

Instagram: an Australian-Catalan telecollaboration experiment

Andreu Pedró-García*

Universitat Jaume I

Original source:

***Revista d’Innovació i Recerca en Educació*, 9(1): 11-28 (2016)**

(<https://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/REIRE>)

Translated from Catalan by Mary Black

Abstract

This article explores the pedagogical potential of a project carried out with Catalan as a second language learners and native Catalan speakers using the digital application Instagram within a university setting. This project ran parallel to in-person language classes, and it combined photographs and written expression to make the learning process more enriching, direct and connected to the real world. The main objectives of this project were first to foster Catalan learners’ interaction and contact with native speakers and thus improve their communicative competence, and secondly to introduce both groups to sociocultural aspects of the two cultures to help them more directly attain intercultural competence. The resulting data shed light on forms of remote interaction with native speakers as well as on the suitability of social media for collaborative activities within a university setting.

Key words: telecollaboration, online learning, Catalan as a second language, intercultural competence, interaction, Instagram.

* Contact address: Andreu Pedró. [Department of Translation and Communication Studies](#), Universitat Jaume I. Av. Vicent Sos Baynat, no number. 12071, Castelló, EU. E-mail: andreupeidro@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The current deluge of digital applications has had a substantial impact on language teaching, making it possible to introduce new teaching practices that were unthinkable even in the recent past. An increasingly technological society in which we find out what is happening with our smartphones, and where paper is giving way to digital media at a breakneck speed, is forcing us to reconsider teaching and explore new educational possibilities to make the learning process more effective. In foreign language classrooms, more conventional practices have given way to more interactive ones with more real contact with the culture of the language being studied. One example is telecollaboration experiences based on Web 2.0 tools, which enable students to be in more direct contact with other cultures, as we shall outline in full detail below.

Using these digital tools in the language classroom makes even more sense within the context of teaching Catalan as a second language abroad as they help overcome the distances between the linguistic regions. Direct exposure to other cultures is precisely more difficult abroad, and this fact forces us to find alternative forms of contact to overcome these distances.

In this article, we shall provide a practical presentation of a specific telecollaboration project between Catalan learners and native Catalan speakers through the photography application Instagram to determine its pedagogical possibilities. First, we shall introduce the project's objectives and justify its importance according to the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Secondly, we shall provide a detailed description of the project and explain how it was carried out. Next, we shall examine several contributions from experts on second-language acquisition with Web 2.0 tools. Thirdly, we shall present the project's findings on the written output, interaction among the participants and attainment of intercultural competence, emphasising the aspects that worked the best while acknowledging the limitations and possibilities for improvement. Finally, we shall conclude the article with an overall assessment of the project by examining the data collected in the opinion survey. In this section, we shall also reflect on the suitability of this project within a university setting either inside or outside the field of languages.

2. Objectives of the project

The digital cultural exchange is a real classroom experience which has two facets: communicative and intercultural. The goal is for students to put their communicative skills into practice by exchanging short written texts while also addressing sociocultural issues which can help them understand aspects of the everyday lives of speakers from other cultures.

Therefore, we can say that the project's main objective is to help the participants attain communicative and intercultural competence while bearing in mind the limitations inherent to CEFR level A1 and the project design.

Within communicative competence, the goal is for the participants to practise a series of communicative functions determined by different contexts, as well as to foster interaction among them. In terms of intercultural competence, sociocultural aspects are examined according to CEFR's public domain of language use.

3. Justification

The European languages department at Monash University uses CEFR as its guideline. CEFR states that in order to participate satisfactorily in communicative situations, users and learners must draw from a series of competences learned in the course of their previous experience. For this reason, the project tries to equip students with the tools for declarative knowledge (knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge and sociocultural awareness), since second-language teaching often takes for granted that the learners have already acquired enough knowledge of world of the culture(s) of the language being studied, even though this is often not the case. Within general competences and declarative knowledge, CEFR establishes the following declarative knowledge:

Table 1. Declarative knowledge (CEFR)

1. General competences
1.1 Declarative knowledge
1.1.1 Knowledge of the world
1.1.2 Sociocultural knowledge
1.1.3 Intercultural awareness

Elements like processes, events and geographic, environmental and demographic features, etc. (knowledge of the world), along with others related to everyday life, interpersonal relations, values, beliefs, social conventions and ritual behaviours (sociocultural knowledge) encompass the general competences that students of any language have to attain through experience and direct contact, or by other means, such as facilitative tasks that expose students to all these basic elements of language learning.

