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Students' reflections on communication in Polish-Chinese tandems

Abstract

The study presents an analysis of Polish students' written commentaries on their oral interactions with their Chinese project partners. Students from two universities, in Poland and in China, communicated online, mainly in English, for a period of 10 weeks. In their weekly reports they commented on what they learnt and on the communication acts themselves. The analysis of their reports and the final evaluation provides insights into their perception of linguistic and intercultural exchanges. The corpora built from the students' commentaries made it possible to observe their awareness of discourse phenomena such as knowledge management. Other analysed qualities of student discourse such as coherence, novum versus datum, mode, tenor, level of formality of the language used, demonstrate the ways in which the students constructed meaning in the discourse and to what extent it influenced their understanding of the world. Through the participation in the course task aimed at developing intercultural, pedagogical, linguistic and technical competences, the Polish students had an opportunity to either verify or confirm their perception of China and the Chinese.

Keywords: tandem work, online communication, discourse, corpus

1. Introduction

Student distance interactions have had a long tradition in foreign language learning. Tandem work originated in the 19th century as a technique of learning two languages by two native speakers who take changing roles of a teacher and a learner in each of the languages. When Information and Communication Technologies, and especially the Internet, were introduced into education, student exchanges via email under the scheme of tandem work were immediately applied (Ayoun, 1996; Levy, 1997: 170-172). With the development of speech

transmission, oral communication in tandems with a focus on intercultural aspects was emphasized (O'Dowd, 2006).

This paper presents a project in which Polish and Chinese students communicated in tandems online and the outcomes of this collaboration. These outcomes can be analysed from various perspectives, such as content-oriented – illustrating what students learned about their cultures; pedagogical – presenting the role of international student exchanges online in teaching at tertiary level; educational – which means either providing students with hands-on experience in participating in international projects in order to prepare them as future language teachers for such tasks or implementing constructivist approaches in teaching; technical – using information and communication technologies for purposeful professional communication in foreign languages; linguistic – communicating online in a foreign language with foreigners; and intercultural – developing intercultural competence in an online contact (Gajek, 2013; 2014). This study, however, focuses on the characteristics of the discourse produced in the students' commentaries as Polish and Chinese students participated in intercultural discourse online. Guided by the academic teachers, who were the initiators of the exchange, and building on their linguistic knowledge and intercultural experience, the students created meaning of the world and constructed a new vision of the world within the discourse. The original student dialogues were not available for the analysis because recording of students' oral communication for further linguistic investigation may strongly influence their spoken performance and behaviour. This may be counterproductive to the expected pedagogical, motivational and linguistic outcomes. Nevertheless, student work always requires some form of monitoring. In this case they wrote weekly reports, which are the focus of this study. Thus, only some aspects of the discourse emerging from the project are examined, with special emphasis put on knowledge management and awareness of social factors presented in the reports. An analysis of the corpora made out of the students' reports and evaluation files illustrates the ways students participating in the discourse infer meaning and how they react to new meaning created.

Norman Fairclough (1992: 64) defines discourse as “a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning”. Following Fairclough's definition, Locke (2004: 7) observes: “Discourse(s) make the world meaningful.” By talking with their interlocutors the students participating in the project had a chance to notice and better understand people from a distant region and their cultural phenomena.

Selected elements of discourse are taken into consideration in this study. Firstly, the contextual factors such as roles, reasons, time, etc. that influence the students' language use are analysed. In the project described in this paper they were predetermined by the teachers. Secondly, the organization of knowledge is investigated, that is:

- Rhetorical management – participants know the aims and intentions of communication
- Referential management – participants address common references and opinions
- Thematic management – participants consider central elements of discourse development
- Focus management – participants observe the objects of communication and make sure they refer to the same things. (Chafe, 1979; 1980; 1987; 1994; Tomlin et al., 2001: 49)

Thirdly, the levels of coherence of the interactions are examined, that is:

- Global coherence – participants know what is the narration or conversation about
- Episodic coherence – participants focus on lower level units to work out the global coherence, but they have their own autonomous sense
- Local coherence – participants infer sense from single sentences or utterance (Tomlin et al., 2001: 49).

Fourthly, the following qualities of discourse are investigated based on Halliday and Hassan's (1985) taxonomy:

- the relation between the new and old information. That is, new information is not known (*novum*) information opposed to known, old (*datum*) information (Halliday, 1967a; 1976b, Tomlin et al., 2001: 63).
- the level of formality, both formality of the text and formality of the language
- the role of contexts perceived as the social context that is the situation and field in which the social character of the participants' activity is revealed
- tenor, which describes the social roles of the participants and their relations (temporary or long-term) in the dialogue and beyond it.
- mode, which involves the communication channel (oral or written). (Halliday & Hassan 1985: 12).

