated in Figure 6.1. Every learner uploaded a photo of themselves in casual contexts, including nights out with friends, and practising sports (photos have been removed from Figure 6.1 in order to protect the students’ identity).

They communicated a wide range of greetings, and included humour and personal feelings. Besides, a number of personal references showed a level of complicity between participants:

« À mon avis, les gens qui reçoivent un tatouage, les reçoivent comme une forme d’expression dans la majorité des cas. Par exemple, un nom d’enfant ou une femme ou
Furthermore, in a CoP, students must feel comfortable and be able to express their opinions unreservedly. Risk-free expression even when the participants’ viewpoints differed was again manifested in the three online activities:

« Je vois que je suis le seul sur cela qui ne doit pas être un membre de bebo!! Je déteste le réseau social. Je crois que c'est addictif et un gaspillage de temps! Je vis dans le monde réel!! Mais aucune offense évidemment! Je crois que cela peut être dangereux! 
» (Charles)

Finally, ‘social presence’ is apparent when members of the community show a will to work as part of a group: “A community is inherently collaborative” (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: 20). This sense of collegiality was experienced in the online forum and the wiki. Though a majority of the blogs were kept private, students revealed that they wished they were open for comment (Section 5.3.3) which suggests as strong appetite for collaboration.

The second element which constitutes a CoP is ‘cognitive presence’. It is created with the use of triggering events which aim at puzzling learners and making them respond. It is also obtained with exploration, integration, and resolution (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: 19). This means that students seek and exchange information in order to understand an issue, are able to link different ideas together and apply them to new ones. This type of activities was noted in all three social media to various extents. In the discussion forum, students regularly discovered cultural traits that were unknown to them and they were encouraged to compare them with their own culture. In the discussion forum, the triggering events were the tutor’s weekly messages and the reading of articles depicting societal aspects of France. They were less systematic in the blog, as students were asked to take on their own initiative to identify and report on perplexing personal cultural experiences, but some students gave evidence that they were able to use their own experiences and write about them in their respective blogs (Section 6.2.4). As regards the exchange of information, this was highly visible in the forum where students wrote about their experiences and opinions. The blog and wiki were more used for linking ideas together and applying them in new contexts.
The third element ‘teaching presence’ relates to the functions under the responsibility of the teacher even though some functions can be held by other participants at times. The functions include “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Garrison and Anderson: 2003, 29). In other words, it is linked to managing the environment before and during the learning process. Typical functions are ‘design and organization’, ‘facilitating discourse’ and ‘direct instruction’. These were evidenced by the teacher who designed the course activities and objectives before the project started, and focused the learner’s work on specific tasks during the study. For example:

« Cette semaine je vous propose de a) présenter des aspects culturels que vous avez remarqués lors de voyages, rencontres ou autres. Cela peut concerner la culture française ou une autre. b) Qu’est-ce que cette expérience vous a appris sur votre propre culture ? Par exemple, quand je suis arrivée en Irlande, j’ai découvert que le « tea » désigne une boisson chaude mais aussi un repas léger et que le « dinner » qui est un repas consistant peut être mangé en milieu de journée. C’était étonnant pour moi car en France le dîner est TOUJOURS le soir et le thé est uniquement une boisson. Cette expérience m’a appris que le vocabulaire reflète les habitudes d’un pays (les habitudes alimentaires ici). Tous les irlandais comprennent les mots « tea » et « dinner » et partagent une culture alors qu’une étrangère comme moi a besoin d’explication. Le terme « tea » semble aussi être utilisé en Nouvelle Zélande (voir texte ci-dessous) et en Grande Bretagne :
http://forum.wordreference.com/showthread.php ?t=504850 » (Instruction from the tutor)

To summarise, the analysis of students’ online messages echoes the feedback from learners (Chapter 5) who stated that working online made them feel part of a community. The three official characteristics of a Community of Practice have been evidenced in all three social media.

6.2.3 Interaction with peers: Deep learning or surface reflection?

It is believed that Communities of Practice set in an educational context are key factors of deep learning. They are composed of teachers and students who interact in order to generate critical thinking, construct and confirm understanding. Students’ feedback and analysis of their messages posted online have already confirmed that learning and reflection occurred in the course of the project. However, whether or not the information acquisition which took place was legitimate deep learning remains to be
objectively determined. To do so the students’ comments will be measured with the three components of deep learning.

As outlined in the literature review (Section 2.3.1), deep learning is composed of three fundamental elements: (1) ‘conditionalized knowledge’ or the learners’ ability to build-up new knowledge and relate it to previous knowledge (2) ‘metacognition’ or the participants’ aptitude to think critically and reflect on their learning, and (3) ‘communities of inquiry’ which is the context in which learning occurs. Evidence of these three components was found in the participants’ feedback and are summarised in Table 6.1.

In addition to students’ feedback, the analysis of the participants’ online entries, especially those posted in their reflective blogs, indicates that some level of deep learning did occur. For instance, the following message is a good example of “conditionalized knowledge”:

« Tout d’abord, je dois avouer que je n’étais pas d’accord avec le système français quand ma prof nous en a parlé. Mais après avoir lu ce texte et fait des recherches sur le sujet, je pense que c’est meilleur que l’apprentissage traditionnel. En France, tous les élèves doivent assister aux cours de la sécurité routière. Après, avec cette attestation scolaire, le adolescent – s’il ou elle veut conduire – peut se présenter à l’examen du “code”, qui est une formation théorique. C’est seulement après ça que le jeune est permis de conduire. Il ou elle doit parcourir au moins trois mille kilomètres accompagné d’un adulte expérimenté. Finalement à l’âge de dix-huit ans le candidat peut se présenter à l’épreuve pratique du permis de conduire. Bien sûr, il y a des gens qui disent que les jeunes de seize ans ne sont pas murs, qu’ils sont dangereux sur la route. Mais sans doute, la solution est de les éduquer sur la sécurité routière, de les donner la formation pour qu’ils aient la confiance et la compétence le plus tot possible ! En conclusion, je crois que la conduite accompagnée est un bon système. […] Finalement le système français est meilleure que la notre, puisque ici on peut conduire à la maison après avoir raté l’épreuve pratique ! » (Marc)

This lengthy composition on the French system for young driving learners illustrates one student’s process of acquiring detailed new information which he obtained from class discussion, newspaper article reading, and personal research. It shows how this learner compared this newly gained knowledge to his pre-existing knowledge of the Irish driving system, before re-assessing his understanding and viewpoint on the issue of allowing drivers as young as sixteen years of age to be let on the French roads.
### Table 6.1 – Evidence of deep learning in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Conditionalized knowledge</th>
<th>“I loved it. It gave you the opportunity to build up what other people had said and get new ideas […] it helped to keep it fresh in your head” (Anonymous female student)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It helps in terms of making comparisons with your own culture” (Cédric)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It allows me to compare Ireland with France and makes me take notice of some aspects of Irish culture which I haven’t noticed before” (Anonymous female student)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Metacognition</td>
<td>“Because it makes you stop, think and have your own thoughts on the subjects” (Adeline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Not only did [the wiki] help remembering the cultural aspects raised during the term, but it also allowed us to develop with depth some of them in particular.” (Raphaëlle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think with online activities ie. discussion forums was far more beneficial […]. With the discussion forum it was another chance to practice writing French and made us formulate ideas therefore we thought about what we were learning more.” (Karine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“We kind of take it in much better than if we were you know told to go away and read a book. We learn all the aspects, the cultural aspects but you are just kind of passively taking it in whereas [with the discussion forum] you think about it yourself” (Julie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I found it very helpful. It made you explore the aspect being discussed and think about it” (Julie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Community of Practice</td>
<td>“It made you interact as well, and you got to see as well what other people thought” (Julie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It was a very informal environment” (Emmanuelle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I enjoy the fact that it is a more relaxed way of practising French than homework or tests” (Caroline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It was less daunting than speaking in front of a class of strangers” (Laura)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It is really engaging, you really don’t notice that you are learning stuff […] it is so interactive” (Karine)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, since the online reflective diary which was intended to represent most of the deep learning occurrences observed, received a low participation rate, it is difficult to assert with certainty that the sample of deep learning noted is an accurate reflection of all the participants, or the majority of them. No compelling conclusion on this matter may be drawn from an objective stance to support the participants’ feedback. Although it may be argued that the low amount of written evidence of deep learning processes does not necessarily imply that little deep learning actually took place; no other method allows us to state otherwise.
6.2.4 The issue of assessing ICC

The literature on ICC assessment (see Section 1.5.2) points out the difficulties associated with measuring intercultural development. Thus, this research study took into consideration the recommendations made by specialists (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002; Deardorff, 2006, 2009; Fantini, 2000, 2009; Lázár et al., 2007) in the field, namely defining the concept of ICC, and identifying frameworks of references with the aim to pinpoint the exact elements of ICC that have been chosen to evaluate from the participants’ productions and interactions. As delineated in Chapter 4, the research methodology combined quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as implemented triangulation in order to get optimal results. These measures have enabled me to evaluate the impact of the online tasks on students’ collective ICC awareness (Chapter 5), and the outcomes are enlightening from a researcher’s point of view. However, the practical side of evaluating ICC still remains to be discussed: as a teacher how did I assess the participants’ individual performances? Which exact criteria were used? What was the breakdown of the marking scheme for each online tool? Was the assessment method reliable? Did the assessment method change during the course of the study? Is there any possibility that it was undermined by my subjective views of what ICC represents? In other words, would a different teacher using the same marking scheme have given the same marks to the students? All these questions will be addressed in this section.

To begin with, the marking grids used to mark the individual work and progress of students in each tool will be provided and commented on. Overall, the measuring criteria were threefold: they examined the students’ communicative competence (e.g., spelling, lexicon, and syntax), their intercultural competence (e.g., evidence of reflection or comparison between C1 and C2), and also their online literacy (e.g., uploading a photo, inserting a hyperlink).
Table 6.2 – Marking grid for the discussion forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nombre de messages – 10%</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>Commentaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 message → 0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 message → 1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 messages → 2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 messages → 3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 messages → 4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 messages → 5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 messages → 6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 messages → 7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 messages → 8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 messages → 9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 messages et + → 10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualité des messages – 15%</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>Commentaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pertinence (5%)</td>
<td>.....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Référence aux autres messages (5%)</td>
<td>.....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avatar ou photo (5%)</td>
<td>.....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total                      | ... / 25 |              |

The discussion forum tasks were assessed on a 25 marks basis, which was later converted into 2.5% of the students’ final mark of their French course (Table 6.2). The marking scheme was divided between a purely quantitative measure of their online participation, and a qualitative measure of the content of their posts. Depending on how many messages participants posted, they could obtain from 0 to 10 mark(s). If a student did not post messages at all, s/he would get 0 mark, if s/he posted 1 message s/he would get 1 mark, and so on. The quality of the messages was worth 15 marks subdivided into three criteria: the relevance of the message (5 marks); if the student took into account the comments made previously by other learners, and made reference to them (5 marks); and if the user demonstrated online literacy, for instance uploading a photo or inserting an hyperlink to illustrate a comment (5 marks). The linguistic level was not subject to marking as it was emphasised to participants that grammatical errors and misuses would not be penalised. Indeed, the aim of the discussion forum was to enable learners to express their ideas freely, i.e. without the constraint of writing impeccable grammar. Though, students were encouraged to keep a minimum of correctness to be understood, and feedback was provided on the most common grammatical errors noted (see Section 6.2.5).
The blog entries were evaluated on a 25 marks basis, which was also later converted into 2.5% of the students’ final mark of their French module (Table 6.3). Three categories were used to assess the students’ participation in the blog: the amount of entries written (5 marks), the navigation features (5%), and the quality of the messages which represented most of the marks (15 marks). As with the discussion forum, the linguistic level of learners was not evaluated in the blog. Instead emphasis was put on the students’ personal reflection and learning progress; these could be expressed by describing the context in which the blog was written, and explaining its purpose (3%); including new linguistic or cultural elements learnt, for example new expressions, grammar problems solved or elements of objective or subjective culture (6%); and evidence of observations made as regards to their C1 as well as the target culture (6%).
The wiki activities were measured on a 100 marks basis, which was converted afterwards into 5% of the students’ final mark (Table 6.4). As the tasks carried out required both individual input and a collective effort, the wiki marking scheme took this aspect into account. 40 marks were allocated to personal contributions and evaluated the process of defining culture with their other group members: 15 marks for the amount of entries, 25 marks for the content of the messages. This category considered the quality of the entries by judging their relevance to the task. 50 marks were dedicated to the group work and assessed the ending product, i.e. the final definition. The 50 marks encompassed both linguistic and cultural components, it also considered if the teacher instructions had been respected, e.g., the definition was kept within the word limit; it was structured in paragraphs to facilitate comprehension; and information was drawn from the course, personal experience or research. Another 10 marks was added if learners had returned an evaluation of their fellow classmates’ definition. Indeed,
students were also involved in the marking and assessed other groups’ definition. The students’ mark and the teacher’s mark were put together and the average determined the final mark to each student. This strategy was employed to make sure students did look at the marking scheme and knew exactly what was expected from them.

The three marking schemes were designed before the beginning of the study but some modifications had to be implemented during the course of the project concerning the assessment of the blog and the wiki. In regard to the blog, since there was a very limited uptake partially due to technical difficulties (e.g., blog closure as anti-spam precautions) which were outside of the participants’ control, it was decided not to penalise the low participation too severely. All participants who had created a blog were awarded the maximum 5 marks in the “number of messages posted” category. No further ‘free’ marks were given, however, so as not to penalise the students who did overcome the technical challenges and compensated the delay in using their blog to the full by posting several entries closely together in time.

Moreover, as recommended in the literature (O’Dowd, 2010: 353), the different marking schemes were explained in detail to students before the beginning of each task so that participants would know what criteria were used to assess their work. As this measure was not sufficient to inspire the majority of learners to keep their reflective blog, the idea to involve peer assessment was added in Semester 2 with the wiki, with the hope that student would be more conscious of the tasks. Students were given a list of criteria to assess their peers’ work:

1. La définition est-elle composée de 400 mots environ ? (0 – 0.5 – 1)
2. La définition est-elle structurée ? Par exemple, les idées sont organisées en paragraphe, des phrases complètes ont été utilisées au lieu de puces (« bullet points »), des mots de liaison sont employés… (0 – 0.5 – 1)
3. La grammaire est-elle satisfaisante ? (orthographe, accent, conjugaison des verbes, accord des adjectifs…) (0 – 0.5 – 1)
4. La définition donne-t-elle des exemples culturels discutés en classe / dans les textes étudiés ? (0 – 0.5 – 1)
5. La définition est-elle illustrée de photos ou liée à des pages web ? (0 – 0.5 – 1)

Des commentaires:
Note: ……./5

Interestingly, in the second semi-directed interview, some students admitted that this extra task incorporated a sense of competition between each team and enticed them to outperform the other group.
In addition to concentrating on the evaluation criteria, an important consideration when designing ICC assessment scheme is its reliability. To be more precise, the ethical problem that may be associated with ICC evaluation is the level of subjectivity from the examiner (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2009; Fantini, 2000). I was mindful of this when designing the marking schemes and also when deciding on the grading for each student performance. But, I believe that there is always a degree of subjectivity when assessing ICC, and that this must be accepted. Evaluating personal dispositions and attitudes is not easily quantifiable and requires personal judgment at some level. In fact, some experts recommend subjectivity: Corbett (2004) proposes subjective evaluation as opposed to objectives assessments which merely measure factual knowledge when evaluating ICC. As shown throughout this thesis, the acquisition of ICC is a dynamic process which cannot be obtained by solely memorising facts. Such objective assessments would be inappropriate. This being said, once subjectivity has been accepted, measures may be taken to minimise it. Following Deardorff’s (2008: 49) guidelines, I took into consideration my possible cultural biases, and consciously kept an open mind; I was careful not to penalise students who expressed prejudiced comments on the C2, by making stereotypical remarks for example, as long as an effort was made by the learners to reflect on their own frame of mind. This was facilitated by two factors: firstly, this research project aimed at raising awareness of ICC rather than formally assessing the participants’ ICC; and secondly, as explained in Section 1.4.5, ethnocentric stages are considered as an integral part of the normal learning process which comprises both intercultural development and potential regression. In addition, students who made biased remarks received tutor feedback if it was felt necessary, although, this was a rare occurrence.

To summarise, the elements of ICC assessment which received careful attention in the study carried out for this doctoral research included the following recommendations for teachers interested in developing ICC, which are partially inspired by Deardorff’s (2009: 485-6):

**Prior to the empirical study:**

1. Consult the literature on ICC, and delineate a satisfactory definition which clearly identifies components (e.g., Byram’s *five savoirs*, 1997).
2. Determine which ICC components will be evaluated. Do not try to assess too many elements over a short period of time.

3. Consult the literature on ICC assessment to design an assessment scheme, and a timeline which fit the learning environment. Do not blindly copy existing methods of assessments as they may not suit the context of the study.

4. Make sure that the evaluating method corresponds to the course’s learning objectives and expected outcomes.

5. Include peer-assessment in the marking scheme, if appropriate, to engage the participants, and enable them to reflect on their learning experience.

6. If relevant, include assessment of communicative competence, intercultural competence, and online literacy. Depending on the tasks, one or two of these may be the subject of focus in one assessment method, and other element may be the subject of focus in a different assessment method.

7. Take note of the potential prejudices held by the examiner(s). Consider measures to minimise them.

During the empirical study:

8. Observe how the tasks are progressing, and take note of students’ uptake. Be open to amending the marking scheme (with very careful consideration) if it suits the situation. Consider consulting other practitioners for advice on any alteration before implementing them.

9. Make sure to inform the participants in a timely manner, if changes are made to the marking scheme.

10. Apply measures to minimise the evaluator’s biases. Consider a second opinion in order to safeguard a fair marking process.

After the empirical study:

11. Allow for participants’ feedback on the assessment method.

12. Examine the evaluating method. Recognise the strengths and limitations of the assessment process, and take note of them for future use.
6.2.5 The teacher roles: Providing descriptive and prescriptive feedback

As shown in Chapter 5, students’ participation varied in the three social media, which may well have been because of the guidance of the teacher. When the teacher gave very little input, as was the case with the blog, participation was low; when the teacher provided regular and constructive feedback, as was the case with the online discussions, participation was higher. This was confirmed in Section 5.4.3 by a high number of students (78.2%) who stated that the tutor feedback on their discussion forum messages was “helpful”, “very helpful” or “extremely helpful”, and this stressed that feedback is a critical component in the success of an online task. While it was anticipated and planned from the early stages of the project to provide feedback to the students on their language skills, during the course of the study, the content of the learners’ posts rapidly raised a pedagogical question: what type of feedback should be provided for the benefit of the students? Indeed, when monitoring an online discussion forum, the issue of descriptive versus prescriptive feedback comes to the fore. This is due to the fact that online literacies and new forms of online writing (like an online discussion forum) may be associated with a level of informality which is not present or accepted in more traditional writing exercises such as essays. To illustrate this matter, this section will analyse the errors/misuses made in the students’ online posts.

To begin with, the two terms will be clarified. Prescriptive grammar refers to the structure of a language according to norms in formal written registers, while descriptive grammar refers to the structure of a language as it is actually used by speakers and writers (Meyer, 2004: 1). For example, in French, the negation is composed of two elements (“ne ... pas”, “ne...plus”, “ne...rien”, “ne ...jamais”, etc.) and a prescriptive approach would expect learners to write “Je ne sais pas” for “I don’t know”. But in actual facts, many native French speakers omit the first negative component (“ne”) in informal settings or in oral interactions. Instead of “Je ne sais pas”, they would write or say “Je sais pas” or even “Chai pas” (the equivalent of “I dunno” in English). A descriptive approach would consider this as an acceptable and accurate representation of the language.

22 Indeed, it was necessary to consider the communicative aspect of ICC as much as the intercultural component.
The Internet pervasiveness in our modern lives may have a significant impact on our language use. For example, native speaker Internet language use in online applications such as discussion forums is predominantly composed of written messages, but they also contain features of spoken language and casual attitudes towards grammar (Crystal, 2001: 18). In French-speaking online forums, in addition to the omission of the first negative component, this could be exemplified by the absence of capitalisation, a liberal use of punctuation or the inclusion of informal expressions and emoticons.

### Table 6.5 – Error classification for the analysis of writing errors (adapted from Ferris, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morphological errors</th>
<th>Lexical errors</th>
<th>Mechanical errors</th>
<th>Syntactic errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prepositions</td>
<td>9. Word choice/inappropriate vocabulary</td>
<td>11. Capitalisation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gender and agreements</td>
<td>10. Word in English/no translation</td>
<td>12. Misspelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Articles</td>
<td>15. Hyphens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pronouns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Use of the negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Elision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Conjunctions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to identify the errors/misuses made by students, their 173 postings of Semester 1 have been analysed. This small corpus represents a total of 14,756 words. The system of error analysis chosen follows O’Sullivan and Chambers’s (2006) choice of classification which identifies four categories of error adapted from Ferris (2002): “grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and substance error” (see Table 6.5). In addition to lexical and grammatical errors (Table 6.6) where correction is appropriate, and where a prescriptive approach can be adopted, data reveal that the texts were characterised by a level of informality (Table 6.7) which teachers traditionally correct in more formal registers. This analysis will enable us to attempt to evaluate the relative importance of prescriptive and descriptive approaches in new writing environments.

The corpus is examined both in a quantitative and a qualitative manner. The quantitative analysis indicates the amount of errors as well as informal uses made in the discussion forum during Semester 1. The qualitative analysis illustrates the numerical results with examples of the content posted by participants online.

As Table 6.6 indicates, the majority of errors noted were mechanical (638 errors) and morphological (569 errors). Students experienced particular difficulty with accents (441 occurrences), verb forms and moods (219 occurrences), spelling (194 occurrences), and
gender and agreements (219 occurrences). It was difficult to categorise misspellings and misuses of accents as they could have reflected a level of informality or been linked to the tool, e.g. typing on the keyboard too quickly. But without ways to identify the reasons behind the mistakes, it was decided to consider them as errors.

Table 6.6 - Corpus analysis: quantitative results on a formal register

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of errors</th>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
<th>Group C</th>
<th>All groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morphological errors (Total of 569)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositions</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and agreements</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb forms/mood</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronouns</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elision</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunctions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic errors</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical errors (Total of 68)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word choice</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word in English</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical errors (Total of 638)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misspellings</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accents</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyphens</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the morphological errors identified, data show that students were highly influenced by their L1 in choosing prepositions: « L’homme français ne peut pas résister une jolie femme! » (Rolande – my emphasis23). Gender and agreement errors concerned particularly the agreement of adjectives and past participles with their subjects: « Nos informations personnelles doivent rester privés » (Bastien); gender misuses also had an influence on the choice of article: « J’étudie le français, la gaélique…» (Anne-Laure). Mistakes in verb forms and mood were predominantly related to the use of the third person singular form instead of the third personal plural: « On dit que les jeunes d’aujourd’hui a plus d’argent que sens » (Karine). Similar inaccuracies were made with pronouns, especially in long complex sentences: « la jeunesse de nos jours […] ils peuvent payer » (Paul). Other morphological errors comprised elision of words, usually verbs: « Le système peut être difficile pour quelques personnes » (Apolline), and misuses of conjunctions: « Je suis membre de Bebo ou Facebook » (Karine). The syntactic mistakes observed were usually due to a direct transfer of the students’ L1 syntax system into the L2: « Je joue au rugby depuis j’ai cinq ans » (Cédric) or « Je crois que les tatouages regarde belle sur certains gens » (Ariane). Lexical errors were made when students resorted to a wrong word, notably

23 Italics in students’ quotations are the author’s emphasis.
because of its similarity with the appropriate word: « Il y a beaucoup d’aspects de la vie quotidienne qui *propose*nt des problèmes pour les handicaps » (Adeline) or randomly included English words: « Je pense que *many* des gens qui ont des tatouages sont des victimes » (Adeline). Finally, mechanical errors subsumed misspellings: « J’ai rencontré *beaucoup* de jeunes » (Karine); and misuses or omission of accents: « J’habite à Thomond Village » (Sabrina) and hyphens: « Les jeunes sont très globalisés, *c’est à dire que*… » (Salomé).

**Table 6.7 – Corpus analysis: quantitative results on genre-specific written language (informal)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of errors</th>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
<th>Group C</th>
<th>All groups</th>
<th>Classification of errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morphological</td>
<td>Omission of “ne”</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>Informal usage</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emoticons</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical</td>
<td>Capitalisation</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation/ exclamation</td>
<td>154 (Incl. 94)</td>
<td>85 (Incl. 64)</td>
<td>77 (Incl. 61)</td>
<td>316 (Incl. 219)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The level of informality in students’ written messages was observable through morphological, lexical and mechanical elements (Table 6.7). Informality was particularly expressed with the use of colloquialisms (96 occurrences) and the absence of capitalisation (90 occurrences). However, liberal punctuation, and more specifically the very frequent use of exclamation marks, was the most significant aspect noted (316 occurrences, including 219 extra exclamation marks). Like native speakers, learners omitted the “ne” part of the French negation: « On peut rencontrer des colocataires *qu’on aime pas* » (Edwige) or « *C’est pas vrai !* » (Emmanuelle). Participants also made use of colloquial expressions: « Je viens tous les jours en voiture. *Ça me fait* une heure et quart, à peu près » (Magalie) or « Beaucoup de magasins en ville ont *pas mal de marches* » (Bastien). In addition, despite the fact that the messages were written (or typed) a significant level of oral speech markers were spotted: « J’aime faire des courses, le surf et les vacances…. *amm c’est tout !* » (Rolande) or « *Ha ha !* C’était très intéressant » (Cédric). The students’ posts were also characterised by the intense use of emoticons, including: « Jaime le foot gaelique et le musique, surtout u2 😎 ! » (Nicole) and « c’est préférable de le garder propre et simple 🌿 » (Charles) or « BONJOUR ! :) » (Sophie). Similarly to the corpus analysis in a formal register, categorising some misuses required some consideration, notably regarding the use of capitalisation and punctuation. Since
the absence of capitalisation of countries and nationalities, and words at the beginning of a sentence were a regular occurrence, it was decided that these were not typing mistakes but conscious decisions made by students to adhere to an informal register. The same conclusion was made with the heavy use of punctuation. The absence of capitalisation was manifested with « Je ne suis pas d’accord avec cette représentation des français. C’est la même idée que tous les irlandais sont des leprechauns ! » (Karine) or « je suis membre de bebo. c’est une page privée, accessible seulement à mes amis. elle raconte mes passe-temps… » (Sophie). Examples of liberal punctuation include: « Les Français ne sont pas différents !!!! » (Salomé) or « Bonjour à tous.......sans nul doute le programme Erasmus donne beaucoup d’expérience.......... » (Adeline).