Below is a series of descriptors, according to the CEFR classification, of the different contexts of language use dealt with throughout the project, which help address a variety of sociocultural issues. These categories have served as the reference when developing the topics on which this project is based:

Table 2. External domains of language use. Descriptive categories

Areas	Places	Institutions	People	Objects	Events	Actions	Texts
Personal		The family and social relations	Parents, siblings, in-laws, close friends, acquaintances	Art objects, books Pets Sports and entertainment facilities	Family events, gatherings Holidays, outings Sporting events	Everyday actions Reading Radio and television Leisure activities Hobbies	

						Games and sports	
Public	Public spaces: streets, squares, parks Public transports Shops, markets, supermarkets Restaurants, bars, churches					Shopping and using public services Fun, leisure activities	Tickets
Occupational	Public establishments, department stores, shops						
Educational		Institutions			Exchanges Visits and exchanges	Games	

Source: Author

Digital cultural exchange exposes the participants to some of these elements, even if just in an introductory fashion, in addition to helping raise intercultural awareness of the cultures associated with the participants' languages. As CEFR says, "knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community' produce an intercultural awareness" (2001, p. 103), which contributes to a better understanding not only of one's own culture but also of the regional and social diversity within each culture.

4. Description and contextualisation of the project

The participants in the Australian-Catalan telecollaboration project were the students enrolled in Introductory Catalan 1 (ATS2058) at Monash University on the one hand, and the Translation and Interpreting students at University Jaume I (UJI) and the Catalan Philology students at the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB) on the other. Both groups have a similar profile; they are all university students of similar ages with a particular interest in languages.

Every week, the participants had to post a photo or a video on a given topic on Instagram, along with a comment written in English or Catalan with a certain number of words. Instagram was chosen as a meeting point for the two groups because it is quite popular among young people and is user-friendly and not overly complicated. Generally speaking, young people are quite skilled at using the social media, and there Instagram is not very technically complicated.

The photographs and the comments were posted using a tag system which changed according to the weekly topic. This system enabled the participants to see each others' comments, as well as all the comments on the topics posted to date. The length of the comments for each photograph was between 35 and 40 words, not counting all the subsequent interactions that might arise among participants. The participants were assembled into four groups of six participants each who were supposed to interact with each other, even though they could also interact with other groups. The table below shows the tag system used in the first six weeks:

Table 3. System of tagging the posts

Weeks	Tags		
1 (3-9 March) Who are you?	#ICDMON #quietsmon #quietsmon1 #quietsmon4	#quietsmon2	#quietsmon3
2 (10-16 March) Hobbies	#ICDMON #aficionsmon #aficionsmon1 #aficionsmon4	#aficionsmon2	#aficionsmon3
3 (17-23 March) The people around you	#ICDMON #entornmon #entornmon1 #entornmon	#entornmon2	#entornmon3
4 (24-30 March) Your city	#ICDMON #ciutatmon #ciutatmon1 #ciutatmon4	#ciutatmon2	#ciutatmon3
5 (31 March – 6 April) Shops	#ICDMON #botiguesmon #botiguesmon1 #botiguesmon4	#botiguesmon2	#botiguesmon3
6 (7-13 April) Breakfast	#ICDMON #esmorzarmon #esmorzarmon1 #esmorzarmon4	#esmorzarmon2	#esmorzarmon3

Source: Author

This project was part of the Australian students' final evaluation, while it was totally voluntary for the students in Valencia and the Balearic Islands. In order to motivate the Catalan-speaking participants, it was decided that Monash University would award them a certificate of participation at the end of the project. Only those who completed all the tasks earned the certificate.

The main language of communication in the comments was Catalan, although English was also used. The students at Monash University always had to write in Catalan; however, since this was an exchange, the Catalan-speaking students were given the option of writing in either English or Catalan. The main goal was to learn about the everyday customs of the speakers from the other culture, and therefore the instructors did not correct the grammar in the posts, nor did the participants correct each other.

The reason why this project was presented to the students as a strictly cultural activity is because we wanted to prioritise communication and spontaneity as opposed to the accuracy and official rules so characteristic of conventional written production tasks. Therefore, more importance was attached to the exchange of ideas without external pressure to use correct grammar as a way to make the communication lighter, more fluid and more focused on the content. The topics each week were as follows:

Table 4. List of topics discussed in the project¹

<p><i>1. Who are you?</i> Briefly introduce yourself. Tell your name, where you're from, your age, what you study and what languages you speak. Include a greeting and a farewell. The photo can be of you or something you identify with.</p> <p><i>2. Hobbies</i> Tell about a hobby of yours, whether you do it alone or with friends, how often, etc.</p> <p><i>3. The people around you</i> This week you have to talk about someone else, such as a family member, friend, pet, etc. Tell what this person/animal is like.</p> <p><i>4. Your city</i> Briefly describe your city and tell what you like the most about it. The photo can be of a place that you particularly like or is part of your daily routine.</p> <p><i>5. Shops</i> Take a photo of a place you usually go shopping or an interesting shop that you like. Describe what it's like, what you can buy there, its hours, etc.</p> <p><i>6. What do you eat for breakfast?</i> What do you eat or what do people usually eat for breakfast where you live? Is there any special or traditional dish? Do you drink coffee, tea, hot chocolate? Do you have breakfast at home or sometimes go to a café or restaurant?</p> <p><i>7. Your neighbourhood</i> Describe your neighbourhood, what you can find there, a curious place or shop, where it's located, the kind of neighbourhood, houses, etc.</p> <p><i>8. How do you get around?</i> Tell how you get around the city. What public transport do you use? Is there bike-sharing in your city? Are there any passes so you can save money? Do many people use them?</p> <p><i>9. Music</i> Do you like music? Do you go to concerts? Do you buy music online or do you buy CDs? What singers or bands do you like?</p> <p><i>10. Holiday traditions</i> Tell about a traditional celebration held in your city or country, what people do then, whether you participate and whether or not you like it.</p> <p><i>11. Traditional dishes</i> What's your favourite dish? What are its ingredients? Do you know how to cook it? When is it eaten? Is it popular or traditional in your house?</p> <p><i>12. Your bar</i> What's your favourite bar? What drinks or food do they make? What type of people go there? Why do you like it?</p>
--

¹ The instructions were written in standard eastern Catalan, which is the model used in the classroom.

These topics were chosen in accordance with CEFR level A1 and following the order in which they appeared in the textbook (Veus 1) used in the in-person classes. Therefore, the students wrote their posts after they had received the input they needed (grammatical structures and vocabulary) to achieve the specific communicative objectives. Thus, if the topic of free-time activities was discussed in class in week 1, the students had to put these communicative linguistic contents into practice and comment on a photo of their choice in week 2.

The technical requirements needed to participate in the project were having a smartphone with Instagram installed on it. This app does not allow photographs or comments to be posted via a web browser, which did lead to several problems, as we shall explain below.

5. Theoretical framework

Different experts have written about the importance of integrating the social media in language learning today. Below we shall examine some of the contributions that address aspects related to the practice of telecollaboration.

5.1. *Definition and current use*

Dooly (2008) defines telecollaboration as a teaching and learning experience shared among participants in institutional settings located in different places, facilitated by the use of Internet technology. Guth and Helm (2010, p. 14) define telecollaboration as follows:

In language learning contexts, telecollaboration can be defined as an Internet-based intercultural exchange between people of different cultural/national backgrounds, set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence [...] through structured tasks.