2. The context of students' communication

The 97 participants of the study came from two institutions: Institute of Applied Linguistics, University of Warsaw (48 students) and School of English and International Studies, University of International Business and Economics in Beijing (49 students). The project aimed at enhancing linguistic, cultural, intercultural, pedagogical and technical skills among students. The participants' task was to talk in Chinese-Polish tandems for one hour per week. They got 10 topics for a start, prepared by the Chinese partner and accepted by the Polish teacher. The themes for discussion covered selected cultural issues and they are presented below. On the one hand, such topics are discussed in typical language courses, thus it was assumed that the students were familiar with them. On the other hand, the topics reflected the basic areas of student life and experience, which was supposed to enhance the sense of learning and increase motivation. At the initial intercultural training session, the Polish students were instructed to search for universal human values and to identify similarities rather than differences. The following topics were suggested:

1. Hobbies: Story reading, mountain climbing, bar drinking, movie watching, majiang playing, sight-seeing, paper cutting, gardening, or whatever;
2. Campus life: Location, size of the university, college rankings, fields of study, courses taken each semester, students' workloads, student organizations, student activities, and parties;
3. Holidays: Major Chinese/Polish holidays, what people do during the holidays, and special or historical meanings of some of the traditional holidays, such as the Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Halloween, Independence Day, Valentine's Day, Qixi Day (or the Chinese Valentine's Day), Qingming Day (Ching Ming Day), etc.;
4. Cuisine: Major cuisines in China and Poland, well-known local snacks in your hometown and in the place where you go to college, your favourite snacks in the local area, and advantages and disadvantages of the local snacks;
5. Education: Compulsory education, costs of K-12 education (e.g., fees for luncheons, textbooks, school uniforms, activities, etc.), competitiveness for college admission (e.g., college entrance exams, high school grade point average (GPA), high school students' workload, extra hours for evening or weekend cram classes, etc.), higher education and

- employment prospects, relationship between what is specialised at college and choice of jobs, and level of education and job-seeking success;
6. Travel: Places of historical interest in your country/region, places you want to visit most (reasons, etc.), and your preferred transportation vehicle for travel (e.g., reasons, etc.);
 7. Leisure activities: Going window-shopping, visiting museums, playing Taiji in parks, workouts by going to fitness clubs, going to the movies, singing in a chorus, and others;
 8. Foreign language learning: Purposes of learning a foreign language, importance of learning a foreign language, foreign language courses offered by the university, ways of learning in language classes, ways of learning outside of classes, successful experiences of learning a foreign language;
 9. Business: Business etiquette (attire, dining, meeting, etc.), business travel (e.g., do you like a job involving lots of business travelling? etc.), business gifts, corporate bribes, business success (e.g., what are some of the crucial things that can help achieve business success when communicating with Chinese and Polish?), and other topics that may interest you;
 10. Employment: Your ideal profession (e.g., what and why?), your education and profession (e.g., how has your education built a strong foundation for your ideal profession?), current employment situations in your country, preparedness (e.g., what will you do if you fail to get a job in your ideal profession? Will you rely on social welfare? Why or why not?) (Zhang, 2011).

The students were informed that they could make use of these topics in their communication sessions, but they were not restricted to them. They could also choose other themes for their weekly conversations depending on mutual interest.

The students used Tencent Instant Messenger (Tencent QQ) with the interface in English to talk with their partners. It serves for video and audio communication and it has an English-Chinese and Chinese-English dictionary. At the outset of the project the teachers exchanged the QQ id numbers of their students and they distributed the numbers randomly among the members of the other group. Due to the time difference, the students had to negotiate the time schedule for their online meetings. After each session, Polish students reported

what they have learned. Their reports could include their personal impressions on the interactions. Thus, each student wrote 10 short reports, one for each topic. All of them were uploaded into a Moodle forum accessible to all participants. At the end of the project the Polish students filled in two evaluation questionnaires, one in English, one in Polish. As one topic was assigned per week the project lasted 14 weeks, including the initial period of matching pairs and the evaluation session. As the linguistic, intercultural and pedagogical results of the project are presented in other publications (Gajek, 2013; 2014) this paper focuses on the discourse investigated on the basis of the reports written by the Polish participants only.

3. Methodology

3.1 Materials

Four corpora of students' reports and comments were analysed in the study. As students wrote their reports either in Polish or in English (depending on their choice), two monolingual subcorpora were analysed separately. The Polish corpus (PLCD) consists of 7709 words (2487 types). The English corpus (ECD) consists of 63768 words (5137 types). The texts were examined to identify various discourse phenomena. The analysis involved both the entire corpus of reports as well as 10 separate subcorpora including reports from each week. To complement the analysis and interpretation of the results two other corpora were built. They consist of the evaluation opinions written by the students in English (ECE, 10236 words, 1310 types) and in Polish (PLCE, 5362 words, 1822 types).

