Videoconferencing as a Tool for Developing Speaking Skills

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Abstract This paper aims to explore the possibilities offered by innovative language learning, in particular such that is aided by dynamically changing technology, and focuses on videoconferencing, a mode of communication that can foster the development of speaking skills in English. Since videoconferencing allows geographical distances to be bridged, it can be used by foreign language teachers who want to overcome the problem of limited opportunities for speaking practice in the classroom by exposing students to genuine interaction in which communicative experiences can be extended. We will discuss a project that involved several experimental sessions of videoconferencing, organized as a result of international collaboration between a Polish and a Spanish university. The project primarily aimed to develop students' communicative language skills through audio and visual interaction in real time and to create a collaborative learning environment where the participants—in both cases studying for a B.A. in English—had to construct and negotiate meaning using task-based activities. Using the results of this project, as illustrated by the students' evaluation questionnaires and the teacher's observations, we aim to identify the potential benefits for language learning that might be offered by new technologies.

1 Introduction

The rapid expansion of technological tools in recent years has been transferring foreign language teaching onto a completely new level. Considering the limited opportunities both for interaction outside the classroom and for the development of learners' communicative competence, new technologies, especially new capabilities for audio and video communication that have emerged lately in educational contexts are particularly useful for successful achievement of language learning objectives.

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The present paper discusses a project that involved several experimental sessions of videoconferencing, organized as a result of international collaboration, and focuses upon the ways in which the application of new technologies can benefit the development of speaking skills among learners of English as a foreign/second language.

2 Communication and Interaction in Language Learning

It has been widely agreed that pursuing authentic communicative goals allows learners to develop communicative competence. The concept of communicative competence has itself been long discussed in literature. The prevailing model (cf. Bagarić and Djigunović 2007), first proposed by Canale and Swain (1980, 1981), was based on three main areas of knowledge and skills: *grammatical*, *sociolinguistic* and *strategic competence*, with a fourth component, *discourse competence*, added by Canale (1983, 1984) some time later. While grammatical competence is mainly concerned with mastery of the linguistic code needed for understanding and expressing the literal meanings of utterances, sociolinguistic competence involves appropriateness of language use in different sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts. Strategic competence, on the other hand, is connected with the use of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that help learners deal successfully with any gaps in communicative competence. Finally, discourse competence, as described by Canale (1983, 1984), involves the mastery of rules that determine cohesion and coherence of both spoken and written texts. Thus, well-designed tasks need to focus on communication that provides an opportunity to use linguistic elements correctly, but also to express oneself appropriately within social contexts (Swain 2000).

Oral interaction has long been considered an important element in the field of second language acquisition, and it has been widely agreed that speaking skills develop best in an authentic situation that involves negotiation of meaning (Long 1996). However, interactional modifications that contribute to making input more comprehensible alone do not appear sufficient to focus learners on the differences between their interlanguage and target language forms and still need to be accompanied by two additional factors involved in interaction and acquisition: the learner's attention and output (Swain 1985; Schmidt 1990). The emphasis on the three elements of input, attention, and output, as expressed in Long's (1996) interaction hypothesis, means that negotiated interaction, in which corrective adjustments are made by native speakers or experts who are more competent than learners, reveals gaps in learners' interlanguage. Furthermore, it leads to the modification of their output in the L2, and thus its adaptation to the negotiated form, which facilitates acquisition.

Yet the benefits of interacting in the L2 mentioned above have mainly been shown for the traditional NS–NNS configuration (Long 1996). The way learners interact among themselves is different from the way learners and native speakers interact, which is why the model for negotiation of meaning among L2 learners described by Varonis and Gass (1985) may be perhaps more suitable for identifying and analyzing the negotiation routines in the case of the videoconferenced oral interviews

between foreign language learners. In their model for negotiation of meaning, Varonis and Gass (1985) claim that the horizontal flow of conversation is interrupted when an acknowledgement of the communication problem (the indicator) occurs following the source of non-understanding (the trigger), and it is continued until the negotiation for meaning ends, either with a positive or negative outcome. Then, the conversation is resumed and the main line of discourse is continued.