Dooly's definition of telecollaboration dovetails with the initial plan of the Digital Cultural Project in that, as mentioned above, the main objective of this telecollaboration experience was to help improve the participants' communicative and intercultural competence. What is more, the two participating groups are from different educational settings and communicate via an online digital application.

In terms of the suitability of using digital tools in an educational setting, in an article on using blogs, wikis and social media, Araujo (2014) asserts that the tools provided by the advent of Web 2.0 are playing an increasingly important role in the teaching-learning process of any subject, given that a considerable number of students are digital natives, are familiar with the use of these tools and use them in different facets of their lives (personal, professional, social, etc.).

5.2. *Emotional factors of Web 2.0 tools*

In a study on the use of Twitter in the foreign language classroom, Cuadros and Varo (2013) reached the conclusion that learning in informal settings, in which students feel no pressure from teachers or peers, helps build a personal learning

environment, strengthens the bonds between students and teachers and exposes the students to samples of real language.

Similarly, based on a collaborative online experience aimed at fostering lexical creativity, Bosch and Cruz (2014) state that asynchronous communication gives foreign students time to reflect, which helps them feel uninhibited when expressing themselves in Catalan. Furthermore, communication via Web 2.0 allows the limits of the in-person classroom to be overcome and thus multiplies the student-teacher and student-student communicative effect and makes the class more cohesive.

5.3. *Intercultural competence*

In addition to the intercultural awareness that CEFR proposes, Byram (1997) had previously advocated a model of intercultural competence that consists in five components or kinds of knowledge (savoirs) which can be summarised as follows:

- Intercultural attitudes (savoir être): Curiosity and broad views, willingness not to discredit other cultures and belief in one's own.
- Knowledge (savoirs) of the social groups and practices of both one's own country and the interlocutor's country.
- Interpretation and relation skills (savoir comprendre): The ability to interpret and explain a document or event in another culture and to relate it to documents and events in one's own culture.
- Discovery and interaction skills (savoir apprendre/faire): The ability to acquire new knowledge and cultural aspects and to use this knowledge in communication.
- Critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager): The ability to critically evaluate perspectives, practices and products of both one's own and other cultures based on explicit criteria.

5.4. *Photography as a motivating element*

Another factor that should be borne in mind when analysing intercultural competence in telecollaboration projects is the motivating role of photography when showing a specific reality. In fact, visual components prompt verbal responses and have been used since the early 20th century to analyse personality with the famous Rorschach tests. In language teaching, images can be used at any level and are quite common in textbooks, especially in oral activities. Muller (2012) discusses photography not only as a tool for fostering communication in the language classroom but also for presenting deeper cultural contents in a given teaching sequence. Therefore, photography is also an important element facilitating the attainment of intercultural competence. Friesen (2012) recounts a real experience on including photography for a diverse student group in the English as a second language classroom and reaches the following conclusions:

The classroom dynamics change when I combine artistic media with my pedagogy. Suddenly the otherwise quiet students speak up, enthusiastically participate, and feel comfortable in contributing to

class discussions and sharing their work.

In the case of the digital cultural exchange, the photographs that were more curious or unfamiliar to the participants drew their attention the most and inspired the most comments.

5.5. *Interaction*

Digital cultural exchange is not merely a collection of comments and photographs on specific topics but also strives to create an ongoing dialogue among the two participating groups and thus foster interaction. In this sense, Licoppe (2009, p. 1925) talks about the interactive possibilities currently available to language learners thanks to the broad gamut of applications and other digital platforms:

Members have resources to interact from a distance, through an ever more sophisticated array of communication technologies (and prominently mobile technologies), which has sparked the development of ‘connected presence,’ in which social relationships are accomplished through a seamless web of frequent face-to-face encounters and variously mediated interactions at a distance.

