Task design for telecollaborative exchanges: In search of new criteria

Malgorzata Kurek a, *, Andreas Müller-Hartmann b

a Jan Długosz University, Częstochowa, Poland
b Pädagogische Hochschule, Heidelberg, Germany

ARTICLE INFO
Article history:
Received 9 December 2016
Accepted 16 December 2016
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Task design
Pre-service teacher education
Task criteria
Task evaluation
Telecollaboration
Intercultural online exchanges

ABSTRACT
This study examines the relationship between the criteria used for task evaluation and the process of actual task design using an Exploratory Practice approach. A telecollaborative task-based teacher training course serves as a research environment in which German and Polish students collaborate online in international groups designing and evaluating tasks for prospective telecollaborative learners. Having analysed the processes of teacher trainees' task design and evaluation, the authors argue for more tightly structured telecollaboration tasks and for task sequences which are constructed to enable each task to build on the outcomes of the previous one. As the findings reveal, telecollaboration tasks should conform to pedagogic task-based criteria, rather than to the more open and SLA-oriented CALL task appropriateness criteria proposed in Chapelle (2001). The authors, guided by the analysis of teacher trainees' learner texts and reflections, propose a new set of such criteria to be implemented in telecollaborative task design.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction
The teacher’s role in telecollaborative learning environments is characterized by a complex set of competences, since the integration of technology and learners’ collaboration in international teams creates additional affordances and constraints compared to the traditional classroom. The design of tasks “is very much at the heart of the matter” of the development and running of such learning environments (Levy & Stockwell, 2006, p. 248).

Designing tasks for telecollaborative projects is particularly challenging as it requires teachers’ attention to an intricate interplay of pedagogical, technical, linguistic, and intercultural factors. For example, the fact that telecollaborative projects bring together participants from linguistically and culturally different backgrounds makes tasks, especially those which are loosely structured, prone to culturally tinted interpretation. Furthermore, how students interpret and perform a task depends largely on the explicitness of the task itself (e.g. the clarity of instructions) and the teachers’ and participants’ awareness of technology affordances and limitations. The complexity of factors involved in telecollaborative task design is not always evident though if traditional SLA-oriented criteria are applied (see for example Chapelle, 2001 or Doughty & Long, 2003).

Consequently, when training prospective foreign language teachers for telecollaboration it is vital to be not only aware of the linguistic potential of tasks or general affordances of technologies, but also of other pedagogical possibilities and, by making informed choices, integrate them smoothly with task objectives.
Telecollaborative exchanges organized in teacher education courses as a form of experiential learning (Hong, 2010; Hubbard & Levy, 2006) serve as an ideal educational environment in which future teachers can first discover, then experience and, finally, reflect on the mutual relationship between technology and pedagogy in authentic linguistic and intercultural contexts. Such exchanges also facilitate dialogue and peer-learning and, thus, offer both a holistic and a highly contextualised approach to teacher training. This is in accord with claims that teacher preparation programmes should develop pedagogical and technological skills in an integrated and holistic way (Delli Carpini, 2012; Kessler, 2006; Müller-Hartmann, 2006). A positive online learning experience provides teacher candidates with a viable pedagogical model and sensitizes them to those aspects of task design which are unique to online contexts.

2. Literature review

2.1. The development of task design in CMC

Task-based language learning is already well grounded in language education (see Candlin & Murphy, 1987; Ellis, 2003; Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009). In the last 10 years it has been promoted in terms of language education policy on different educational levels (Carless, 2007; East, 2012; Edwards & Willis, 2005; Nunan, 2004; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Van den Branden, 2006; Van den Branden, Van Gorp, & Verhelst, 2007). The role of tasks and, with that, task design has also always been an important issue when designing telecollaborative learning environments (Hampel, 2010; Hauck, 2010; Müller-Hartmann, 2000; O'Dowd & Ware, 2009; Rosell-Aguilar, 2005; Thomas & Reinders, 2010). Already in 1997 Furstenberg wrote that “our main role, then, is to design tasks (…) since the task is what gives meaning to the learners’ explorations. Only a well-designed task can ensure the quality of the learning process — which is a teacher’s ultimate responsibility” (1997, p. 24).

The question of what well-designed tasks are has been answered in different ways though. In 1999 Meskill (p. 145), provided a “task anatomy for sociocollaborative language learning”, listing a number of task criteria that take a pedagogic approach to language learning and which work as well in multimodal CALL environments. They included: having more than one answer to solve the problem, being intrinsically interesting and rewarding, using a multimodal skills integrated approach, being challenging, or providing real-world problem solving.

In 2001 Chapelle suggested a different framework for the evaluation of tasks in CALL (Table 1). This framework has since become prominent in telecollaborative research design (see for example, Hampel, 2006, p. 113, and Wang, 2007) and task design in teacher education (see NIFLAR http://cms.hum.uu.nl/niflar/).

Chapelle’s work has developed from an interactionist SLA perspective (Chapelle, 1997) to a more integrated approach which also considers sociocultural and pedagogical aspects (Chapelle, 2000, 2003). In her framework, though, she still looks at task design from a SLA perspective, in which the “language learning potential should be considered the most critical for CALL activities” (Chapelle, 2001, p. 58). This means a priority of a focus on form in terms of task design over the other criteria she lists and over pedagogic task criteria which might be as important when designing tasks. Levy and Stockwell (2006, p. 251) concur when they say that “this definition [of tasks] is appropriate for research purposes, but (…) it is less valid and appropriate for teaching purposes” (see also Lai & Li, 2011, p. 507, and Rosell-Aguilar, 2005, who tries to integrate psycholinguistic and sociocultural approaches to task design).

Doughty and Long (2003) differentiate between methodological and pedagogic principles in the design of distance foreign language learning environments. They define the former as “universally desirable instructional design features, motivated by theory and research findings in SLA, educational psychology, and elsewhere, which show them to be either necessary for SLA or facilitative of it” such as “elaborate input, focus on form” or “negative feedback” (Doughty & Long, 2003, pp. 51-52).

Pedagogic principles on the other hand “comprise the potentially infinite range of local options for realizing the principles at the classroom level” (Doughty & Long, 2003, p. 53). From our perspective, this ‘infinite range of local options’ needs to be more contextualised though when investigated through a pedagogic lens.

There is a clear set of pedagogic principles that support task-based language learning. Samuda and Bygate (2008, p. 219), for example, pointed out that “broader understandings of the ways that tasks can contribute to language learning and teaching (…) must be grounded in understanding of ‘task’ as a pedagogic tool in different contexts of use.” In line with this,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for CALL task appropriateness (Chapelle, 2001, p. 55).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language learning potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please cite this article in press as: Kurek, M., & Müller-Hartmann, A., Task design for telecollaborative exchanges: In search of new criteria, System (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.12.004
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات