Pragmatic Features in the Language of Cross-Cultural Virtual Teams: A Roundtable Discussion of Student-to-Student Discourse in International Collaborative Projects

1. Introduction
The aim of this roundtable session was to engage participants in a discussion of how students communicate with one another in the context of international collaborative projects conducted by e-mail or using a Web-based platform. Although considerable reflexion has gone into the way these learning projects can be set up and how they can be assessed (Maylath et al. 2008, Mousten et al. 2008), relatively little attention has been paid, at least in articles and conference papers, on how the students react with one another. This would appear to be a crucial aspect of such projects, as it is precisely this interaction which is specific to virtual teams, it is where cultural input is exchanged, and it is basically where the learning experience take place. The discussion is therefore focused on the various aspects of student communication, with a view to evaluating its efficiency and meaningfulness.

2. Background
The virtual exchange what we call the Trans-Atlantic Project, which serves as a baseline for the following discussion, has been going on for nearly a decade now, but the aims and methods of this sort of project have been the subject of relatively few discussions or appraisals.

The most common model is for widely separated teams of students, typically one from America, and another from Europe, to work on a project using email or other Internet-based communication systems. In the context examined here, the project is language-based and involves technical writing and/or translation, though the actual forms change from institution to institution and more significantly from year to year, as the teaching partners gain experience. Its starting point was the joint aim of raising the language awareness of American students writing technical texts for an international audience and introducing European students of translation to communication with the authors of a text. Subsequent developments are sketched out below.

It is not only possible, but even desirable, to combine various aims within one project. Thus, within the present consortium¹, different partners have different objectives. For the American teams, the major issue is making students aware that texts travel far and wide and that their writing strategies must take the international aspect into account. For Århus the main aim is to train students in techniques of translating and peer-editing with non-translators. Trieste’s primary objective is training in internationalisation and localisation in the context of multilingual documen-

¹ The coordinators of the virtual teams, for the purposes of the roundtable discussion, are as follows: University of Paris-Diderot (John Humbley), henceforth referred to as Paris; University of Wisconsin-Stout (Matt Livesey) and North Dakota State University (Bruce Maylath), referred to together as US; Århus School of Business: (Birthe Mousten), referred to as Århus, and University of Trieste (Federica Scarpa), referred to as Trieste.

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tation management. And for Paris, the aim is to change the students’ mindset and convince them that translation is not an academic exercise, but an active attempt to get a message across. These aims, different as they are, all are student-orientated, so it is important to know what is going on when the students actually communicate with one another. This process is hard to keep track of for many reasons. If they work together on a common Web-based platform, the communication is always clearly visible and archived, whereas in e-mail communication, the teacher must be very active in getting the comments from the student; sometimes a couple of the students are very hesitant to hand over the exchange with the foreign student, or say that they have lost it.

The advantages of virtual international collaborative projects, however, ought to be emphasized. Most of these stem from being a grassroots, bottom-up initiative. Firstly, they are simple to set up and cheap to run. Contrary to physical exchange programmes, they need minimal agreement and financing from university authorities to get started. They can use the multimedia equipment and infrastructure which the university already has. Secondly, they are relatively flexible, since they work on an asynchronous basis, allowing students and staff to work at their own rhythm and avoiding the necessity to fix set times for exchanges. Thirdly they involve the teaching staff of both universities directly, unlike physical exchange programmes, where faculty rarely meet, let alone collaborate on individual courses.

Despite the swiftness of virtual communication, which makes such communication possible in the first place, time is a critical factor because of the short semesters—or, worse, unaligned semesters. The projects are indeed flexible and open to innovation, but they usually have to fit into an extremely tight schedule. Of all the challenges that instructors and students face in conducting the project, we have found that tight timetables are the most critical factor by imposing all sorts of constraints – ones which novices to this type of exchange tend to underestimate.

3. The process of exchange

The process of the exchange between students can be schematised into the following chronological steps:

1. Students get to know each other
2. Students comment on each other’s work
3. Students follow up (or not) on each other’s comments

What happens in these steps will be examined below.

3.1. Students get to know each other

The reaction of students can depend on the extent to which the teaching staff has prepared them. US teachers in particular comment on the lack of awareness that their American students have of foreigners and the world outside their national borders, which can prove a challenge in communication with a distant partner. One solution, begun at Århus, is to have the students on both sides of the Atlantic write up an introduction, called a ‘pre-learning report’, about themselves so that their partners know whom they are dealing with. A second solution, also started at Århus, is for students to exchange basic data about their texts in initial stages through what is called a ‘translation brief’.