CEFR (2001) asserts that the student’s or learner’s communicative competence is put into practice in different language activities, including understanding, expression, interaction and mediation. It defines interaction as at least two individuals participating in an oral or written exchange in which expression and understanding alternate and may overlap in communication. One of the language learning competences introduced by CEFR is conversational competence, which is directly related to interaction:

Conversational competence is not simply a matter of knowing which particular functions (microfunctions) are expressed by which language forms. Participants are engaged in an interaction, in which each initiative leads to a response and moves the interaction further on, according to its purpose, through a succession of stages from opening exchanges to its final conclusion. Competent speakers have an understanding of the process and skills in operating it.

While Instagram allows for interaction among users in order to produce messages related to given themes, it should also be borne in mind that the type of interaction produced via this channel (Instagram) differs significantly from spontaneous interaction in oral conversation. We could say that there is a certain degree of spontaneity in this project, but this kind of written interaction is usually more planned, especially among the Catalan learners who have to use the structures they are studying, and there is a prior reflection process in order to produce the message. In the previous section, we claimed that there are studies that show the potential of photography to motivate students in cultural aspects. Similarly, photography can also help foster interaction, as Muller (2012) says below:

Auteur photography, a fictional cultural object, can be used in the language class as a means to trigger interaction. The device that we put into practice allows learners to become deeply engaged in the task thanks to the communicative themes provided by the images.

6. Interpretation of results

Through a series of samples, we shall see how the participants interacted with each other, how they put different communicative functions into practice and whether they shared information on the external usage contexts.

Likewise, we shall also examine the survey that the students filled out once the project was over, which provides data on their attainment of intercultural competence.

Throughout the project, different kinds of interaction which helped put into practice the communicative functions at CEFR level A1 were observed. We have classified them as follows:

Table 5. Interaction among the participants

Type	Comments
Responding to an introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Greetings: Hello, XXX! I hope this is a good opportunity to get to know people and new cultures, too. — Hello, XXX! Nice to meet you. I really like your hair. — Hello, XXX! Nice to meet you! — Hello, XXX! Welcome! — This is so much fun, seeing people interested in Catalan. Nice to meet you, XXX!
Asking for information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — What do you think is more difficult, Chinese or Catalan? — Why are you interested in learning Catalan? Hugs! — Hello, XXX. What is netball? — How are people treating it disrespectfully? — Lots of Australians like to surf, right? — What do they call it?
Answering specific questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Definitely Chinese. — Well, it's mainly a political issue. There's a hatred towards us Catalans, but in my opinion, it is political and baseless. As a Valencian, I have no problem calling it either Catalan or Valencian. — Netball is a sport like basketball, but you can't bounce the ball [...] — OK, thanks for the explanation. I've never seen it before. Super interesting! — Yes, it's really popular in my city. — Oh, that's really interesting. Here in the Mediterranean, we don't have enough waves to do it. I think that in the south, in Andalusia, you can surf on some beaches.
General comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — I really like your drawing, XXX! — Hello, XXX! I began to play the electric guitar a few years ago, but I got tired of it. It was really hard for me! — I like Harry Potter, too. — When I was a kid, I also used to go skiing with my aunt and uncle and I loved it, but I haven't gone for a long time. Hugs! — I also used to dance Flamenco! I loved it! — By the way, I also love Downton Abbey.

-
- Hello, XXX! I also love to travel. I've travelled a lot with my parents and my brother, and sometimes alone or with friends. I've never been to New Zealand or Australia, but they must be amazing. Aren't you afraid to hitchhike?
 - Travelling is awesome!! :) But I think I'd also be a little intimidated to hitchhike!!
 - Ha ha, I was a bit afraid the first time. But I love adventures! And people are usually super-friendly. Once I was picked up by the man who made the Oscar-winning film 'The Pianist'. It was really exciting!
 - Awesome. I've also hitchhiked around Europe. I think it's the best way to meet interesting people who you wouldn't meet otherwise :)
 - I don't know... I don't think I'd do it. :S But it's interesting to read your experiences! Maybe it's more common to hitchhike in Australia than here?
 - I am glad to see people from foreign countries trying to learn our language. It was something I could never imagine because people from our own country treat it disrespectfully. Thank you so much for your effort and your interest.
 - I really love your dog, XXX!
 - I love your sister's name. I've never heard it before. I have a brother and we're also different in both our tastes and our personalities, but we don't fight too much.
 - Melbourne must be a beautiful city. Someday I'd like to visit Australia to see Sydney and Melbourne.
 - I think Melbourne is better than Sydney.
-
- It's beautiful!
 - It's so impressive! And the kangaroos, too!
 - What a beautiful landscape!
 - I love this photo! It's so soothing.
 - I've never met anyone who likes woodworking... that's really interesting!
 - How beautiful and peaceful it looks there!
 - Cool! That graffiti is amazing!
 - It looks like a really interesting city and there's always something to do there.
 - How beautiful!
 - Yeah, it does make you want to sit down there!
 - I love Manel! Especially his version of "La Gent Normal".
 - How beautiful!
-