This small corpus analysis highlights the areas where participants of the study made grammatical and lexical mistakes; mistakes which were pointed out by the teacher through prescriptive feedback, i.e. grammar correction. Suggestions of improvement or corrections of inaccuracies were provided as a non invasive group feedback in Sulis (see Section 5.4.3). But this analysis also indicates positive practice: learners were able to adapt the register of their posts to the social environment they were interacting in, thus making their online discussions similar in many ways to language use in native speaker online settings. As part of the feedback, it was important as well to notify students that the informal register of their written messages was appropriate in this specific context. For this reason, descriptive feedback where students were made aware of formal and informal registers was provided. To summarise, the emergence of new forms of online writing brings new challenges for language teachers. It is safe to say that a tradition of error correction should remain, as a good grammatical background remains essential, particularly at the early stages of language acquisition (e.g., beginner’s level). Nonetheless, the context in which the interaction takes place dictates the tone, and teachers need to raise awareness of formal and informal registers to their students. This would bring authenticity in the language classroom and contributes to preparing learners to apprehend the target culture better.
6.3 Conclusion

Chapter 6 illuminated previous results depicted in Chapter 5 and further answered the research questions of this thesis, as outlined in the Introduction. As a summary of this final chapter will be presented, a number of references to the present study’s primary and secondary research questions will be indicated in order to underline the findings obtained with this research project. The same procedure will be applied in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 6 examined students’ motivation and autonomy (Primary research question 4) further by analysing a deviant case. The researcher’s analysis confirmed that students highly valued evident connections between the online activities and the curriculum; participants were more susceptible to take part in and enjoy a task if they considered it as befitting the course’s objectives, regardless of their instrumental motives. Section 6.2.1 pointed out a shortcoming in the blog activities design which meant that only students who had posted entries received feedback and were given a direct link to a “model” blog. This was deemed as a demotivating factor for a number of learners who felt left out, thus stressing the pivotal role of tutors in giving students the means to work autonomously.

Chapter 6 also demonstrated that the building of a Community of Practice and deep learning were made possible with the blended learning approach adopted by the project (Primary research question 4). Characteristics of a CoP were exemplified by a relatively strong bond between participants (Secondary research question 4), notably in the discussion forum where complicity was palpable. “Cognitive presence” was also noted. The discussion forum showed evident signs of exchange information while the blog and wiki were used for linking ideas together and applying them in new contexts. “Teaching presence” was also observed, despite some students stating that it was insubstantial in the blog activities. Section 6.2.3 indicated that students’ feedback supported the existence of the two components of deep learning: “conditionalized knowledge” and “metacognition” within a CoP. But the analysis of the content of the students’ messages did not allow to indisputably concluding that deep learning happened to a significant level.
In addition, the issue of assessing ICC was also discussed. Section 6.2.4 recommended including three criteria when assessing ICC with SMALL: communicative and intercultural competences as well as online literacy; and to stress on one or two aspects depending on the tool being used and the tasks to complete. It also gave examples on how to minimise the evaluator’s biases by determining what is understood by ICC and clearly identifying components to evaluate (Primary research question 3). Furthermore, it concluded that peer assessment is a good way to engage students and also safeguard that they understand the tasks. Section 6.2.4 also showed that regardless of how much planning is carried out prior the start of a course, unexpected events that may require a change in the marking process may occur. For this reason, observation skills and flexibility are important evaluator qualities to hold. Lastly, Chapter 6 exposed some new challenges for teachers who are using new forms of writing, and concluded that while error correction remains essential, particularly at the beginner’s level, it is important that all types of writing settings and their codes/registers are exposed to language learners.
Conclusion and recommendations

Summary of thesis

This doctoral dissertation drew the research areas of intercultural learning and CALL/SMALL together to examine the impact of a discussion forum, blog and wiki on L2 learners’ intercultural sensitivity. It specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

- How is culture linked to language teaching and learning and what is intercultural communicative competence? (Primary question 1)
- How do social media develop awareness of intercultural communicative competence? (Primary question 2)
- How can intercultural communicative competence be developed online in an educational context? (Primary question 3)
- How do fundamental concepts in language learning and education (motivation, autonomy, deep learning) relate to the teaching of intercultural communicative competence with social media? (Primary question 4)
- What recommendations from this study set in a standard third-level teaching and learning setting may benefit other practitioners in foreign language education? The recommendations relate to the benefits and limitations linked to this type of project. (Primary question 5)
- Can intercultural communicative competence be assessed in an educational context? If yes, how? (Secondary question 1)
- Which social media are better suited for enhancing intercultural communicative competence? (Secondary question 2)
- How do students react to social media implemented in their course for the purpose of developing intercultural communicative competence? (Secondary question 3)
- How do students interact within the social media implemented in their course for the purpose of developing intercultural communicative competence? (Secondary question 4)
The empirical study indicated that the implementation of the three online tools in the Français oral class had a strong influence on the students’ learning experience. Findings evidenced that the three social media facilitated the development of ICC awareness, though they put different ICC skills into practice. Despite the discussion forum being undeniably the students’ favourite medium (Secondary research question 3), data analysis showed that the wiki included the most evidence of ICC awareness as it encompassed the knowledge and skills that were acquired and exercised in both the discussion forum and blog beforehand (Secondary research question 2). The online forum was principally suited for sharing new cultural discoveries and reviewing their significance in a forthcoming Community of Practice; and the blog enabled students to reflect on their learning and exercise critical thinking (Primary research question 2). Both students’ feedback and the researcher’s analysis propose that the study was a meaningful and valuable learning experience for the majority of participants - even within the constraints of a standard third-level language teaching and learning setting. In addition, this thesis examined secondary theoretical backgrounds pertaining to students’ motivation and autonomy, deep learning, and teacher roles (Primary research question 4). Results of the empirical study confirmed that students were highly instrumentally motivated, and also regarded clear connections between the online activities and their course’s objectives as paramount. Lastly, teacher guidance was also considered as a being a significant factor in the success of online tasks. Teachers are not solely perceived as assessing ICC progress, they are also vital in providing students with the means to work autonomously as well as providing awareness of authentic online interactions.

This concluding section will present and discuss the major findings made by the doctoral research project presented in this thesis. It will also indicate the limitations of the study and lay out lessons that may be learnt from it, in order to complete the reflective cycle of action research. Finally, recommendations for future research suggest will be put forward.
Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the empirical study indicates that students predominantly responded favourably to the implementation of online activities for the purpose of enhancing their ICC (Secondary research question 3). The introduction of the blended learning approach in the French language classroom was positive in many ways. Students were naturally curious about and drawn to trying new activities. Learners created an informal and friendly environment in which they interacted by reading and sharing information, and by articulating new and previously acquired information in writing (Secondary research question 4). The teacher’s main aim of enhancing intercultural competence was attained to a great extent and the majority of participants encouraged and supported the future use of social media. However, it was noted that, for a small number of participants, technophobia was mentioned as a deterrent to their use despite teacher guidance and hands-on training sessions. This underlined that VLE and social media designs may influence how users perceive their technical abilities. As such developments on providing tools with a better affordance may be needed (Primary research questions 3 and 5).

This study concentrated on examining the links between language teaching and learning and intercultural communicative competence. After a thorough description of the evolution in the teaching of language and culture in the European and North American contexts which led to today’s complex debate on what constitute ICC (Primary research question 1), concurrently with a historical depiction of the rapid advances of Internet technologies, the empirical study investigated how social media develop awareness of ICC. The data analysis revealed that the tools enabled the participants to share their opinions and reflexions, and that it contributed to the building of a community in which students felt comfortable. In other words, the creation of non-threatening environments where students could express themselves freely, i.e. without the constraint of writing with flawless grammar or without the fear of being reprimanded for their opinions, was highly encouraging (Primary research question 2). In addition, findings suggested that the asynchronous feature of the media chosen for this research project allowed learners to read messages in their own time, as many times as they wanted in order to accustom themselves to new ideas, especially when the interaction was in the target language.
This seems of particular significance in ICC acquisition since reflection is a vital component of the concept (Primary research question 2). Likewise, the exercises where students compared the L2 cultural aspects with their own culture seemed to have been the most effective in making the students reflect and gain awareness of ICC. Furthermore, tools enabling collaboration between learners, like it was the case with the discussion forum and the wiki, were most effective to make participants interact thought and knowledge on cultural issues (Primary research question 2). The possibility to read other participants’ opinions and reactions allowed students to learn from their peers in a more engaging manner than through more traditional approaches where interaction is usually limited between learners and a book or learners and their teacher. From the study carried out for this research, it was noticed that the three social media used helped the development of different ICC elements (Primary research question 2). The discussion forum seems to have been favourable to develop skills of discovery and interaction or what Byram (1997) refers to as “savoir-faire”, as well as expanding students’ curiosity and openness or “savoir être” (Ibid.). The blog was effective for expressing reflexivity. Both the blog and wiki comprised elements of “savoir s’engager”, notably critical observation, reflection, interpretation, and comparison. Finally, students showed signs of flexibility and empathy in the wiki. However, these findings are to be treaded carefully, as the outcomes were possibly more task-dependent than tool-dependent. Indeed, the discussion forum, blog and wiki were introduced in this study with the objective of completing a set of specific tasks. These three tools may be used for other purposes and as a consequence produce different results. Also, findings highlighted some limitations in what the social media can offer: the tools are only as good as the users are. This was pointed out by some learners who regretted that the international students of their group contributed very little online when it was sensed that they could have enriched the interactions and learning processes greatly if they had (Secondary research questions 2 and 3). In other words, Bax’s (2003: 26; see also Section 2.3.3) concept of the computer’s “omnipotent fallacy” has been proven right; online technologies are merely tools and are not the panacea of all educational needs. This study confirms that the tasks design and their implementation by the teacher are essential (Primary research questions 3 and 5), but this study also adds that the completion of these tasks by participants (under the guidance of their tutor) is equally important to enhance students’ online learning experience.