The teaching staff in Trieste, by contrast, felt that the American students’ pre-learning reports were not as useful to the Italian students, who tend to say less about themselves than the Americans. However, it did appear to them that the more an Italian student was familiar with English/American culture, and the more widely travelled the student, the more he or she would feel the necessity to break the ice at the beginning of the exchange. One sidelight on introductions was that Italian students did not in general think of further qualifying their geographic location, their assumption being that the Americans would not be interested in such fine details, Italy being such a
small and distant country in their eyes. In any case, all partners agree that the more frequently the
students exchange background information, the better the content of the communication is.

As they continue the process of making acquaintance, students may follow different paths.
Some, as in Trieste, may use different media for different sorts of communication, clearly sepa-
rating the class work from private exchanges. Notwithstanding the instructions received from the
teacher before the onset of the project to introduce themselves briefly, Italian students were keen
to get down to work and more focussed on an exclusively professional relationship than their
transatlantic partners. Other students, as in Århus, stick to e-mail for all exchanges, but swap a
wide variety of experiences, both personal and professional. The issue of the personal versus pri-
vate sector is an important one, closely linked with cultural assumptions. Young American stu-
dents tend to mix private and professional to an extent which their elders find horrifying (cf The
Narcissism Epidemic, Twenge & Campbell 2009), and this is reflected in some of the exchanges.
The French students, like the Italians, tend to limit any private exchanges to the most stereotypi-
cal, giving away as little as possible about themselves in what is seen as a university and therefore
public setting. In order to overcome this reticence, it has been suggested that the students commu-
nicate on an external topic, such as why they chose to work on the subject in hand, thereby giv-
ing work-related information, but at the same time, giving the partners clues about the personality
of the person they are working with so far away. In all cases, though, a maximum amount of time
should be set aside for exchanges, which, as has been suggested, is important for enhancing learn-
ing. Indeed, when students run out of time, they invariably express disappointment that their ques-
tions have gone unanswered or that their comments have been left without acknowledgement.

3.2. Students comment on each other’s work

As the exchanges get going, students quickly come to the task at hand and comment on the work
done by the distant partner. This phase is clearly crucial to the success of the exchange. In all cases
the students report back to their distant partner on the work they have received, and in some cases
they may also comment to the teacher about this work.

Logging the process

Comments made to the teacher can be collected systematically, for example via a student-kept
logbook handed in to the instructor at the end of the course, as is done in Trieste and Paris. Log-
books often contain subjective assessments and evaluations of the partner student’s work, ex-
pressed either directly (“full of mistakes: is s/he a native English speaker?”) or indirectly (“X did
not answer/understand my question…”), but some logbooks remain completely objective.

Commenting on the process

More commonly, students record comments when they communicate with their distant partner.
The media used for these exchanges have a direct repercussion on its external visibility. In the
eyears of the project, exchanges took place exclusively by e-mail, and only the students con-
cerned had access to their exchange. In order to monitor and then study these exchanges, however,
instructors collected copies of the e-mail either during or after the project. In occasion, some stu-
dents, who wished to continue a private exchange, opted for their own personal e-mail provider.
In later years, some partners have adopted the use of an interactive Web-based platform, where
exchanges are visible to all, so that the students comment on what they see emerging on this fo-
rum. The teacher can thus more easily monitor and study what the students are saying. The fact
that some exchanges are completely private and others are completely open to all the members of
the group may well influence the type of comments that the students make. From the viewpoint
of linguistic pragmatics, it is quite possible that students will be more reticent to make criticisms
of their distant partner’s work if they think that these will be read by all the rest of the group. Fur-
ther study is called for, perhaps with one group working exclusively via e-mail (as does Århus for
example) and another exclusively via a Web-based platform (as does Paris), with metrics to count the number and type of comments made in both cases. At Århus, we have noticed informally that when a problem in a text has not been solved or was only solved partly, and the teacher asked why the problem was not brought up in the exchange, Danish students have responded with answers such as “Well, one cannot ask about everything,” and “Sometimes it seems silly to ask such a question,” and “Maybe I ought to have solved that myself.”