**Expressing
admiration or
surprise**

Source: Author

Even though the instructions for the project made it clear that a certain degree of interaction among the groups was expected, there were posts that got no type of response or interaction with other users. For future editions of the project, we will study which topics garnered the most interest and consider introducing a moderator who can encourage the conversation among all the groups.

Observing the posts, we saw that the dialogue that emerged between the two groups of participants helped consolidate the structures studied in class and put the communicative functions at CEFR level A1 into practice. Therefore, the texts by the Catalan speakers served as both a reference and an exercise in written comprehension for the participants. This enabled new structures to be

introduced, as well as helping the non-native Catalan speakers deduce vocabulary related to the topics within a communicative context.

Below we shall see examples of several posts made in week 1, which show the students practising the basic structures needed to master the functions inherent in introductions, greetings and goodbyes:

Table 6. Written production. Week 1: Who are you?

Students from Monash	Students from the UJI and the UIB
<p>Hello! <i>My name is XXX, I'm 23 years old and I'm Australian, from Melbourne. I speak English and Spanish, and I study the Arts and Sciences. Talk soon!</i></p> <p>#ICDMONASH #Quietsmonash #Quietsmonash4</p>	<p>Hi everyone!! My name is XXX, I'm 19 years old and I'm from a tiny town in Valencia called XXX. I study Translation and Interpreting at the UJI. I know how to speak Catalan, Spanish, English and a bit of German and Portuguese. See you soon!! ;) #ICDMONASH #quietsmonash #quietsmonash4</p>
<p>Hi everyone! <i>My name is XXX, I'm Australian, from Melbourne. I'm 23 and I study Environmental Engineering and Spanish at Monash University. I speak English, Spanish and now a little Catalan. Bye!</i> #quietsmonash #ICDMONASH #quietsmonash2</p>	<p>Hi everyone! My name is XXX, although my friends call me XXX. I live in XXX, a beautiful little town on Mallorca. Right now, I'm in my first year of a Bachelor's in Catalan Language and Literature at the UIB. I can speak Catalan, Spanish, English and French, although I've also studied Latin and classical Greek. I hope we have lots of fun in this digital exchange. Kisses to everyone: my personal Instagram is XXX #ICDMONASH #quietsmonash #quietsmonash2 #intercanvidigital</p>
<p><i>Hello! How's it going? My name is XXX. I'm from Melbourne, Australia, and I'm 22 years old. I study Physiology at Monash and I speak Spanish. Bye!</i></p> <p>#ICDMONASH #Quietsmonash #Quietsmonash3</p>	<p>Hi everyone! My name is XXX, I'm 21 years old and I'm from XXX, a town in Valencia. I study Translation and Interpreting at the University Jaume I. I speak Catalan, Spanish, English and French. See you soon! #ICDMONASH #quietsmonash #quietsmonash1</p>
<p><i>Hello Catalan friends! My name is XXX, I'm twenty years old and I live in Melbourne, one of the largest cities in Australia. In addition to languages, I also study Law and Politics. Currently I speak English and Spanish, and a bit of German and Catalan. In the summer, I travelled to Sidney, another major city, and I played music with friends. I hope to learn more about you soon! Bye</i></p>	<p>Hello! I'm XXX and I'm 20 years old. I live in XXX, a tiny village in Valencia, and I study Translation and Interpreting in Castellón. I speak Catalan, Spanish and English, and a bit of German. I hope we all really enjoy this experience. Bye and talk next week. #ICDmonash #quietsmonash #quietsmonash1 #projecte #intercanvi #Austràlia</p>
<p><i>Hi! My name is XXX. I'm from New Zealand but I live in Australia. I'm 22 years old. I'm studying Spanish at Monash University. I speak English (very well), Spanish (well) and Catalan and Portuguese (just a bit). Talk soon!</i></p> <p>#ICDMONASH #Quietsmonash #Quietsmonash2</p>	<p>Hello! Greetings to everyone! I'm XXX, I'm 19 and I live in XXX, Castellón. I study Translation and Interpreting at the UJI, and as you see I speak Catalan, Spanish, English and French, and I have a basic level of German. So, you could say that I really love languages. I hope to hear from you soon! Hugs! #ICDMONASH #quietsmonash #quietsmonash4</p>