3 Videoconferencing and the Development of Speaking Skills

The term *videoconferencing* is used to describe a system where two or more participants in different locations can interact while both seeing and hearing each other in real time with the help of specialized equipment and a high-speed Internet connection (Smith 2003). As the quality of online transmission has been continually improving and the cost of computer equipment falling, videoconferencing is becoming more and more accessible nowadays, especially in the field of distance learning. There are a growing number of studies that have discussed the practices and obstacles to effective teaching and learning focusing on the educational uses of videoconferencing, both in schools and in higher education (Coventry 1998; Martin 2000; Newman et al. 2008; Lawson et al. 2010).

It is important to mention that while being situated within the e-learning context, videoconferencing significantly differs from text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC), as it allows for audiovisual channels in the interaction. As a result, videoconferencing retains key elements of the communication process, such as the reception of non-verbal signals that support the interaction, and, most importantly, the immediacy and spontaneity of response, creating time pressure on the participants to process input and provide output in real time (Lee 2007).

The audiovisual channel of communication and time pressure which entail the need for an immediate response definitely put the videoconferencing context very close to a real-life authentic situation. Such a claim seems to be supported by a recent study by Kim and Craig (2012) in which experimental tests were carried out with test-takers using face-to-face and videoconferenced oral interviews. The findings indicated no significant differences in performance between the two test modes and also provided evidence for the comparability of the videoconferenced and face-to-face interviews in terms of comfort, computer familiarity, environment, non-verbal linguistic cues, interests, speaking opportunity, and topic effects. In another study, Yanguas (2010), while examining task-based, synchronous oral computer-mediated communication (CMC) among intermediate-level learners of Spanish, found no significant differences in the way video and traditional face-to-face communication groups carried out these negotiations.

In the light of such considerations, it is hardly surprising that videoconferencing has been making an important contribution to the language learning field, especially as a means of communicating orally with expert/native speakers and as a means of

enhancing the development of learners' oral skills (McAndrew et al. 1996; O'Dowd 2000; Chapelle 2001; Wang 2006; Lee 2007; Katz 2001; Kinginger and Belz 2005; Ware and Kramsch 2005; Wiedemann 2006; Guichon, 2010; Bower and Kawaguchi 2011; Kim and Craig 2012).

There are a number of scholars linking videoconferenced interactions that aim at fostering foreign language speaking skills with issues of self-confidence, anxiety and communication apprehension. For example, Kinginger (1998) analyzed classroom interactions taking place between language learners in the US and France via international videoconferencing. The research project aimed at identifying the morphosyntactic and discourse difficulties experienced by American second language learners interacting with native speakers of French. She found that much of the language use that took place during the conference was beyond these learners' capabilities, due in part to heightened language classroom anxiety, and in part to differences between the variety of French learned in American schools and the French spoken by educated native speakers. In a particularly useful study, Phillips (2010) investigated the development of L2 oral production among young learners and her findings suggest that pupils of both lower and higher abilities tended to see videoconferencing as helpful in learning to speak French; good students were highly motivated by their videoconferencing participation and lower ability students benefitted with increased confidence in speaking.

Unlike most of the studies on videoconferencing and language learning (including those mentioned above) that focused on interactive contexts with native speakers or expert speakers, this article aims to discuss the role of videoconferencing in fostering the development of oral production in English among native speakers of Polish and Spanish, in both cases learners of English as a foreign language.

4 Description of the Research Project

This small scale study attempts to contribute to our understanding of how videoconferencing can be used as a tool for teaching speaking in a foreign language. Yet, from the very outset, we need to be aware of its limitations, as the sessions were not recorded, and thus measuring such components of successful language performance as complexity, fluency and accuracy (Skehan 2009) was not possible. The results of the study will be discussed on the basis of the questionnaires completed by the Polish participants at the end of the project.