3.2 Methods of analysis

There are two approaches to the use of corpora in discourse analysis – *corpus-based* and *corpus-driven* (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001: 65). In *corpus-based* research, the data are used to expound, test or exemplify theories and descriptions. The selection of examples helps to support arguments or to validate statements. This approach is to confirm the researcher's hypotheses. *Corpus-driven* research starts by investigation of the evidence and it generates theoretical and descriptive statements which – as Sinclair (1991: 4) puts it – clearly “reflect the evidence”. This analysis proceeds in a more inductive way, i.e. “the corpus itself is the data” (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001: 65). What is more, “a corpus is the main or

only source of the data" (Baker, 2006: 16). Both approaches were used for the examination of students' reports and evaluations.

3.3 Findings: Students' reports

48 Polish students communicated with 49 Chinese students mainly in English with the use of various digital tools. They also tried to communicate in Chinese, as some Polish students knew basic Chinese, and some Chinese students wanted to learn some phrases in Polish. They worked in tandems for ten weeks. They were aware of the context of the discourse: they knew WHO they were – students of either Polish or Chinese University; they knew HOW they were expected to communicate – preferably synchronously via QQ, Skype, chat or asynchronously via any other means of communication only if spoken communication was hindered, as it was set in the task requirements; they knew WHY they decided to communicate – to fulfil a course task, to practice spoken English in a natural interaction, to get more intercultural experience, to get hands-on experience in educational projects, etc. (they had a choice, either to participate in the intercultural project or to do other tasks in the course); finally, they knew WHEN the communication took place – online – upon agreement of the tandem partners. In spoken interactions, the students exchanged information on the topics prescribed.

An analysis of each set of reports shows that the students were able to organise information gained in the online sessions. The knowledge management features based on Chafe' taxonomy, presented earlier in the text, refer to various qualities of the discourse. They are presented in the list below.

- Rhetorical management – At the beginning of the project participants focused strictly on the topics given. Then, as the topics overlapped and the interlocutors gained more confidence in interaction they were able to define their own aims and intentions of communication.
- Referential management – The participants were able to address common references and opinions as the topics covered universal human activities and values.
- Thematic management – The participants considered central elements of the discourse development. They were able to make its flow natural.

- Focus management – Participants used various means of communication such as pictures, Chinese – English dictionary entries available in QQ to make sure they referred to the same things.

In order to present the evidence for the claims made above, examples were drawn from the 10 subcorpora. Selected concordance lines drawn from the reports on the respective topics illustrate the Polish students' management of new knowledge gained from online conversations with their Chinese partners.

The selected examples of concordance lines for the keywords *like** and *love** drawn from the subcorpus on Hobbies illustrate the information the students got about their interlocutors' individual preferences, hobbies, and ways of spending their free time.

1. ... ng in a dormitory. In her free time she [likes] watching American movies and going swim ...
2. ... ier for me. That's nice of him. Mike [likes] doing sport. Actually, talking about hi ...
3. ... hobbies he told me only about sport. He [likes] practising three sports, i.e. basketbal ...
5. ... (so now he's in my good books :) and he [liked] watching volleyball matches although he ...
6. ... her hobby she told me that she doesn't [like] to go out in the evenings, but she love ...
7. ... hat she loves to buy, she said that she [likes] buying everything. Whenever she's sad o ...
9. ... o near the sea. In her free time she [likes] shopping, Jenny's also very outgoing pe ...
11. ... ther a stay-at-home type of person. She [likes] watching TV shows, reading – especially ...
14. ... ai, who studies finance in Beijing. She [likes] jogging and Chinese music and she sent ...
16. ... ly childhood. What's more, Wenjun, just [like] me, loves watching The Big Bang Theory ...
17. ... y often and she misses them a lot. Yang [likes] relaxing music and watching movies, espe ...
21. ... , Harry Potter and Titanic. She doesn't [like] reading books though. I found out that ...
22. ... essie is a great fan of American series [like] "The Vampire Diaries" as "vampires a ...
25. ... ut everything, hobbies included. Shawna [likes] playing badminton and tennis in his fre ...
27. ... and poker. She can't play majjang. She [likes] travelling and next week she will see t ...
30. ... rs to spend time on his own although he [likes] interacting with others. Shi is also ve ...
31. ... orld championships. Chinese people also [like] badminton, football and basketball. The ...

1. ... like to go out in the evenings, but she [loves] to go shopping. When asked if the cloth ...
2. ... When asked if the clothes are what she [loves] to buy, she said that she likes buying ...
3. ... relationship. She added that she would [love] to travel to Europe for her honeymoon. ...
4. ... shows, reading – especially novels and [love] stories by various Chinese authors, but ...
5. ... not popular among Chinese students. She [loves] cinema and watches a couple of films ev ...
6. ... a couple of films every week. She also [loves] running: she runs for 20-25 minutes eve ...
7. ... ways when it comes to hobbies: we both [love] listening to some good music (here she ...