Source: Author

We cannot empirically assess whether the project helped the participants attain a higher level of intercultural competence, since this reflects each student's

personal motivations and degree of engagement. Furthermore, the contents of this project were limited in order to adapt to the Catalan learners' level and the length of the Australian university semester. However, at the end of the project, the students were given a survey in which they were able to share their opinions on the project and directly assess whether it had helped them better understand the culture of the language they were studying. Question 2 in the table below shows their answers:

Table 7. General feedback on the digital cultural exchange

1. I found the digital exchange:	
An enriching experience	67%
Yet another language assignment	33%
Not at all useful	0%
2. This experience helped me to:	
Better understand the culture of Valencia/the Balearic Islands	33%
Learn more about the lifestyle of people from the other culture	100%
Reflect on my culture	17%
Break stereotypes	17%
3. What do you think about using the new technologies in the foreign language classroom?	
They're a useful way to be in touch with native speakers	83%
The teaching is more dynamic	67%
It connects the lessons with the real world in a more direct way	67%
It can be confusing at times	0%
I prefer traditional language teaching	33%
4. This project helped me in my language proficiency:	
Totally agree	0%
Agree	100%
Disagree	0%
Totally disagree	0%

Source: Author

Based on the data in the survey, we can see that the majority (67%) of the participants believe that the digital cultural exchange helped them learn more about the lifestyle of people from other cultures, yet only some of the students (33%) believe that it helped them better understand Catalan and/or Australian culture.

In addition to the closed-ended questions, the students were also able to express their opinions on the project in general or on other aspects:

- *I thought the Instagram cultural exchange was a brilliant idea, and a really good way to practise basic sentences and learn new words in another language. It's also fun to see what life is like for students across the side of the world.*
- *It was an innovative and fun way to get us to practice much more often, I really enjoyed it.*
- *It was enjoyable talking with non-English speakers.*
- *Not all students have smartphones.*

7. Limitations

This project has the limitations inherent to CEFR level A1, since intercultural competence cannot be achieved with just a brief introduction to certain cultural facts. Higher linguistic complexity is needed to be able to express oneself on more abstract issues. Another limitation is related to technology, as there was one student who did not have a smartphone and was unable to participate in the project. This student was asked to send comments on the weekly topics by email, but he was unable to interact with the other participants. Another technical glitch was the way Instagram works, since some participants had problems with their smartphones and had to drop out of the project. Instagram does not allow photographs to be uploaded from its website but instead only allows users to see pictures posted from a mobile phone. For future editions of this project, other platforms which can also be used from a browser, like Pinterest, Tumblr or Flickr, will be considered.

Another problem was the linguistic accuracy of the posts, not those by the learners – it is natural for them to make mistakes in their learning process – but in the posts by the native speakers, who in theory should serve as a reference in the Catalan language model. Furthermore, some of the native participants did not adapt their discourse to a language level that was accessible to the learners.

In terms of the way the project worked, we can state that only the Catalan learners benefitted linguistically; because Catalan was the working language used in the project, the native speakers from Valencia and the Balearic Islands acted more as linguistic coaches.