263
The empirical study also examined how ICC could be developed online in a standard educational context. It was noted that step-by-step and task-based activities were the ones which actually received the best responses (Primary research question 5). So, in order to improve the students’ learning experience this needs to be reflected in the methodology. Taking into consideration that not all learners are comfortable with technology (Donaldson and Haggström, 2006), it was also observed that opting for a blending learning approach, where regular and direct contact with students was possible, facilitated the development of the online intercultural tasks. Training sessions were also organised and feedback confirmed that they should not be overlooked (Primary research question 5). The students who were reluctant to take part in some activities said that they felt unprepared or were let down by the technology, which highlighted a need to build trust between the users and the tools (Secondary research question 3). To (re)gain confidence, in addition to greater initial guidance to meet the needs of the participants, a search for more intuitive tools could solve issues such as problems using the wiki and difficulty met when typing accents. This could be achieved either by improving the current tools used or changing to similar tools available on the market (Primary research questions 3 and 5). Additionally, three aspects were identified as key to the success of the project: a fair marking scheme, as students prioritise their energy where work is graded. Obviously, the context in which participants were working had an influence on their participation and this study showed that at the end of the academic semester, students were focussed on assignments which were most heavily weighted. Given this instrumental motivation (Gardner, 1985), increasing the weighting for this work or limiting the activities to one tool per semester would possibly solve the problem (Primary research questions 4 and 5). This raises the general issue of ensuring that online work is given sufficient weighting alongside traditional assessments such as essays and oral examinations. The other two elements were the provision of clear tasks matching the objectives of the course; and teacher presence, notably by providing ongoing guidance and constructive feedback (Primary research question 5).

These last two elements stress how fundamental concepts in language learning and education also relate to the teaching of ICC with social media (Primary research question 4). As stated above, instrumental motivation is a significant factor in an educational context where performances are expected to be assessed and graded. This is true regardless of how convinced students are that a task or a specific medium is
enhancing their learning. One can note that the online tool that students prefer may not represent which tool is most beneficial for ICC learning, so in order to attract students’ attention/motivation, teachers may adapt the marking scheme where they feel students would benefit the most (Primary research question 5). Along with testing theories on motivation, the study observed factors behind autonomy and deep learning. The data analysis confirmed that students highly valued clear links between the online activities and their programme of study; learners were more inclined to complete the tasks if they considered them as being relevant to the course’s objectives (Secondary research question 3). Regarding deep learning, the data analysis does not allow us to conclude irrefutably that critical thinking was a widespread occurrence taking place in the online activities. However, it can be said that a number of students manifested signs of high-level critical thinking. Students’ feedback also tends to confirm this. According to participants, the community they were exchanging in was beneficial for interaction of thought, new knowledge construction, and provided them enough time for reflection (Primary research question 2).

The final issue addressed in this thesis was whether or not ICC could be assessed in an educational context (Secondary research question 1). The empirical study suggests that indeed, ICC can be evaluated, but under some conditions. It is recommended that the evaluator has a clear understanding of the components and the frameworks describing ICC before deciding on what to assess and by which means. Considering the dynamic characteristic of ICC, it is preferable to plan several methods of assessments and to implement them over time (Primary research question 5). This would allow for observing the process of ICC acquisition rather than a product or knowledge. For instance, the wiki tool enabled me to examine the students’ interaction (process) in addition to their final definition of culture (product). Online tools are particularly convenient for this as dribble files are good for keeping a record of interactions. The wiki, for instance has a “history” function which allows users to see every change made by participants, determining when they were made and by whom. Moreover, the assessor’s possible biases need to be minimised. This can be done through collaboration: instead of one individual assessing the learner’s ICC, the insight of colleagues may be included (Primary research question 5, and secondary research question 1). If this is not possible, students may be involved in the marking on the condition that a clear grading scheme is provided to them. Finally, if ICC is to be
evaluated by students completing tasks online, this study recommends that technical skills showing some proficiency in using Web 2.0 tools are evaluated in addition to the learners’ ability to communicate appropriately in the L2 and effectively in the C2.

**Limitations of the study**

The empirical study depicted a number of benefits provided by the use of social media for the purpose of raising awareness of ICC. Nonetheless, it must be noted that this research project presents some limitations. This study shows some restrictions in terms of generalisations of results; because of its limited number of participants, findings may not be statistically generalisable. In addition, due to the pedagogical constraints, some of the findings emerging from this project may not be applied to all language learning and teaching contexts where intercultural sensitivity is also the topic of focus. With the exception of the international students, this study concentrated on students of French enrolled in the first-year of their degree. It combined learners from varied programmes of study which may have influenced the participants’ motives to learn about intercultural sensitivity differently. This being said, as pointed out by Becker (1996: 66), qualitative data analysis – which was mainly used in this research project - may result in the generalisation of theories. So the theories depicted in this thesis may be of use for other practitioners.

**Action research: Lessons to be learnt**

Action research in education is grounded in classroom practice and aims at reflecting on and learning from professional action with the aim of promoting best practice. In order to support future developments in the areas of ICC and CALL/SMALL, a number of suggestions can be made. These are drawn from issues that the present research project encountered and are listed as follow:

- Make the link between the objectives of the course and the tasks obvious. At the beginning of the term, ask learners what their expectations of the class are, and check that they meet the objectives that you have set. If they do not, explain to
students how they may readjust their outlook based on the outcomes anticipated from the class.

- Plan and design the tasks and marking scheme by taking into account the likely instrumental motivation of the students. Decide carefully what shall be evaluated but also how to motivate students. The weighting of the grade may be a noteworthy incentive. Consider student peer-assessment, if suitable, to engage learners in the completion of their tasks and reflect on learning strategies.

- Be ready to amend the marking scheme of an activity if it did not turn out as expected for reasons outside of the students’ control.

- Test the social media prior to their implementation in the classroom, and check that you are familiar with their main functions and navigation system. During the study, follow the learners’ interactions closely, and react promptly if there is any problem (blog spam).

- Avoid using too many social media at the same time; one tool per term may be enough depending on the class objectives. Alternatively, consider the assignments workload students may face, and avoid introducing a time-consuming task to be completed around this time unless it is well graded.

- Don’t assume that all students are digital natives. Anticipate training sessions and provide guidance or online self-help documentation. Consider workshops where learners can help each other get accustomed with the technology.

- When using online discussion forums with several classes, consider opening the discussion to all groups to get more interaction, especially if groups are small (as was the case during Semester 2 in this study).

- Beware that task design does not discriminate between learners; make sure that all students get the same information, regardless of their input in the task. This is particularly true in the case of tasks involving self-reflection (portfolio).
**Directions for future research**

Following the presentation of recommendations to improve professional practice with social media for the development of ICC, this study concludes with directions for future research. In comparison with other research projects which are mainly carried out between several institutions, this study showed that intercultural sensitivity can also be developed in a standard third-level setting. This can be a starting point for more future research addressing intercultural communicative competence issues with social media without the challenges of inter-institutional projects. In addition, other future projects could follow up on two research areas addressed in this doctoral dissertation, namely the assessment of ICC, and language use in online settings, and more specifically “interactive written communication” (Leone, 2005).

Firstly, despite the fact that the development of ICC is gaining significance in the foreign language classroom, the issue of evaluating language learners’ skills and attitudes remains problematic. For example, the idea of assessing ICC levels is still morally questioned (Borghetti, 2011b; Kramsch, 1993; Deardorff, 2006) because it is a dynamic concept and involves subjectivity. But, measuring the outcomes of students’ progress is a standard process in educational settings, either through formative or summative assessments, and as such cannot be overlooked. In the case of ICC evaluation, a number of suggestions have already been put to the fore (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2009; O’Dowd, 2010; and also this thesis) but some issues may still be addressed, notably regarding the biases of the measuring tools and evaluators, but also regarding the assessment of ICC developed through the use of CALL/SMALL.