9. ... is very similar to me. First of all she [loves] swimming, especially in the sea. WenJun ...
11. ... she really enjoys Majiang playing. She [loves] flowers but unfortunately only very we ...
12. ... ory” :) The thing we have in common is [love] for animals, especially dogs. In case ...
14. ... Trade. We talked about our hobbies. She [loves] table-tennis, and she sometimes takes p ...
15. ... ects in China”. As for her hobbies, she [loves] playing basketball (she is in a basketb ...
16. ... ountain climbing and reading books. She [loves] climbing and her favourite montain is t ...

In the Campus Life subcorpus, the keyword selected for examination was *student**. The examples of concordance lines provide the Polish students' insights into campus life in Beijing.

2. ... mes to business and economics colleges. [Students] choose their courses themselves. The ...
3. ... r courses themselves. There are many [student] organizations, for example, humanities, ...
12. ... that although there is a lot of foreign [students] who like going to bars and sitting ther ...
13. Na Zhao is a very good [student]. She studies hard for her exams and alw ...
42. ... ics and investment bank. Chester is in a [student] union as it provides several opportunit ...
43. ... there are no courses. During this year [students] can get an internship. In their free ti ...
48. ... ng. She lives in a dormitory with other [students]. During our conversation I discovered t ...

The keywords examined in the Holiday subcorpus were *holiday*, *festival* and *celebrate*. The selected examples listed below demonstrate the Polish students' perceptions of the meaning of the Chinese festivals and of the way they are celebrated in their interlocutors' country.

1. ... also called Moon Festival. During this [holiday] people eat mooncakes and also spent thi ...
2. ... Dragon Boat Festival (3 days), National [Holiday] (7 days), Mid Autumn Festival (3 days), ...
3. ... e calendar year, but that their biggest [holiday] is the Spring Festival, the Chinese New ...
5. ... Eric told me that the most important [holiday] for them is Chinese New Year called Spr ...
6. ... What is more, they have a quite similar [holiday] to our All Saints' Day called the Tomb - ...
7. ... graves of their relatives. An important [holiday] is the Dragon Boat Festival, which is c ...
9. ... e students do not even go home for this [holiday]. However, the New Year's Eve (which acc ...
12. ... d me, i.a. about the Qingming Day: this [holiday] commemorates those who passed away and ...

1. ... I learnt quite a lot about the Spring [Festival]. As my firend said, almost everyone is ...
2. ... event, he is also very busy. The Spring [Festival] marks the end of the winter season and ...
3. ... also learnt new things about Mid-Autumn [Festival], which is also called Moon Festival. Du ...
4. ... umn Festival, which is also called Moon [Festival]. During this holiday people eat mooncak ...

6. ... med The spring festival, the Mid-Autumn [Festival] and the Lantern Festival. Asked about h ...
 9. ... my brief description of it). During the [Festival] people reunite, spend a lot of time wit ...
 11. ... e on Jan22th. She's very happy that the [festival] is coming. Report 3 Agnieszka Bukows ...
 16. ... Mid Autumn Festival (3 days), Qingming [Festival] (3 days), Labour Day (3 days). During t ...

1. ... of the winter season and Chinese people [celebrate] new year. The event is spent with famil ...
 3. ... al in China is Spring Festival which is [celebrated] on the 1st of January of the lunar cale ...
 4. ... oximately 23rd of our January) when day [celebrate] the day, decorate their houses, make a ...
 5. ... urprising for me was the fact that they [celebrate] the Saint Valentine's Day in the summer ...
 8. ... and set off firecrackers. They also [celebrate] Christmas, but I was surprised to learn ...
 9. ... e comparing to our culture is that they [celebrate] Valentine's Day in July. Raport 3 (n ...
 12. ... tmas very seriously – only some of them [celebrate] it as we do. Most of the students do no ...
 14. ... ms vary regionally. The Chinese also [celebrate] their own Valentine's Day in July. They ...
 15. ... morates those who passed away and it is [celebrated] in the first 10 days of April (accordin ...
 23. ... a, who do celebrate Christmas. The most [celebrated] event in China is the Spring Festival. ...
 24. ... 's Eve. It takes place in spring and is [celebrated] among family members, who meet on diffe ...
 26. ... so known as the Chinese New Year. It is [celebrated] by the entire nation. Chinese people ma ...
 34. ... a far more important than Christams, is [celebrated] in a similar way to the one in Poland. ...
 45. ... All Saint's Day I described the way we [celebrate] this day in Poland. The Chinese equival ...
 46. ... equivalent – Qing Ming Day – is not as [celebrated] as it is in Poland. Chinese people also ...
 51. ... er day, Qixi. On Ching Ming Day people [celebrate] the day of their beloved dead ones and ...
 52. ... to graveyards. Generally, people do not [celebrate] holidays in a religious way, although s ...
 57. ... that the young people living in cities [celebrate] Christmas. For them, Christmas is still ...
 58. ... ther traditional festivals. The Chinese [celebrate] the National Day on 1st October to comm ...
 60. ... nment spends a lot of time and money to [celebrate] it, but for common people it is the lon ...