8. Conclusions

Throughout this article, we have showcased the pedagogical possibilities of a digital cultural exchange from two different perspectives: culture and communicative. The tasks done throughout the project helped the students in both participating groups learn about sociocultural aspects of other linguistic areas and consolidate the linguistic contents of Catalan – only for the students at Monash University – through weekly practice. Indeed, according to the survey, the majority of participants (67%) believe that the digital cultural exchange helped them learn more about the lifestyle of people from other cultures, and all of them (100%) said that it helped them progress in their language learning.

This study made it possible to reflect on forms of remote interaction with native speakers, and especially on the suitability of the social media Instagram for collaborative activities in the university setting. Furthermore, within the

educational context of the Catalan language class, this project helped strengthen the bonds among students, in addition to providing them contact with samples of real language.

In terms of communication, it helped the students put communicative functions at the CEFR A1 level into practice and master the language structures they had studied throughout the course by posting weekly comments.

We can also say that this experience has been a motivating factor in the students' learning process, and we believe that it could have different applications in other educational settings both inside and outside the Catalan language domain. Today's digital platforms can serve as channels of connection not only among native speakers of a language and its learners but also among groups of learners from different places with similar objectives. The potential of these applications in language teaching is unlimited and can be used according to the needs of the course and the educational setting in which it is being offered.

We can currently find literature on occasional telecollaboration experiences via different social media or other more conventional media, such as email, discussion forums, chats and videoconferencing. However, researchers have not sufficiently analysed a single platform to provide a more well-grounded picture of its suitability for tasks related to language learning. In fact, Cassany (2011) states that the social media can play an important role in learning processes, but that having them play a prominent role in formal education seems more complicated.

In this sense, we believe that much research remains to be done in order to examine the different aspects associated with telecollaboration experiences in the second language classroom, such as the evaluation of non-linguistic contents, the choice of topics, correct spelling and grammar among the participants and the curricular framing of digital activities. In short, we are equipped with new digital communication tools which overcome not only physical but also cultural distances and can have major repercussions on the way we currently envision language teaching and learning.

Bibliography

ARAUJO, J. C. (2014). "El uso de blogs, wikis y redes sociales en la enseñanza de lenguas", in *Edutec. Revista Electrónica de Tecnología Educativa*, 49(a282), pp. 1-27.

BYRAM, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

BOSCH, A.; CRUZ, M. (2014). "Descripció lingüística del català i del castellà mitjançant activitats col·laboratives en línia d'anàlisi de la creativitat lèxica amb estudiants de postgrau", in *Actes del IV Simposi Internacional sobre l'Ensenyament del Català*. Vic: Eumo.

CASSANY, D. (2011). *En línia. Llegir i escriure a la xarxa*. Barcelona: Grao.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CUADROS, M.; VARO, D. (2013). "Twitter y la enseñanza del español como

segunda lengua”, in [RedELE. Revista Electrónica de Didáctica Español Lengua Extranjera](#), 25, p. 1-26.

DOOLY, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Telecollaborative Language Learning: A guidebook to moderating intercultural collaboration online*. New York: Peter Lang.

FRIESEN, H. L. (2012). “Photography and Writing: Alternative Ways of Learning for ESL Students”, in [Teaching English in the Two-Year College](#), 40, pp. 39-43.

GUTH, S.; HELM, F. (Eds.). (2010). *Telecollaboration 2.0: Language, literacies, and intercultural learning in the 21st century*. Bern: Peter Lang.

LICOPPE, C. (2009). “Recognizing mutual ‘proximity’ at a distance. Weaving together mobility, sociality and Technology”, in [Journal of Pragmatics](#), 41, pp. 1924-1937.

MAS, M.; VILAGRASA, A. (2005). *Veus 1. Curs de català A1 (llibre d'exercicis i gramàtica)*. Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat.

MULLER C. (2012). “La photographie, un outil pour communiquer en classe de langue”, in [Recherche et pratiques pédagogiques en langues de spécialité. Cahiers de l'APLIUT](#), 31, pp. 10-27.