4.1 The Context and Objectives of the Project

The project took place from May to June 2011 at University of Bielsko-Biała in Poland. At this point, it is important to mention that it was designed and organized in collaboration with Professor Veronica Colwell from the University of León, and formed part of a series of similar projects carried out between the two institutions

since March 2011 (cf. Loranc-Paszylk 2011). All the participants were students reading for a B.A. in English.

The main aim of this project was to allow the students the opportunity to develop their speaking skills in English by preparing for and participating in a series of interactions in the form of job interviews via videoconferencing. As a result, we decided to work within the framework of task-based instruction, as it involves learners' active participation in sharing and exchanging information through problem-solving situations and triggers meaningful use of the target language (Willis 1996). Consequently also the use of new technologies (e.g. videoconferencing) was meant to expand students' communicative experience, as they do not live in a cosmopolitan area or one particularly frequented by tourists and thus have few opportunities to interact in English with foreigners, let alone native speakers of English.

It is also important to mention that our project was based on a genre of a job interview. Genre was defined as a macro level concept, a communicative act within a discursive network; it deals with repertoires of typified social responses in recurrent situations (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995). For the task-based activity of focusing on a job interview it involves a set interactional pattern with typical questions and predictable stages to be expected by the interlocutors.

Being placed within the context of the videoconferencing project, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent will the videoconferencing task contribute to the learners' self-confidence as regards speaking skills relevant to the job interview genre?
2. To what extent will the videoconferencing experience enhance the participants' awareness of gaps in their interlanguage during negotiations of meaning?

4.2 The Participants

The group of 24 Polish students from University of Bielsko-Biała took part in the project. They were all completing their second semester of a BA English degree, all between 19 and 20 years old, and residing in the Bielsko-Biała region. Their English language competence could be described as ranging between B1 and B2, according to the *Common European framework of reference for languages*. Based on a pretreatment background questionnaire, we found that 3 participants admitted that they had not yet had any opportunity to communicate with a foreigner in English, and another 7 students described their real-life interaction with foreigners as very occasional and involving an exchange of basic information. The selection of the Polish participants was not random since they were asked to join the project as a part of their course requirement.

The group of 9 B.A. students from the University of León in Spain was comparable with respect to the profile of their studies and average age, although their language level was perhaps more differentiated: generally between B1 and C1.

They were all 2nd year students in their 4th semester of a B.A. English degree, 20–21 years old. There was 1 Erasmus student from France and 8 Spanish students who were all the residents of the local area. Two of the participants from the University of León voluntarily took part in the project for the second time, having worked in its first edition.

4.3 The Procedure

In this section, we present a short description of the project with particular attention paid to the description of stages that make up the task-based activity.

As part of the project requirement, the students completed two desktop video-conferencing assignments in the language lab, where one room was equipped with desktop videoconferencing capabilities. The videoconferencing sessions were conducted in a language lab equipped with the Polycom® HDX 7000™ video-conferencing system. The equipment allowed for image transmission at a resolution of 1,280 × 720 and a speed of 30 frames/s, (720 p). The quality of the transmission was superb: HD voice, HD video and HD content. The device established the Internet connection directly, by dialing to other endpoints (IP address).

Like in the first edition of the project (Loranc-Paszylk 2011), the students had to perform the tasks both as members of a recruiting team and as individual candidates for particular jobs. This way of organizing the assignments aimed to exploit the full potential of the videoconferencing sessions and to maximize the learning experience. The project consisted of a number of steps described below.

Step 1: Preparing job advertisements Students from both universities were organized into small teams consisting of 4 or 5 participants and each group was responsible for designing one job advertisement for the local job market that would be suitable for a student applicant from Spain or Poland respectively. The 5 job advertisements were subsequently sent via e-mail to the other station, and job advertisements were received in turn from Spain or Poland.

Step 2: Preparing for the job interviews This stage involved both written and oral tasks, as well as individual and group work. First, we will discuss the individual assignments linked with the students' roles as applicants and then we will describe the group work tasks based on the students' roles as members of the recruiting teams.