The most productive keywords in the Food and Cuisine subcorpus were *cuisine*, and *dish*. The selected examples demonstrate what the Polish and Chinese students learned about each other's food culture.

2. ... varies regionally. There are 8 types of [cuisine] in China. Chuan cuisine is famous in Si ...
 3. ... are 8 types of cuisine in China. Chuan [cuisine] is famous in Sichuan province in the no ...
 4. ... China, in Shandong province there is Lu [cuisine]. Zhe cuisine is mild and is famous for ...
 7. ... aro braised meat. A famous meal from Su [cuisine] is Lions head, which is made from pork. ...
 8. ... ns head, which is made from pork. Xiang [cuisine], on the other hand, is spicy, as for ex ...
 11. ... was a pleasure to talk with Eric about [cuisine] because, as I already mentioned, he lov ...
 12. ... of passion. He told me that the type of [cuisine] depends on the region and caan be very ...
 13. ... ed information about Chinese and Polish [cuisine] as well as our opinions on concrete dis ...

14. ... is not very fond of traditional Chinese [cuisine]. She said that her favourite Chinese di ...
 19. ... tc. According to Season the most famous [cuisine] specialty in Beijing is roasted duck, w ...
 28. ... re are eight different types of Chinese [cuisine] characteristic for different regions in ...
 29. ... comes to vegetables used in the Chinese [cuisine] the “bok choy” (a kind of Chinese cabba ...
 32. ... t introduction into the world of Polish [cuisine]: it is diverse and people with differen ...
 34. ... l, cream and eggs. So traditionally our [cuisine] is quite hearty. We have many kinds of ...
 37. ... told me a little bit about the Chinese [cuisine], which main component is rice. Yang lov ...
 40. ... for their sweet taste, whereas Sechuan [cuisine] is very spicy. There're some specific s ...
 42. ... , himself, asked a lot about the Polish [cuisine], my eating habits, eating habits of Pol ...

1. ... The most popular [dish] in China, at least in Beijing, is a rost ...
 2. ... eijing that specializes in serving this [dish], and, understandably, it's crowded. ...
 3. ... most traditional and well known Chinese [dish] is Beijing Roast Duck which is broadly ...
 4. ... ne. She said that her favourite Chinese [dish] was her mom's dumplings filled with por ...
 5. ... mes fast food. Her ultimately favourite [dish] is scrambled eggs with tomatoes. I was ...
 6. ... umplings are said to be the traditional [dish]. Chinese cuisine is very varied ...
 7. ... shes. I asked him, what is the typical [dish] from Hubei province (a place that he co ...
 8. ... itional dishes and it's Mike's mother's [dish] number one. The Chinese dumplings have ...
 9. ... for Shi to name one traditional Chinese [dish]. Shi and his family prefer to cook w ...
 10. ... uy bread and milk. Yampi's favourite [dish] is dumplings. She can even make it hers ...
 11. ... so attaching a picture of “nian gao”, a [dish] they eat during the Spring Festival and ...
 12. ... sts. Of course rice is the most popular [dish], eaten by Chinese people every day, and ...
 13. ... rd used in Polish to describe a one-pot [dish]), and then we eat it for 2 or 3 days. ...

In the fifth subcorpus on Education, the examined keywords were *education*, *student** and *school**. The examples listed below illustrate the students' new knowledge in this area and mutual interest in the education systems in their partners' country.

2. ... ams, because they count most. Higher [education] is paid, and many students are supporte ...
 3. ... China, I was the first one to describe [education] system in my homecountry and then it wa ...
 4. ... while it turned out that the stages of [education] are quite similar in our two countries. ...
 6. ... n China there are 5 years of compulsory [education]: 6 years of primary school and three ye ...
 8. ... ed. As it comes to fees, now compulsory [education] os free of charge. On higher education ...
 9. ... education os free of charge. On higher [education] level, however, students are obliged to ...
 10. ... ish students work during their academic [education] as it is not popular at all in China. F ...
 13. ... mpressed by the fact, how important the [education] is for Chinese students – although it m ...
 14. ... at for Chinese students in general good [education] is a guarantee for career and professio ...

1. ... t very big. They have nearly 8 thousand [students] and 400 faculties. As to college rankin ...
 2. ... mes to business and economics colleges. [Students] choose their courses themselves. The ...
 3. ... r courses themselves. There are many [student] organizations, for example, humanities, ...
 4. ... ties,sports,languages,bicycle and so on.[Students] have much fun in their organizations. ...
 5. ... mics. The total of about 20-30 thousand [students] study there, including many internation ...
 6. ... udy there, including many international [students]. The campus is located in the North Fou ...
 7. ... s she had not much time to take part in [student] life, now she has more time for it. She ...
 8. ... pular in China; clubs are expensive and [students] normally just get together, hava a dinn ...
 9. ... ijing by bus. But she said that most of [students] study far away from their hometown. Unf ...
 10. ... lives in the dormitory as most Chinese [students] do. She lives in 4 people room which sh ...
 11. ... eats the sense of integrity with other [students]. Sometimes she goes out with her friend ...
 12. ... that although there is a lot of foreign [students] who like going to bars and sitting ther ...