Finally, future research could expand on the study of native speaker and non-native speaker language use in online interactive media. This thesis showed that the register used in such settings raised the issue of prescriptive versus descriptive feedback for foreign language teachers. It would be interesting to see projects investigating if there is any correlation between native speakers’ linguistic use and the Internet tools they are interacting in. For example, it may be presumed that language use may differ significantly when users are writing an e-mail, a text message or a tweet. Furthermore, if a variety of written language uses are noted, it might be beneficial to investigate if
any cultural aspects may be identified as an influence on the ways native speakers and language learners write in Internet settings. The findings would be useful for practitioners, and enable them to compare the written work of their students with native speakers’ productions.
References


Anderson, R. (2007) ‘Thematic content analysis (TCA)’ Qualitative research methods, available: 


Farrington, B. (1986) "Triangular mode" working: The LITTRE project in the field', System, 14(2), 199-204.


Keranen, N. and Bayyurt, Y. (2006) 'Intercultural collaboration: In-service EFL teachers in Mexico and pre-service EFL teachers in Turkey', *TESL-EJ*.


O'Dowd, R. (2003) 'Understanding the "other side": Intercultural learning in a Spanish-English e-mail exchange', Language Learning & Technology, 7(2), 118-144.


Wickersham, L. E. and Dooley, K. E. (2006) 'A content analysis of critical thinking skills as an indicator of online discussion in virtual learning communities', *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 7(2), 185-193.


Williams, R. (1976) *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, London: Fontana.


Appendices
Appendix 1 – The five C’s: Communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards for Foreign Language Learning</th>
<th>Connections</th>
<th>Comparisons</th>
<th>Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate in Languages Other Than English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate and understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standards</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connections</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparisons</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop insight into the Nature of Language and Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home &amp; Around the World</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 – Defining the culture concept and implications for teaching
(Levy, 2007: 112)

1) Culture as elemental
   • We are deeply embedded in our own culture.
   • We have to learn about our own culture first to better understand our frame of reference.
   • Aim at “practical objectivity” and reflection, with the learner as researcher.

2) Culture as relative
   • A contrastive approach is unavoidable, but problematic.
   • Generalisations have some value, as long as they are not considered absolute.
   • Small scale interactive models/methods are helpful.
   • Aim at direct engagement to develop a more nuanced perspective.

3) Culture as group membership
   • Membership of groups is layered and multiple.
   • Membership is regulated formally and informally.
   • Aim at raising awareness of the cultural groups we belong to and how language is used to negotiate and sustain membership.

4) Culture as contested
   • Culture is contested at many levels.
   • Culture is contested through multiple language interactions.
   • Aim at raising awareness, identifying points of contestation and managing differences.

5) Culture as individual (variable and multiple)
   • Cultural knowledge varies from person to person and operates at many levels.
   • Students and teachers are selective in how they represent their culture.
   • Aim at sharing individual experiences and building upon them.
Appendix 3 - Assessment grid for intercultural competence

(Deardorff, 2008: 49)

1. Has intercultural competence been defined using existing definitions in the literature?
2. From whose perspective is intercultural competence being assessed? What are the cultural biases of the evaluator?
3. Who is the locus of the evaluation?
4. What is the context of the intercultural competence assessment?
5. What is the purpose of the intercultural competence assessment?
6. How will the assessment results be used? Who will benefit from the assessment?
7. What is the time frame of the assessment (i.e., one point, ongoing, etc)?
8. What is the level of abstraction, or in other words, will the assessment be more general, or will it assess more specific components of intercultural competence?
9. Do the assessment methods match the working definitions and stated objectives of intercultural competence?
10. Have specific indicators been developed for the intercultural competence assessment?
11. Is more than one method being used to assess intercultural competence? Do the methods involve more than one evaluator’s perspective?
12. Are the degrees of intercultural competence being assessed? What is to be done with those not meeting the minimal level of intercultural competence?
13. Does the assessment account for multiple competencies and multiple cultural identities?
14. Has the impact of situational, social, and historical contexts been analyzed in the assessment of intercultural competence?
15. How do the assessment methods impact the measurement outcomes? Have the limits of the instruments/measures been accounted for?
16. Have students/participants goals been considered when assessing intercultural competence?
Appendix 4 – Approval from the University of Limerick’s ethics committee

10 March 2008

Florence Le Baron
Department of Languages and Cultural Studies
University of Limerick
Limerick

Re: ULREC No. 08/06 – Using Blended Learning to Enhance Cultural Competence

Dear Ms. Le Baron

The above application was considered by the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee at its meeting on 21 February 2008.

I have the pleasure to inform you that the application has been approved by the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Schweppe
Lecturer in Law
Chair, FAHSS Research Ethics Committee
Appendix 5 – Information sheet given to participants (Semesters 1 and 2)

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Department of Languages and Cultural Studies

Information sheet

Using blended-learning to enhance cultural competence

This project investigates how Information and Communications Technologies can help you to learn about French culture and will contribute to the completion of a PhD thesis. Your role as a student of French enrolled in the module FR4141/2 during the autumn 2008 and spring semester 2009 is to attend normally your Français oral tutorial and to follow the instructions assigned to you on a weekly basis on SULIS, the virtual learning environment provided by the University of Limerick.

For this research project data based on your written and oral work on SULIS, which will be anonymised, will be collected during the semesters. You will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire and to attend a group interview each semester. The group interview will be conducted by Prof. Angela Chambers – co-supervisor of the research project - to discuss the work. The participation in the research is voluntary and participation or non-participation will not impact on your grade in any way.

For further queries, you may contact the project investigator at any time:
Florence Le Baron
Department of Languages and Cultural Studies
University of Limerick, Limerick
Office: F1-115+ / Email: Florence.LeBaron@ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:
The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee
C/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office
University of Limerick, Limerick
Tel: (061) 202022
Appendix 6 – Consent form signed by participants (Semesters 1 and 2)

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Department of Languages and Cultural Studies

Consent Form

Using blended-learning to enhance cultural competence

To whom it may concern

I hereby grant permission to Florence Le Baron, Angela Chambers and Liam Murray to use my written and oral work as part of the Module FR4141/2 in the academic year 2008-2009, for the purposes of research in language-and-cultural learning and teaching. I understand that my name will not be included or my identity divulged in any way in the documentation pertaining to these activities. I understand that I may withdraw from this project at any time during the semesters and that therefore my written and oral work on SULIS will not be used for data collection. My participation in the research is voluntary and will not impact on my grades.

Signed

Students’ name:
Students’ signature:
Date:

Faculty Member’s name: FLORENCE LE BARON
Faculty Member’s signature:
Date:
Appendix 7 – Information sheet given to participants (Semester 3)

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Department of Languages and Cultural Studies

Information sheet

This project, entitled ‘Using blended learning to enhance cultural competence’ investigates how Information and Communications Technologies can help you to learn about French culture and will contribute to the completion of a PhD thesis. As a student of FR4143, you will be asked to complete one. This survey will be used to validate your comments made in the questionnaires that you filled in during the Academic Year 2008-09. The information will also be used to compare your experience of Français oral classes with online activities within Sulis during the Academic Year 2008-09 and your current experience of FR4143 Français oral tutorials without online activities.

1. The questionnaire will last approximately 20-30 minutes.
2. The participation in the research is voluntary and participation or non-participation will not impact on your grade in any way.
3. The questionnaire data will be handled in the strictest confidence. Information identifying you will not be disclosed under any circumstances.
4. You have the right to withdraw from this project at any time and you may also contact ULREC if you have any concerns regarding this research.

For further queries, you may contact the project investigator at any time:
Florence Le Baron, Department of Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Limerick, Limerick.
Office: F1-115+ / Email: Florence.LeBaron@ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:
The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee, C/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office, University of Limerick, Limerick. Tel: (061) 202022
Appendix 8 - Consent form signed by participants (Semester 3)

Consent Form

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in this research project for Florence Le Baron, co-supervised by Prof. Angela Chambers and Dr Liam Murray.

Title of Study: ‘Using blended-learning to enhance cultural competence’

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it, and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
- I fully understand that my participation in the research is voluntary and will not impact on my grades. I am free to withdraw at any time without having to explain or give a reason.
- I am also entitled to full confidentiality and anonymity in terms of my participation and personal details.