- The Polish students as individual applicants had to apply for two job offers selected freely from the ones sent from Spain. A session devoted to an analysis of CVs and covering letters was carried out in class and, after training, the students were instructed to write and send via e-mail their application packs including both documents. Further to this, the students took part in a few sessions based on listening to several podcasts and recordings of authentic job interviews carried out in English. The recordings were also available for extensive listening out of class on the Moodle platform. The listening sessions were followed up by a

discussion aimed at identifying the typical stages of a job interview, and also enumerating typical questions asked and appropriate answers. As a final task at this stage of the project, the students were asked to prepare individually a written scenario for their own job interviews in the roles of candidates.

- The teams—authors of a given job offer—collected the applications sent by the Spanish students and selected suitable candidates whom they would invite for an interview based on the applications received. Further to this, they had to prepare questions for the candidates and establish assessment criteria for speaking in English. All groups had to prepare their own criteria which were later presented in class, discussed and revised, until one final version of the assessment criteria framework was agreed upon by all the teams.

Step 3: The job interviews At the most important stage of the project, the students were again working both in groups and individually. As individual candidates, they had to participate in at least one job interview led by the team from the partner university via videoconferencing. The time allowed for each interview was 10–13 min. As members of the recruiting team, the students had to conduct a few job interviews via videoconferencing, then evaluate and conduct an internal review of the candidates, select the most successful ones and, finally, notify the candidates about the outcomes of the recruiting process via e-mail.

Finally, at the last stage of the project, we asked the Polish participants to fill in an anonymous evaluation questionnaire that consisted of eight 4-point scale close-ended questions and two open-ended questions. The analysis of these responses provide insights into the participants' experience from a first-person, retrospective point of view, and most of all, allows us to answer the research questions posed in the previous section.

5 Results of the Research Project

Tables 1, 2 and 3 provide a summary of the responses to the close-ended questions (Q1–Q8) with the mean, standard deviation and the mode for each question, and the participants' responses to the open-ended questions (Q9 and Q10).

Table 1 presents a summary of responses to the close-ended questions (Q1–Q4), with the participants responding on scale of 1–4 (1—"strongly disagree" and 4—"strongly agree"). The results obtained suggest that the videoconferencing sessions contributed to building up the participants' self-confidence with regard to the pragmatic competence in English. Most of them admitted that after the videoconferencing experience they would describe their communication skills in English as sufficient to take part in a job interview in this language (Q1, with the mean of 2.92 and the mode of 3).

Furthermore, the videoconferencing sessions with the Spanish students apparently acted as a strong stimulus for speaking, as the majority of the students agreed that they were more motivated to speak in this new context than during a standard

Table 1 Results for close-ended questionnaire items (Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4)

N (24)	Mean	Standard deviation	Mode
Q1. Thanks to the videoconferencing project my communication skills in English are sufficient to take part in a job interview	2.92	0.84	3
Q2. Students are more motivated to speak during videoconferencing than during standard classes	3.42	0.76	3
Q3. The videoconferencing session made me realize that I should improve my speaking skills	3.86	0.43	4
Q4. The videoconferencing session made me realize that I should improve my vocabulary and grammar	3.61	0.52	4

Table 2 Results for close-ended questionnaire items (Q5, Q2, Q3 and Q4) rating the VC experience in terms of learning gains

N (24)	Mean	Standard deviation	Mode
Q5. Evaluating somebody's speaking performance in English	3.23	0.47	3
Q6. Anticipating and answering questions asked by job interviewers	2.96	0.84	3
Q7. Self-presenting—talking about my strengths and weaknesses	3.17	0.71	3
Q8. Interaction/conversation management: sustaining conversation, asking questions as interviewers	2.65	0.87	3

conversation class (Q2, with the mean of 3.42 and the mode of 3). The answers to the next questions strongly suggest that interaction with the Spanish learners enabled the Polish students to notice the gaps in their interlanguage. The participants almost unanimously admitted that the sessions made them realize that both their speaking skills as well as vocabulary and grammar were not on the satisfactory level and needed to be improved. The results also show that there was little individual variation in the responses to Q1, Q2, Q3, or Q4 as the SD value is low and never exceeds 1.