1. ... the university and final exams in high [school]. The students focus more on the entry e ...
 2. ... ince, she also went there to her middle [school] and to her high school (it is her homet ...
 6. ... l and three years of junior middle high [school]. Later there are optional high school a ...
 7. ... h school. Later there are optional high [school] and college. The education starts at th ...
 8. ... In China there is a lot of pressure at [school]. Teachers are pushing pupils to study, ...
 9. ... ng the pupils is also very fierce. High [school] is really important, so students try re ...
 10. ... hard in order to be admitted to a good [school]. There are interviews, schools ask for ...
 19. ... me). Chinese students can go to public [schools] (which are more socially accepted) or p ...
 20. ... nted. Chinese students should go to the [school] of the province they come from. If they ...

Two keywords were examined in the Travel subcorpus: *travel** and *place**. The selected examples the Polish participants' perceptions of the importance of travelling and visiting places of cultural value for both Chinese and Polish nationals.

1. Zi told me that she likes [travelling], but unfortunately she has never been t ...
 2. ... hat it's common for Chinese students to [travel] together. They usually dream of visitin ...
 3. ... riented, students are not encouraged to [travel] or do other things that are irrelevant ...
 4. ... When Yunqi was young, she often used to [travel] with her parents, but when she went to ...
 5. ... went to university, she also started to [travel] with her friends. She told me that alo ...
 6. . Gillian likes [travelling] but she doesn't travel a lot because sh ...
 7. ... illian likes travelling but she doesn't [travel] a lot because she can't afford that. Sh ...
 8. ... e has never been abroad. So far she has [travelled] only to other parts of China. Last summ ...
 10. ... broad one day. Chinese people – if ever – [travel] generally round the Asia. Popular touri ...
 11. ... absolutely amazing to find any Chinese [travelling] so extensively. Nevertheless she admitt ...
 12. ... e admitted that nowadays her countrymen [travel] more and more and even farther than the ...

14. ... an has never been abroad yet. When she [travels], she chooses some places near her homet ...
 16. ... ound the world share similar interests, [travelling] for example. Eric is very curious of ...
 22. ... the seaside. She says she would like to [travel] to Europe, especially to France. Her bi ...
 23. ... extremely surprised to discover that I [travelled] to China this summer. R ...
 24. ... in the report on holidays, Gao has not [travelled] abroad a lot in her life. However, when ...

3. ... trip at the end of the semester, find a [place] that they are interested in (e.g. the y ...
 4. ... diverse and there are many interesting [places] to see there. As the first and the most ...
 5. ... emperature there is lower than in other [places] because of the water. Among other touri ...
 6. ... planes are preferred to get to distant [places]. For example, it takes two days to go f ...
 7. ... et. When she travels, she chooses some [places] near her hometown. She mentioned a mou ...
 9. ... never been abroad. She has been to many [places] in China though. She told me that becau ...
 10. ... , and you can find many interesting new [places] and traditions. It is not very common t ...
 11. ... ture, so she enjoys visiting historical [places] in China. The Chinese historical archit ...
 12. ... mportant sites for tourists. The second [place] is of course Tiananmen Square (also in ...
 13. ... mportant events in Chinese history took [place] there. Huqiawen would like to visit Ja ...
 14. ... to study a lot. She visited some famous [places] in China, but she hasn't been abroad ye ...
 15. ... her here and show her some interesting [places] in Warsaw :-). Below you can see th ...
 16. Erica told me about some [places] of interest in China that she likes to ...

In the subcorpus on Leisure Activities, the keyword chosen for scrutiny was *time*. The selected examples listed below illustrate how the students identify the role of free time or lack of it in their lives, but also their views on the importance of leisure activities.

1. ... ves travelling but now she doesn't have [time] and money to go for a journey. When sh ...
 2. ... to go for a journey. When she has free [time], she always goes somewhere with her bes ...
 3. ... eradyn mentioned, ways of spending free [time] in China and Poland seem to be pretty m ...
 4. ... hinese partner prefer to spend his free [time] in an active way. He enjoys sports very ...
 5. ... tennis. However, he also likes to spend [time] with his friends. Often he visits karao ...
 6. ... one. Unfortunately, he didn't have much [time] for leisure lately as the exam session ...
 7. ... sitting on a comfortable sofa. At that [time] she feels very relaxed. If there is a c ...
 8. ... t(a) Gao does not have a lot of free [time] because of the amount of work at school ...

The most productive keyword in the Foreign Language subcorpus was *language**. The selected examples illustrate the students' approach this issue from various perspectives: educational, cultural, and personal.