Signed
Students’ name:
Students’ signature:
Date:

Faculty Member’s name: FLORENCE LE BARON
Faculty Member’s signature:
Date:
Appendix 9 - Questionnaire 1

FR4141 Questionnaire

Using blended learning to enhance culture competence

Name (optional): ____________________________________________

Sex: ____________________________________________

Age: ____________________________________________

No. of years studying French: ____________________________________________

Computer literacy

Question 1: How long have you been using a computer for…

…Word processing …Internet access

☐ 0-1 year ☐ 0-1 year
☐ 1-2 years ☐ 1-2 years
☐ 2-3 years ☐ 2-3 years
☐ 3-4 years ☐ 3-4 years
☐ More than 4 years ☐ More than 4 years

…Social networking

☐ 0-1 year
☐ 1-2 years
☐ 2-3 years
☐ 3-4 years
☐ More than 4 years

Please, specify the tool(s), ex: Bebo:
Question 2: What online resources did you use this semester?

- [ ] Announcements
- [ ] Blog
- [ ] Calendar
- [ ] Discussion forum
- [ ] Resources
- [ ] Test and Quizzes
- [ ] Other(s): ______________________

Cultural competence

Question 3: During your French studies (in secondary school and third-level education), have you been taught aspects of French culture other than in the Français oral tutorial?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Please, specify:

Question 4: How would you rate your French cultural knowledge before this semester?

- [ ] Excellent
- [ ] Very good
- [ ] Good
- [ ] Poor
- [ ] Very poor

Question 5: How would you rate your French cultural knowledge after this semester?

- [ ] Excellent
- [ ] Very good
- [ ] Good
- [ ] Poor
- [ ] Very poor

Question 6: To what extent do you feel that using a discussion forum has helped you improve your cultural competence in French?

- [ ] Extremely helpful
- [ ] Very helpful
- [ ] Helpful
- [ ] A little helpful
- [ ] Not at all helpful

Comments:
Question 7: To what extent do you feel that using a blog has helped you improve your cultural competence in French?

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Helpful
- A little helpful
- Not at all helpful

Comments:

Question 8: To what extent do you feel that doing tests and quizzes has helped you improve your cultural competence in French?

- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Helpful
- A little helpful
- Not at all helpful

Comments:

Question 9: Do you feel that this semester’s cultural reflection has also enabled you to learn about your own culture?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Comments:
Online activities

**Question 10:** Do you think that the computer lab training on Week 4 has helped you for your online activities during this semester?

| □ Yes | □ No |

**Comments:**

**Question 11a:** How would you rate your participation in the online activities?

| □ Excellent | □ Very good | □ Good | □ Poor | □ Very poor |

**Question 11b:** If ‘Poor’ or ‘Very poor’, please explain why?

**Question 12:** In your opinion, what are the main advantages of online activities for learning about culture?

**Comments:**

**Question 13:** In your opinion, what are the main disadvantages of online activities for learning about culture?

**Comments:**
**Question 14:** In what way do you think the online activities could be improved?

Comments:

**Question 15:** Do you have any further comments in relation to the use of online activities?

Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Date: ________________  Signature (optional): ____________________________
Appendix 10 - Questionnaire 2

FR4142 Questionnaire

Using blended learning to enhance culture competence

Name (optional): _______________________________

Sex: _______________________________

Age: _______________________________

The aim of this questionnaire is to investigate how Sulis helped you to learn about French culture and to provide a better understanding of your expectations. Questions review the use of applications (Discussion forums, Blog, and Wiki) over the last two semesters. Please answer all items — your comments are particularly important. Data will be treated in confidence — your name and identity will not be revealed. This questionnaire is composed of 15 questions and will take about 15 minutes to complete.

Thank you for providing a valuable feedback on your learning experience.

Question 1: To what extent do you feel that using a Wiki has helped you improve your cultural competence in French?

☐ Extremely helpful
☐ Very helpful
☐ Helpful
☐ A little helpful
☐ Not at all helpful

Comments:

324
**Question 2:** According to you, which of the following helped the most to learn about French culture? Class them in order of helpfulness (1 is most helpful, 7/8 is least helpful).

_____ Discussion with tutor in class  
_____ Discussion with other students in class  
_____ Answering questions raised by tutor online (Discussion Forum)  
_____ Discussion with other students online (Discussion Forum)  
_____ Writing a personal Blog about my cultural learning (Blogger.com)  
_____ Doing Test & Quizzes (Sulis)  
_____ Defining French culture on a Wiki page (Sulis)  
_____ Other(s), please specify: ____________________________________

**Question 3:** This semester, you were asked to take part in several online activities. What motivated you the most in participating? Rank from 1 to 9/10 (1 is most motivating and 10 the least).

_____ The amount of marks appointed  
_____ The ease of use  
_____ The originality / novelty  
_____ If it enables me to develop new skills  
_____ If it enables me to practise my French (writing, reading, listening, speaking)  
_____ Group work  
_____ Individual work  
_____ Feedback from the tutor  
_____ Feedback from other students

**Comments**
Question 4: Write your order of preference of the following tools: Discussion Forums, Blog and Wiki (1 is most liked and 3 the least liked).

1: _________________  
2: _________________  
3: _________________

Comments:

Question 5: Do you think that doing activities online has helped you improve your computer skills?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Comments:

Question 6: Do you think that doing online activities helped your understanding of (French) culture?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Comments:
**Question 7:** Do you think that doing activities online has helped you improve your French language skills?

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither agree or disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

Comments:

---

**Question 8:** How helpful did you find the feedback provided by the tutor on French language mistakes made in the Discussion Forums?

- [ ] Extremely helpful
- [ ] Very helpful
- [ ] Helpful
- [ ] A little helpful
- [ ] Not at all helpful

Comments:

---

**Question 9:** Do you think that doing online activities complements the face-to-face tutorials?

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither agree or disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

Comments:
Question 10: Has your participation in the Discussion forums changed from Semester 1 to Semester 2?

☐ Yes, it has increased.
☐ No, it remained the same.
☐ Yes, it has decreased.

Comments:

Question 11a: How would you rate your participation in the online activities during Semester 2?

☐ Excellent ☐ Very good ☐ Good ☐ Poor ☐ Very poor

Question 11b: If ‘Poor’ or ‘Very poor’, please explain why?

Comments:

Question 12: Do you think that the percentage mark allocated to each online activity represented well the amount of work involved?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Semester 1</th>
<th>Semester 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Forums</td>
<td>(2.5%)</td>
<td>(No mark)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>(2.5 %)</td>
<td>Wiki</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yes
No
Comments

Question 13a: Do you have an Internet broadband access outside UL?

☐ Yes ☐ No
Question 13b: If not, do you feel that it affected your participation in the online activities?

□ Yes □ No

Comments:

Question 14: Would you like to continue doing online activities in the future?

□ Most certainly
□ Certainly
□ I don’t know
□ No
□ certainly not

Comments:

Question 15: Do you have any further comments in relation to the use of online activities?

Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Date : __________________ Signature (optional): ___________________________
Appendix 11 - Questionnaire 3

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences
Department of Languages and Cultural Studies

Using blended-learning to enhance cultural competence

Dear FR4143 students,

Last year, you completed two questionnaires related to your experience about online activities within your Français oral tutorials. I wish to sincerely thank those who contributed!

Today, I would like to share with you the preliminary results of this project and offer you the opportunity to comment on them. Also, I would like to gain knowledge of your last year’s experience in comparison to this year’s without any activities on Sulis.

This questionnaire will take about 20-30 minutes to complete. All contributions are welcome, including the ones from students who did not fill in the previous questionnaires.

Thank you for providing a valuable feedback on your learning experience.

Florence Le Baron
Here is a preliminary summary of your responses collected last year. Take the time to read it and then answer the questions that follow.

**The online tools in your order of preference:**

1. Class Discussions
2. DISCUSSION FORUMS
3. eBlogger

**DISCUSSION FORUMS**

66.7% of the students who answered the questionnaires said that the Discussion Forums helped to improve their cultural competence in French. A small fraction (4.8%) found it a little helpful or not at all helpful. 28.6% of the students polled admitted not to have used the forums.

81% of the students polled felt that the online activities enabled them to learn about their own culture.

47.6% found the Blog was a little helpful or not at all helpful.

43.5% of the students who answered the questionnaires claimed that the Wiki helped to improve their cultural competence in French.

26% said it was a little helpful or not at all helpful.
Advantages
“It gives you a chance to **learn from others** in the class”
“It gets you **thinking more**”
“It’s a **fun** way of studying!”
“Less daunting that having to stand up and speak in front of a group”
“Make it **more interesting**”
“They are more modern and innovative concepts”
“They provide the student with a more **relaxed** and interesting setting”
“Everybody can access it at any time of day, within or outside of the university”
“**Motivating**”
“Typing in French was very useful”
“**Improve computer skills**”

Disadvantages
“If you are not good at using computers it may be **difficult to use**”
“It is difficult and **time-consuming** to complete such activities”
“You might not understand the instructions”
“You **need a computer**, and you must have knowledge about them”
“It just added **extra stress**”
“The internet connection on campus is sometimes very unreliable”

60.9% agreed that the activities **complemented** the face-to-face tutorials.