Table 2 shows the responses to further close-ended questions (Q5–Q8); at this point, the participants were asked to rate the videoconferencing experience in terms of learning gains on a scale of 1–4 with (1—"very little" and 4—"definitely a lot"). The findings demonstrate that in the participants' opinion the videoconferencing sessions were quite effective with respect to several learning gains, such as, most of all, applying some assessment criteria to speaking performance (the mean of 3.23), anticipating the recruiter's questions, self-presenting and conversation management.

Finally, some dominating tendencies in answers provided to the open-ended questions (Q9 and Q10) are summarized in Table 3, selected responses have been included as examples. Those answers seem to confirm the overall positive findings

Table 3 Summary of the responses to the open-ended questions (Q9 and Q10)

N (24)	Dominating tendencies	Other interesting comments
Q9. Please enumerate two the most valuable aspects of the videoconferencing project	1. Practicing speaking English with foreigners or foreign language learners with different accent 20 answers (83 %)	"I had a chance to see how it is when you have a job interview"
	2. Developing communication skills and preparation for a real job interview)—16 answers (67 %)	"It was valuable to listen to Spanish people's accent and get to know how they speak English"
	3. Critical reflection concerning language level; noticing gaps in one's interlanguage—8 answers (33 %)	"Face-to-face contacts which allowed training English on the new level. I makes our self-confidence grow"
		"I know what I should improve now"
Q10. Please enumerate two the most difficult aspects of the videoconferencing project	1. Stress largely limiting the performance—24 answers (100 %)	"One of the most difficult aspects was stress because of which I couldn't present myself in a calm way—too many people were watching me!"
	2. Understanding different accent of interlocutors—16 answers (67 %)	
	3. Time pressure in providing response to questions—8 answers (33 %)	"Once or twice I didn't understand what the Spanish people were saying to me, so I think that I should practice more and improve my listening and speaking skills"
		"It was difficult to speak face to face"

obtained in the previous sections of the questionnaire. The responses to Q9 show that the vast majority of the participants (83 %) valued the most the opportunity to interact in real time with foreigners in English. The development of pragmatic competence with respect to the job interview context was also frequently mentioned (67 % of the participants indicated such an advantage). The number of participants reflecting critically on their own individual language level is definitely worth signaling, and although we did not investigate individual learner differences, the fact that 33 % of the participants admitted that they had noticed gaps in their interlanguage might be quite significant.

In their responses to Q10, all the students mentioned stress as a factor that largely limited their performance; some of them even described such stress as resulting from the act of 'speaking face-to-face'. Difficulty in understanding a different accent of the interlocutors came as a second most difficult aspect of the interviews. Fewer answers (33 %) indicated the time pressure involved in answering the interlocutors' questions as another significant difficulty.

The findings suggest that the answer to the first research question—"To what extent will the videoconferencing task contribute to learners' self-confidence as

regards speaking skills relevant to the job interview genre?"—seems to be affirmative. The results reported in Tables 1 and 3 suggest that the videoconferencing sessions contributed to building up the participants' self-confidence with regard to their pragmatic competence in English. The most frequent response to the statement: "Thanks to the videoconferencing project my communication skills in English are sufficient to take part in a job interview" was "I agree" (the mode of 3). The development of such subskills as anticipating and answering questions asked by job interviewers, self-presenting—talking about one's strengths and weaknesses, interaction/conversation management—sustaining conversation, or asking questions as interviewers was also reported by the participants (see Table 2). Moreover, 67 % of the Polish students indicated the development of communication skills and preparation for a real job interview as one of the two most valuable aspects of the project. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the marked tendency present in a considerable number of answers to the open-ended Q10 (see Table 3). It should be emphasized that all of the participants pointed to speaking anxiety and signaled the role of stress as the most difficult aspect of the videoconferencing project. While it seems rather clear that the videoconferencing task contributed to boosting the learners' self-confidence as regards the speaking skills relevant to genre of job interviews, we may assume that stress, as a major obstacle in the videoconferenced interactions, possibly resulted in lowering their individual performances.