1. ... ction than of her not comprehending the [language]. She practices her English skills every ...
 2. ... and she is very determined to speak the [language] fluently. I'm very impressed, for I do ...
 3. ... ly. English is the most popular foreign [language] in China, students seem to understand t ...
 7. ... in the country, where people speak the [language] you learn. Now she has a great opportun ...
 8. ... proper accent when they speak European [languages], and that makes them shy in front of fo ...
 9. ... ey are very determined to learn foreign [languages], as they believe this guarantees them a ...
 11. ... Zhao speaks good English and she likes [languages] very much. She was learning Korean some ...
 12. ... n told me that the most popular foreign [language] learned in China is English. People the ...
 13. ... le there rarely learn a second european [language], they prefer to choose other Asian lang ...
 14. ... uage, they prefer to choose other Asian [languages] like Japanese or Korean. Similarly like ...
 15. ... ly like in Europe, knowledge of foreign [languages] offers better career prospects. Gillian ...
 16. ... w she is quite proficient in using this [language]. She tries to learn it not only during ...
 17. ... na, there is a great demand for foreign [language] skills, especially in specific fields. ...
 19. ... ges. Ruan added that knowing foreign [language] is also important because it helps in a ...
 20. ... hem. As to academic teaching foreign [languages], it differs from university to universi ...
 21. ... ioned that the weakest point of Chinese [language] abilities is the speaking part – they'v ...
 22. ... could exchange our opinions about this [language]. She would like to speak French as well ...
 23. ... nch as well, but she is aware that this [language] is really difficult to learn, even for ...
 24. ... because I know how different these two [language] systems are), she is pretty good at it. ...
 26. ... is absolutely the most popular foreign [language], that quite many people know Russian, b ...
 28. ... China always have to choose two foreign [languages] to study (English is a must!). Her choi ...
 29. ... h is a must!). Her choice of the second [language] was French, but her French is still not ...
 30. ... he told me that the most popular second [languages] to be chosen by Chinese students are Ja ...

In the Business subcorpus, the keyword chosen for analysis was the word *business* itself. The selected examples indicate that the students perceive business as constant meetings, gifts and travelling.

1. ... versation with my Chinese friend about [business] matters, but she did not seem to be int ...
 4. ... commercial sector. Since China conducts [business] affairs mostly with the USA, businessme ...
 5. ... s business affairs mostly with the USA, [businessmen] from both countries need to know the ru ...
 6. ... e to globalisation some elements of the [business] etiquette became similar. This concerns ...
 7. ... should wear rather modest, conservative [business] suits and flat shoes. What is more, Chi ...
 10. ... racteristic in China. If you want to do [business] successfully with a Chinese company, yo ...
 11. ... ner. This is a special point in Chinese [business] etiquette. It is normal in china to sen ...
 12. ... tiquette. It is normal in china to send [business] gifts to partners to show your friendsh ...
 14. ... s it is more and more difficult to make [business] in China. She can see clearly the effec ...
 20. ... business ceremony. They prefer formal [business] attire and etiquette. I found it intere ...

21. ... resting when Ruan told me that southern [businessmen] prefer to travel a lot more than those ...
22. ... tion of people have already got used to [business] travel. As to corporate bribes, Ruan ...
24. ... t it:) She said she thinks a successful [businessman] in China should be "diligent, wise and ...
25. ... "order", which is an important part of [business] meeting in China. To my suprise, she sa ...

The keywords chosen for analysis in the Employment subcorpus were *China* and *situation*. The selected examples below illustrate the students' perception of the job market in China. They also demonstrate how the participants relate the situation in their partners' country to that in Poland.

1. ... ork. He just told me that employment in [China] is a difficult problem to tackle since ...
2. ... s a high level of sex discrimination in [China]. It is a lot easier for men to find a g ...
3. ... – reason why a lot more boys are born in [China] – families think boys are more valuable ...
5. In [China] employers are more eager to hire a man ...
6. ... lian would like to work in Beijing. In [China] there are millions of uneducated, poor ...
7. ... a lot about employment possibilities in [China]. As we both didn't have much to say in ...
8. ... opment and rather positive situation of [China] economy, the downturn has also taken it ...
9. ... to sucess in finding a well-paid job in [China] is to have a reach CV and finish many i ...
11. Yunqi told me that [China] has been implementing socialist market ...

1. ... onomic development and rather positive [situation] of China economy, the downturn has also ...
2. ... Zhangwei told me that the [situation] on the job market is pretty serious as ...
3. ... est, so it's another advantage. Current [situation] on the market is not too good because o ...
4. ... nt rate in China is significant and the [situation] is getting worse. It results from the f ...
5. ... asures to enhance domestic demands, the [situation] is more or less stable. Besides, Chinese ...
6. ... lso contribute to an improvement of the [situation] as, according to my partner, they prefe ...
7. Today I found out that the [situation] of young Chinese is similar to the one ...
8. ... difficult to find a good post since the [situation] on the market is tough. The global down ...
9. ... y are banking, economy and the law. The [situation] in Poland is similar – it is almost imp ...
10. ... i Jiaotong Universities. The employment [situation] is not satisfactory at present, as coll ...
11. ... welfare is low. Most problematic is the [situation] of small farms. They trade less and con ...
12. ... hobbies and interests. The employment [situation] in China looks quite bright but obvious ...
13. ... When it comes to the current employment [situation] in China, it is very difficult. There ...