Comments are also made in the classroom, when the students have time in class to work either in pairs or individually, with the teacher passing informally among the students, checking the progress being made. Often a question about some material point found in a partner’s work, addressed to the teacher, will act as a catalyst for eliciting a comment from the teacher (“do you think this text is properly structured…?”), implying a specific point of view on the part of the student. Further discussion usually leads to students’ expressing a judgement about their partner’s work, generally a less flattering one than is actually transmitted to the partner. These sorts of comments, by their very nature, are haphazard and can hardly be brought into any quantitative study, but they do give important indications, especially when they are at odds with the written comments given to the partner.

At Århus, the project is rounded off through a seminar where all the texts are presented orally, with the problems in the text exchange included as well. The same phenomenon appears as in Paris where—in addition to the Paris comments—a consensus can easily build up along the lines of “how come they can’t see that there is no cohesion between A and B?” and “writing up texts on that topic, they would clearly have to know that”. At the same time, the same group of students can be blind to the mistakes that they make themselves or may attach only minor importance to their own mistakes and cultural oversights.

Students also make comments to their classmates on the spot, which they refrain from making to their distant partners. These are even more haphazard and noted only in the informal, semi-supervised atmosphere in which the students work on their own or in pairs with the teacher passing round. The comments made in this situation tend to be even more damning than those confided directly in the teacher and point to strong self-censorship in some situations. Collecting offhand comments made by the students to classmates and their teachers is admittedly difficult, compounded by the fact that generally only the positive comments actually make it into student’s transatlantic e-mail.

The last medium used in communication, though much less so than either e-mail or an interactive platform, is the live video conference. Compared to other media, it promotes greater group dynamics through spontaneous commentary. As a project follow-up, the video conference is superb. Interestingly, it has been less fruitful at the problem-solving stages when whole classes have participated, though students have told us of productive sessions that they have initiated with just their small team using iChat or other streaming video software. Video conferences often remove the sense and rhetoric of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ In semesters when we have not arranged class video conferences, the lack of the personal meetings between virtual team members has sometimes been a source of conflict, which must be dealt with actively throughout the process. We imagine that the same problems surface in international trade and industry when workers have to solve tasks virtually. The increasing use of written media (emails, SMS, blogs) compared to oral media (meetings and telephone conversations) underline this source of conflict. It will be interesting to see in the coming decade what impact a medium like ‘Skype’ will have on international exchanges.

3.2.1. Criticism

No matter the medium, the most problematical comments are those in which the receivers infer criticism. We have observed that Americans, though they tend to get to the point fast, are very tentative in their criticism. Italian students tend to be tactful in their criticism. Among the Italians, both in their reports and e-mail exchanges, hardly any criticism is apparent in their exchang-
es with their transatlantic partners, even when the Americans have been slow in replying to their translators’ e-mails or the source texts contain very obvious spelling/grammar mistakes, which slow the translation work. During the summing up in class, Italian students are only slightly more critical, though the general prevailing attitude remains one of condoning their partners’ shortcomings. The Danish students, on the other hand, are generally very comprehensive and criticise even what may be felt to be minor points. However, they do not hesitate to give sweeping criticisms as well, albeit in an apologetic tone. The French students also relay negative remarks but are not particularly apologetic when doing so. There is obviously much scope for exploring with the students the pragmatics of language and the culturally acceptable ways of giving and accepting criticism and reflecting on the effectiveness of differing communication strategies.

As an example, the Danish translator and Danish reviser of an article from Danish into English experienced what they saw as very outspoken directness in the following criticism from American students serving as editors: (about the introduction to the article) ‘Is this a blurb about the article? It does not tie in well.’ In the same exchange, the American students’ comments are different, neutral and more polite:

The term ‘cleave’ normally refers to meat, not wood. We changed the term to ‘split’. In the final paragraph, we changed ‘cheap’ to ‘cheaper.’ Cheap has a negative connotation; it means poor quality along with being inexpensive.

3.2.2. Praise
Most teams find it easier to give praise than criticism, and in line with what we have pointed out above, American and Danish students in particular are quick to do so. The latter shower praise throughout the text. The French students tend to be amazed at what they feel is extravagant praise heaped on their work by their American partners and to feel a little guilty that they have not been as encouraging when they state the positive or give criticism.

Another example from the Danish email logs shows a US teammate giving praise to their Danish translation/revision partners. From the introduction: “Your translation was very good. The English grammar, punctuation, and spelling were great. Most of our changes were for style, in addition to Americanizing the text”. From final comments: “We were very impressed with your command of the English language. We’ve enjoyed working on the project and look forward to your feedback”.