The second research question—"To what extent will the videoconferencing experience enhance participants' awareness of gaps in their interlanguage during negotiations of meaning"—can also be answered in the affirmative. The participants most frequently marked the answer "I strongly agree" when responding to the following statement: "The videoconferencing session made me realize that I should improve my speaking skills/vocabulary and grammar" (see Table 1). It is also worth noting that 33 % of the Polish students considered the enhanced awareness of gaps in their interlanguage as a valuable aspect of the videoconferencing project (see Table 3, Q9).

The results obtained by means of the questionnaire also suggest that the participants seemed to consider the whole activity as highly authentic and close to a real-life situation. They generally agreed with the statement that students are more motivated to speak during videoconferencing than during standard classes (see Table 1). As a matter of fact, the visual contact allowed by the videoconferencing mode added a lot of authenticity to the whole recruitment process—the Polish participants often referred to the interactions with the Spanish interlocutors as 'face-to-face' (see Table 3), the students interviewed as candidates were stressed out because of being watched and evaluated by the whole recruiting team, and the students performing as recruiters could also assess the candidate's body language. This might confirm the findings of Kim and Craig (2012) or Yanguas (2010) that suggested no significant differences between face-to-face and videoconferenced performances.

On the other hand, in the light of findings reported by Fuller et al. (2006), it appears that a particular set of individual characteristics, such as anxiety associated with computers and apprehension of oral and written communication, can influence learning in a technology-mediated environment and they are influential factors in an

individual's e-learning experience. Such claims may shed some interesting light on the results of the questionnaires completed by the participants who pointed to stress as the most difficult aspect of the videoconferencing experience.

The project might also be summed up by applying the evaluation criteria for videoconferencing-based tasks, as suggested by Wang (2007, p. 593) who modified the measures for *CALL task appropriateness*, formulated earlier by Chapelle (2001). On the basis of the data collected by means of the evaluation questionnaire completed by the participants, the teacher's personal observations and the post-session informal interviews we might suggest that the results of our project have met Wang's evaluation criteria to a large extent.

First, the *practicality* of the videoconferencing tools to support task completion was achieved. Both the video and audio quality during the sessions were excellent and allowed task completion without any breakdowns in communication. All the participants were very positive about the technological capabilities of the video-conferencing system.

The second criterion, *language-learning potential*, was met successfully, especially from the perspective of the development of communicative competence. The tasks involved in preparing for the interview which were based on text-analysis and subsequently evaluating speaking performance made the participants focus on several linguistic forms, whereas performing such oral activities as self-presentation, answering questions asked by job interviewers, and overall conversation management were more focused on meaning and contributed to the development of strategic and discourse competence. As indicated in the answers to the open-ended questions, the participants highly valued the project for allowing them the opportunity to develop communication skills relevant to the context of a job interview, to experience being a candidate/recruiter in a job interview, and to interact with foreigners in English, which might have a positive effect on the level of their sociolinguistic or pragmatic competence.

The tasks were of moderate difficulty, thus fulfilling the *learner fit* criterion. We noted correspondence between the level of the difficulty of the tasks and the level of proficiency of the learners from both Polish and Spanish groups. Moreover, as mentioned above, the participants from both groups had a comparable level of proficiency in English.

As for the fourth criterion, *authenticity*, described as correspondence between the videoconferencing activities and target language activities of interest to learners outside the classroom, the results were also positive. Practicing job interviews was an advantage of the project, as it focused on developing skills useful in the real world. Another important aspect constituting the authenticity of the project was interaction with foreigners in English. The combination of interlocutors involved in the project will surely have given the participants the opportunity to become exposed to and familiarize themselves with English spoken with a foreign accent. Greater sensitivity to diversified accents in English seems to be a must in today's world of differing *Englishes*.