65.2 % said they would you like to **continue** doing **online activities** in the future. 4.3% said they certainly would **not**.
FR4143 - Follow-up questionnaire

Name (optional): ______________________
Sex: ______________________
Age ______________________

PART I - FEEDBACK ON LAST YEAR’S EXPERIENCE

Question 1: Now that you have read the summary, do you feel that your opinion has been fairly represented? Please, tick the box and explain your answer further.
□ Yes
□ No

Comment(s):

Question 2: Are you surprised by some of the findings? Which one(s) and why?

Comment(s):
PART II – LEARNING FRENCH WITH OR WITHOUT ONLINE ACTIVITY…
WHAT’S BEST?

**Question 3:** At the beginning of the semester, when were informed that Sulis would not be used in the *Français oral* class, how did you react? Please, tick the box and explain your answer further.
- □ I would have liked to keep using it in second year.
- □ I was relieved!
- □ It made no difference to me.

**Comments:**

**Question 4:** Now that you have experienced two different learning methods (*Français oral with and without online activities*), can you tell which one you prefer? Please, tick the box and explain your answer further.
- □ With online activities
- □ Without online activities
- □ I am not sure.

**Comments:**

**Question 5:** Sometimes there is a difference between what you **prefer** and what you **feel is useful**. What learning method do you think was most useful to learn about French culture? Please, tick the box and explain your answer further.
- □ With online activities
- □ Without online activities
- □ I am not sure.

**Comments:**
Question 6: With hindsight, write your order of preference of the following tools: Discussion Forums, Blog and Wiki (1 is most liked and 3 the least liked).

1 _______________________________
2 _______________________________
3 _______________________________

Question 7: Do you miss the online discussion forums? Please, tick the box and explain your answer further.
□ Yes
□ No
□ I did not use the discussion forums

Comments:

Question 8: Do you miss the blog? Please, tick the box and explain your answer further.
□ Yes
□ No
□ I did not use the blog

Comments:

Question 9: Do you miss the wiki? Please, tick the box and explain your answer further.
□ Yes
□ No
□ I did not use the wiki

Comments:
PART III – LEARNED FACTS FROM LAST YEAR’S READINGS, CLASS AND ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

Question 10: The questionnaires that you completed last year showed that you found the online activities helpful to learn about French culture and your own culture. With the help of the topics listed below, can you remember 3 facts or more about French culture and/or your own culture from last year’s reading and discussions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotypes</th>
<th>The different meanings of words depending on the country you are from (e.g., tea and dinner)</th>
<th>The strategies used by French people to spend less</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I remember…</td>
<td>I remember…</td>
<td>I remember…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>facebook and the issue of privacy on the Internet</th>
<th>Driving at 16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Goth generation Tattoos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I remember…</td>
<td>I remember…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I remember…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The challenges that disabled people face in our society</td>
<td>The environment and how to reduce household waste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I remember…</td>
<td>I remember…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The alarming <strong>alcohol consumption</strong></td>
<td>The <strong>Erasmus</strong> exchange programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I remember…</td>
<td>I remember…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ex)change your life!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 11: What would be your definition of French culture today (in a few sentences)?

Question 12: Any final comments?

I would like to add…

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Date: __________________ Signature (optional): ____________________________
L'activité de la semaine concerne les stéréotypes.

Observez le document de Frapar et commentez:
1. Que représente chaque image?
2. Êtes-vous d'accord avec cette représentation des Français?
3. Quels éléments ajouteriez-vous?
Appendix 13 – Testimony on word confusion

Merci de votre participation sur les stéréotypes.

Cette semaine, je vous propose de
a) présenter des aspects culturels que vous avez remarqués lors de voyages, rencontres ou autres. Cela peut concerner la culture française ou une autre.
b) Qu'est-ce que cette expérience vous a appris sur votre propre culture?

Par exemple, quand je suis arrivée en Irlande, j'ai découvert que le "tea" désigne une boisson chaude mais aussi un repas léger et que le "dinner" qui est un repas consistant peut être mangé en milieu de journée. C'était étonnant pour moi car en France le dîner est TOUJOURS le soir et le thé est uniquement une boisson. Cette expérience m'a appris que le vocabulaire utilisé reflète les habitudes d'un pays (les habitudes alimentaires ici). Tous les irlandais comprennent les mots "tea" et "dinner" et partagent une culture alors qu'une étrangère comme moi a besoin d'explication.


Re: "Tea" for dinner

In New Zealand, people say 'tea' quite regularly. They say 'dinner' as well.

The first time I heard that expression was when a New Zealander friend asked me whether she could be at my house for tea. I said "Yes, sure!, what time are you coming over?'. She replied 'What about 6?', and I said 'great'. When she arrived I had already had my dinner and had only black tea and biscuits prepared for her. Back then I wondered why she ate a lot of biscuits!!! (she was hungry of course)
Appendix 14 – Example of formal blog

FRENCH BLOG

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2008

Pensez-vous que le programme Erasmus doit être obligatoire?
Sémi ne 11.
Texte 8.

Tout d’abord, je dois dire que je suis d’accord avec cette proposition. Le programme d’échanges Erasmus est une initiative de la Union Européenne. Avec Erasmus, les étudiants peuvent effectuer une partie de leurs études dans une autre université européenne pendant trois mois au minimum ou un an au maximum. Tous les étudiants des pays de la Union ont droit à faire Erasmus et je crois qu’ils devraient le faire, parce qu’il a un tas d’avantages.

Pour commencer, je pense que la raison pour laquelle beaucoup d’étudiants ont peur de faire Erasmus est le financement. Mais chaque élève reçoit une bourse de leur université, donc ils n’ont pas besoin de travailler ou de s’inquiéter de l’argent pendant leur séjour. Il faut dire aussi que la côte de la vie est, en général, beaucoup moins chère en Europe qu’en Irlande.

En plus, beaucoup d’élèves s’inquiètent pour la question de la langue. Bien sûr, Erasmus est très utile et important pour ceux qui étudient une langue mais il n’est pas nécessaire pour en bénéficier de faire des études de langue. On peut aller en Angleterre, par exemple, où bien en université qui parle anglais en Europe – ma soeur, par exemple est allée aux Pays-Bas, ou elle étudiait l’anglais et la psychologie! Oui, j’avoue qu’il peut être difficile de vivre dans une autre culture sans savoir parler la langue, mais il y aurait beaucoup de jeunes logés à la même enseigne.

Enfin, avec Erasmus, on apprend d’une autre culture et une autre façon de vivre. On peut reçevoir une approche différente des filières enseignées. Il permet de voyager, d’améliorer une langue étrangère et de découvrir une culture différente. Erasmus est une expérience enrichissante et unique et pour ça, a mon avis tous les étudiants devraient le faire.

POSTED BY AT 8:16 AM 1 COMMENTS

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2008

La conduite accompagnée, est-elle plus efficace que l’apprentissage traditionnel?
Sémi ne 11.
Texte 4.

Tout d’abord, je dois avouer que je n’étais pas d’accord avec le
Appendix 15 – Example of informal blog

Le Permis de conduire!

This week in the french culture class, we were discuussing the way of learning how to drive in france, and the differences between there and irland and it was very interesting! Particularly enjoyed it as i recently got a car and am learning to drive. It was interesting to hear that there is actual also such thing as a "provisional licence" in france also that one cannot learn how to drive until you are 18. In contrast to here where one can get a provisional licence at just 17. Also, in france i learned that one must have a minimum of 20 hours of driving to do the test, and you cannot pass your exam until you are 21. Even then, an "A" must be displayed on your car for 5 years, and if found without it you are fined. In Ireland, an "L" plate is shown just while you are driving with a provisional licence and after you pass your exam it disappears. Also, i learned in the french culture class that one must do their driving test in the car of your driving instructor, in contrast to here where nearly everyone does their test in the car that they have been learning to drive. For example, i plan to do my test in my own car that i have gained experience in. C'est vrai que le permis de conduire est tres differente en france!

Posted by [Name of student] at 5:39 AM 5 comments

Semaine neuf!

C'est semaine, c'est semaine neuf!... moi je ne peux pas croire que les temps passe tres vite.. maintenant, je suis a l'universite pour deux mois et on aura des examens apres quelques semaines, et c'est vrai a dire que j'ai peur!

En classe cette semaine on va discuter des tatoués... moi je trouve cet sujet tres interessant, personnellement, je ne les aime pas du tout, mais j'ai beaucoup des amis qui les aiment et j'attends avec impatience pour la discusion cette semaine d'ecouter les opinions de chacun!

En plus, en ce moment, je trouve que j'apprends un tas de choses sur la culture francaise. Par exemple, les differences entre "cafe" et "diner." C'est plus different que l'entre ici n'est pas just un lasse du "cafe" aussi, a cause de les classes avec Florence, on apprend que les stereotypes des gens frances ne sont pas toujours vrais - par exemple il ne mangeent pas seulement les cuisines de grenouilles!

Moi, j'aime bien les cours chaque jeudi parce que je pense que j'apprendre plus de choses sur la vie en France, et je l'aime bien!}

Posted by [Name of student] at 8:00 AM 6 comments

Home