In general, the students seem very much aware of the importance of giving praise to each other, but the extent and content of the politeness and praise varies considerably between cultures as well as among individual students.

3.2.3. Admit ignorance of a particular (culture-specific) item
One important feature of these exchanges is that it heightens students’ awareness of cultural specificities which make themselves felt in the communication. These give rise to some of the most intriguing comments made by the students. Many of the European students are amazed at the American students’ interest in shooting, which manifests itself in some of the instructions used as writing exercises (e.g., “How to skin an elk”; “How to clean a rifle”…). During a video conference between the US and Århus, the Danish students voiced the same surprise as had the students in Paris about the popularity of shooting and hunting as topics so the American instructor asked the camera to zoom out so that the Danes could see the response when he asked the American students how many of them hunted. There was an audible gasp of shock from Århus when nearly all the male American students raised their hands. This is partly a transatlantic specificity, but not entirely, as the European students tend to be city dwellers and the Americans (from Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota) are from the countryside or return to it frequently from their city dwellings. Plenty of people go shooting in France, too, though the average age may be much higher than in the US.
The Århus students developed a distinction between ‘being aware’ and ‘not being aware’ in their cultural understanding. It is one thing to be aware of the cultural differences and be able to identify and name them. It is another thing to sense that something seems not quite right but not to be able to point out what precisely seems wrong. One such example came up during the class discussion of a text on how to install a ceiling fan. The Danish translators assigned to the text agreed that something was wrong with it, but initially none of them could put a finger on what it was. Eventually, the identification of the problem surfaced, but only through a discussion involving the whole class: The picture accompanying the text was wrong. It was not probable that anyone would buy a “gadget” looking like that. Another point was the frequency of the use of such a fan in a Danish environment. It would not be in private homes, only in few crowded restaurants during short summer periods. Thus, the problem that they perceived was not the text or the crafting of the text but the notion of a fan in Denmark and the cultural ‘look and feel’ of the product itself. (By contrast, Italian students seemed to have had no objections in admitting their ignorance of topics that seemed foreign to them. Their e-mail exchanges seem to defer to the “author’s authority.”)

Even if American students tend, at least initially, to be relatively unaware of other cultures, the finality of the text can sometimes be put into stark relief when cultural differences are distinct. For instance, one American asked his Italian partners, “What are some of the common religions and beliefs in Italy?” They responded,

In Italy the most widespread confession is Christian Catholicism. Then there are many minorities, that normally correspond to groups of migrants, so for example Muslims or Christian Orthodox. Here in Trieste you can find a lot of different churches related to several different beliefs, particularly because Trieste as a city near to the border of Slovenia, not far away from Croatia and Austria, was a number of times occupied by different populations during its history and therefore many different beliefs are here widespread. Our question: Are there in your city or in your state many foreigners? Are they well integrated or accepted? Here in Italy the presence of foreigners causes several problems, for example in the education field, because children of foreigners don’t know Italian when they go to school and therefore they need special courses.

The United States, of course, is a nation of immigrants. Even now, it is not uncommon even in small cities like Fargo, North Dakota, for the population of a public school to be made up of students with 40 or more immigrant languages spoken among their households. The presence of “foreigners” is the norm.

### 3.2.4. Empathy

Issues of empathy inevitably emerge from student-to-student communication, and the degree to which empathy can be felt is thought to influence the efficacy of the learning experience. Empathy is fostered by the students’ acknowledging that the work presented by the partner represents a real challenge or commenting on the good quality of a text’s rendering. In many situations, empathy seems to be generated by students working on a particular topic, so that the empathy is latent rather than expressed. This may be seen as a more efficient way of creating empathy than encouraging the students to give stereotyped information about themselves (e.g., “I’m 21, I’ve got a dog, and I like hanging out with my friends…”). Typically, the topics receiving most comments come in response to questions on terminology, syntax, lexicon and register. The translation student, faced with a terminology problem, will ask for more information from the technical writing partner, which will in many cases lead to comments on the different ways that some technical point may be viewed in the two countries concerned. In the e-mail exchanges, terminology solicited the most comments, and in more than one case the authors of the source texts replied by sending the translators explanatory images which had not been provided in their first drafts. The students’ documentary research was aimed nearly exclusively at finding the right terminology (not the right style). On the other hand, in the Italian students’ final reports, some translators commented on the repetitiveness and the informality of the Americans’ source-text instructions and how they should
have been adapted to the less redundant and more formal style of Italian instructions (which in
text they seldom did or did not as radically as they should). Just like the French students, the Ital-
i ans seem torn between the more formal norm of their own culture and the attraction to the inform-
ality of American English.