Finally, the fulfillment of the last criterion, *the positive effects of the videoconferencing tasks on the participants*, can be well illustrated by the participants'

comments concerning enhanced self-confidence and increased motivation in learning English thanks to direct contact with foreign students. As we can see from the participants' rating of their learning gains, they commented almost unanimously that the project was a positive learning experience. They also valued the fact that it was a peer-to-peer international project that had provided them with a unique opportunity to interact with peers from a different country who had chosen the same program of study.

It should be noted at this point that the results reported above correlate with the findings of the study which focused on the Spanish participants, undertaken by Colwell O'Callaghan (2012). They suggest that an approach that employs video-conferencing, involves spoken interaction, and at the same time addresses learners' perceptions of their own and others' strengths, weaknesses and coping strategies is highly valued and genuinely motivating for learners.

6 Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that videoconferencing can offer a great potential for learning. The following discussion highlights the aspects that may have affected the participants' performance, as well as tendencies that were reflected in the evaluation questionnaire.

The interactions conducted via videoconferencing were based on a series of job interviews. In Bygate's (1987) functional analysis of speaking, the genre of job interview could be classified as an example of an *interaction routine*, or a predictable pattern of interaction. Therefore, explicit instructions as well as focus on spoken samples of job interviews were an essential element of pre-task training (Bygate and Samuda 2005). We may also assume that predictability of the interactions may have affected the level of participants' self-confidence.

Furthermore, we believe that another possible reason for the effectiveness of this project would be appropriate task design that allowed learners to pay more attention to the selection and monitoring of appropriate language. As Takimoto (2007) claims, the development of L2 pragmatic proficiency can be influenced by manipulating input. In our project, the students had many opportunities to manipulate source materials (via comparing, contrasting, evaluating, creating, see Bloom 1977), which might have contributed to noticing gaps in their interlanguage as well as better retention of the material.

An important principle taken into consideration when designing the task was adopting a register-sensitive approach advocated by Rühlemann (2008). In his view, when teaching the spoken language educators should aim at bringing classroom English into closer correspondence with the language actually spoken. That is why, we decided to provide the participants with a wide choice of listening exercises for self study to expose them to *spoken,* rather than written samples of language typical for the context of a job interview (mainly podcasts of different job interviews).

Finally, it has been reported that when students prepare their projects for videoconferencing, close collaboration among participants, interactivity and a brisk pace of delivery strategies all increase their motivation to learn and to perform well (Martin 2005; Lee 2007). The analysis of the questionnaire responses clearly confirm the occurrence of these benefits.

7 Conclusions and Implications

While considering careful task design to be an essential element of a videoconferencing project (Lee 2007), we might expand the language learning potential into further specification with the following recommendations for videoconferencing sessions focused on developing speaking skills among L2 learners:

- applying strategies that would aim at lowering anxiety and communication apprehension among the participants, for example: exposing the students to a different accent of the interlocutors prior to the actual videoconferencing might have an advantageous influence on speaking performance;
- providing a model of spoken language for the participants of the videoconference; such exposure might be of vital importance, especially when we lack the immediate feedback of expert speakers or native speakers in the interaction (i.e. the interlocutors are not expert speakers of the target language); furthermore, applying a register approach might be an advantage;
- creating a stimulating context for videoconferences—the profile of interlocutors might perhaps be a factor contributing to the effectiveness of the videoconferenced interaction; as was mentioned before, the Polish participants highly valued the fact that they had a unique chance to interact with their peers from Spain who were also studying English, which might have significantly enhanced the participants' level of motivation.

As a matter of fact, videoconferencing offers many of the advantages of the traditional face-to-face mode plus the advantages derived from the use of technological applications, allowing large distances to be bridged. It would thus seem logical that videoconferencing should be implemented successfully in language education, as it creates opportunities for foreign language teachers to gain access to new arrangements allowing for more authentic communication than is available in the traditional classroom interaction.

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