An example of empathy comes from an exchange from a US student to a Danish student where
the US student goes beyond the exchange itself and sees the partner’s part of an exchange in a
wider perspective, namely that the Danish student has to hand in the translated version of the
project for evaluation as part of the curriculum: ‘Annica, overall a very well written essay. I have
made some suggestions to make the article more ‘Americanized.’ Good luck to you, I know you
will do well on this assignment. Tania’’ In her pre-learning report, Tania had written the following
as one of her learning aims under the question, “What do you expect to learn about cooperation?”
And her answer: “Giving constructive criticism without hurting someone’s feelings”. Although
empathy does not often surface so visibly in most student exchanges, this example reveals that
the matter of empathy was looming large in the minds of these students. They were very excited
about having cooperative partners, and they tried their best to communicate so in the best possi-
ble manner.

3.2.5. Power issues
International writing and translation projects are fraught with matters of power (Mousten et
al., in press). Such matters are particularly important in understanding group dynamics, as they
will greatly influence the image that the students have of their partners and themselves. In early
projects, the American students had the upper hand, since they were the ones who chose the top-
ics and wrote the texts to be translated. Especially with instructional and procedural texts, the US
teachers of the technical writing courses encourage their students to pick a topic on which they are
expert. Outside of academia, those who write instructions are asked to do so because they have
the knowledge that others would like transmitted to them. The teachers stress that “author” is the
root of “authority”. Their role as author undoubtedly gives the writers a boost in the power game.
As an unintentional consequence, the notion of “author as root of authority” could explain why
Italian students seem to take a relatively uncritical approach toward the texts to be translated. In
most cases the topic matter has been so new to them that they are reluctant to edit the source text
even when encountering obvious mistakes. In their allegiance to the source text, they have been
even less willing to paraphrase in their translations.

Various steps have been taken since to redress the balance of power. Århus has instituted an
exchange whereby the Danish students translate a text into English, which the American students
edit. When the direction of text travel is reversed in this way, students in the US now react to an
existing text on a topic that they do not necessarily know much about. Paris has taken to asking
students to write a text on the same subject as that which they are about to translate with their
American partner before they receive the American text. To do so, they first research the topic
before receiving the source text. More importantly, they decide how they would present the top-
ic. Generally, the French students’ decisions are quite different from what they later see made by
their American partners. Typically, when the French students write their own text on the topic be-
fore receiving the source text, they are generally much more questioning about the source text,
and therefore less submissive, than students who were simply given a text to translate.

One aspect of power can manifest itself in the use of language, English in particular. American
students can hide behind their status as a native speaker to elude questions. When questioned on
a particular formulation, they will reply that it “sounded better”, which—although never accepted
as a valid argument in academic translation circles—effectively stops any further discussion. Eu-
ropean students are often hesitant to think that a native speaker can make mistakes in a text writ-
ten in their native language. Danish students have the habit of asking seemingly obvious questions
as a means to point out language errors made by their American partners. The e-mail exchanges
do not manifest any reaction by the Americans to this perhaps annoying tactic, but several times
a note of thanks appears in the American e-mails for pointing out spelling mistakes, for instance. Issues of power surface as well in the editing of texts. One Danish student showed much awareness of editing’s various effects, from overediting to rewriting the whole text to correcting maybe the grammatical and terminological errors only. Some criticism can be met by explaining the context and the author’s attitude—especially important in a translation situation. In her pre-learning report, a Danish student wrote, “I need to be polite and not get offended by corrections”. In her translation brief, the same student wrote an idea for editing the translated article (in reference to the article’s “code”): “There is a slight touch of irony in the section about heredity. Please notice if this has been kept in your version”. This was one of the rare examples we saw where the translator and the text editor communicated on the tenor of the text.

3.2.6. Issues of insight into the translation situation

Some students make comments to their partners reflecting on the stage they have reached in the learning process. Often these signal to the teacher that there is still work to be done. In one e-mail exchange an Italian student used the term “synonym”. However, her American partner did not seem to understand what she meant. Although, as students of translation, the European students might be expected to be more familiar with linguistic terminology than the American students, who overwhelmingly major in technical fields, some translation instructors report that they have been surprised by their students’ shaky grasp of metalanguage.

Similarly, many students’ comments reflect a lack of awareness of the particularities of what is involved in the translation process. For instance, many students have tended to produce translations that are too literal or lack cultural awareness or lack attention to detail or sensitivity to the genre of a text. Quite often translation students have started discussing with writing students what tense they intend to use to translate a particular sentence or passage, thereby revealing that the translation students are not aware that the monolingual author of the source text cannot possibly have an opinion about a question that solely concerns the details of the target language. On the other hand, students sometimes show a heightened awareness. In one instance where the direction of text travel was reversed, an experienced American student edited a text on the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, which her Belgian partners had translated from Dutch into English. In the sentence, “McCain rarely elaborated on his program to change the country”, the American student substituted “plans” for “program”. The Belgians then asked pointedly, “What’s wrong with “program”?” The American explained, “Program sounds wrong to me as a native English speaker. Program usually refers to something that is already established. When politicians are on the campaign trail, they are usually proposing plans to change the country’s policies”. With this explanation, the Belgian translators came away with a greater sense of both words’ nuances.

Likewise, comments can also let the instructor know that a particular student has indeed discovered for him or herself something important in translating technique. As an example, a Danish group of students had to translate instructions for how to parallel park a car. The instructions were organized in steps, and the immediate response of the Danish group was that such instructions could not be divided into steps, as this was an ongoing movement of the car. The question posed by one of the group participants was: “Maybe the US way of setting up an instruction is more often stepwise compared to what we would naturally do.” This is the kind of reflection that is not binary but is expected to be learned as an observation that might sometimes come in handy.

3.3. Follow-up on comments

The types of comments examined above elicit follow-up comments, thus contributing to a dialogue. In the best cases, the follow-up is complete and satisfactory to all. Occasionally, the follow-up is nonexistent. Most often, it falls somewhere in between.

What we have witnessed at Trieste is that Italian students tend to be sparing in offering criticism but are pleased to take up suggestions made by their US partners. At Paris, French students
tend to keep negative comments to the end of the project, perhaps out of a sense of a desire to avoid antagonizing their American teammates. At Århus, the Danish students’ follow-up comments seem to serve a variety of purposes: to question, to grant permission, to offer clarification, explanation or feedback.

In a recent running of the Trans-Atlantic Project, the US students accepted their Italian partners’ suggestions and corrections with gratitude, which was a huge source of pride (and surprise) for the Italian students. The American students’ appreciation may have stemmed from the haste with which they were forced by an unusually short overlapping of academic semesters to compose the source texts: they were barely more than drafts. The other side of the coin was that most Italian students lamented the non-finality of the drafts they were translating, a problem exacerbated by the haste that was forced on them as well. In a few cases, US students transmitted incomplete texts with a promise to send missing paragraphs later. Sometimes that never happened. In 3 cases (out of 29), the text to be translated lacked accompanying images, which were sent only much later. Consequently, the translators were denied access to vital pieces of visual information to understand and translate the text. Another common complaint emanating from the short time allocated to the project was that, because of the time difference between Italy and the US, the Italian students received a reply to their questions as late as 24 hours after asking them. One group never received an answer.) Moreover, in 2 cases (out of 29 total groups) US students thought the project would last two weeks, rather than the five days actually allotted.

4. Conclusion
The effects of virtual collaborative projects are still felt long after they have been achieved. All of us leading the Trans-Atlantic Project have experienced chance encounters with former students years after they were involved in the Project and listening to them recount what they recall and gained from their involvement. Collaborative projects with intensive international student interaction are highly profitable means of encouraging learning in the intercultural communication field. Instructors, as project leaders, are helped by understand the pragmatics of students’ exchanges. Our roundtable discussion was aimed first at characterising the situations in which students comment amongst themselves, with their distant partners and with the teaching staff and second at focusing on the types and quality of the exchanges thus engendered. Most relevant to the learning experience are exchanges involving giving praise, accepting criticism and negotiating issues of power. To draw definitive conclusions, more systematic descriptions of such exchanges are needed. The leaders of the Trans-Atlantic Project have set themselves the goal of accomplishing this task.

Bibliography