The concordance lines selected from the ten subcorpora demonstrate the organization of knowledge management in each report. Rhetorical management was appropriate as the students always knew the aims and intentions of communication. The concordance lines confirm that the participants indeed talked

about the topic assigned to them. What is more, they were able to identify common opinions and references. The data indicate that they succeeded in finding shared views, so referential management was properly applied. The participants managed to develop the main themes properly (thematic management). Both the Polish and Chinese students seem to have focused on the same issues in their conversations and the Polish participants did not report any breakdowns in communication.

3.4 Findings: Students' evaluations

The corpora containing the Polish students' evaluations of the project provide an insight into the meaning they assigned to the experience of participating in the project and interacting with their Chinese peers. The analyses of the texts in the Polish and English subcorpora indicate that in many cases, the Polish participants changed their opinions on China, perceived thus far mainly as a supplier of popular goods. The Polish students admitted that they rethought many stereotypes. For some of them meeting a Chinese person for the first time and being able to learn about the Chinese culture was an experience of a lifetime. They recognised this opportunity as influencing positively their future contacts with the Chinese. They also observed increased openness to another culture in themselves and more confidence in intercultural contacts. Finally, they perceived this task more as a life experience than as a class activity.

For some of the Polish participants, the weekly conversations with their Chinese peers also provided an opportunity to reflect on their own culture. For example, the discovery that the Chinese do not drink alcohol at parties triggered a comment on the role of alcohol during social occasions in Poland.

In the course of the project the participants also became aware of the need for various strategies for explaining cultural phenomena. They described them verbally, but they also sent links to relevant websites or photographs or used English-Chinese dictionary inbuilt in the QQ messenger. The majority of the Polish students were satisfied with the successful communication and found it beneficial.

The analysis of the levels of coherence within the framework presented in section 1, and based on the students' topic reports and evaluations, demonstrates that they knew what the narration or conversation was about, which

points to global coherence in discourse. Some of them commented positively about the assigned topics as they provided the ground for interactions. However, a few students reported feeling limited by the topics, as they found them too basic. They also focused on lower level units of conversations to work out the global coherence of interaction, but they also used their own autonomous sense in interpreting new information (cf. section 1, episodic coherence). When the need to infer sense from single sentences or utterances became important (cf. section 1, local coherence) the students made an effort to fulfil their cognitive needs. In the case of linguistic problems they either switched to writing or they sent pictures of the objects they talked about. In the case of technical problems they changed the channel of communication by using email, Skype, other chat programmes etc.

The students' reports focused on recounting new information (*novum* – not known). They rarely reported on old information (*datum*) because of the task requirements, but also because of little prior knowledge about China. Indeed, very few students were familiar with aspects of the Chinese culture. Thus, much of the content of the weekly conversations with the Chinese peers was new to the Polish participants, which was assessed positively in the evaluations, as novelty raised curiosity and interest.

In terms of formality of the texts and language, the analysis of the reports demonstrates the qualities of academic prose, which does not allow for assessment of the style of their interactions.

As the social context of the situation in which the interactions took place was clear to both interlocutors, it is worth mentioning specific contexts described by the students. The aims of the exchange were different for Polish and Chinese participants. Students in both groups were assessed in a different way and consequently they used different strategies to approach the topic. They either followed the prescribed topics or felt free to extend them according to their interests.

Referring to the social character of the activities (cf. section 1, *field*), the students demonstrated an ability to identify individual opinions. They also noticed the importance of politeness in the language and interactions.

The last part of the analysis covers the social roles of the participants (cf. section 1, *tenor*). The students knew that their interaction was temporary, however, not limited to the course requirements. Some of them expected the

end of the interactions with the end of the project. However, some declared a wish to continue communication with their partners. A follow up study, one year later¹, confirmed strong bonds between some interlocutors. They perceived their online discourse as a valid experience even if their personal contact was unlikely.

As far as the means of communication is concerned (cf. section 1, mode), the students easily switched between various communication channels. Depending on the interaction at a particular moment they adopted a text type which was either expository – while presenting opinions or describing cultural phenomena, or pedagogical – while teaching the interlocutor phrases in Chinese or Polish, or persuasive – while justifying choices and plans.

Referring to Fairclough's concept of "constituting and constructing the world in meaning," the analysis of students' evaluations demonstrated that they were able to make meaning of the world. They verified stereotypes, changed attitudes or confirmed their prior knowledge. They changed the perception of China mainly as a mass producer of goods. In spite of different conditions and social practices in both countries, the participants found similarities in their social roles as students, their dreams and their expectations.

To both groups, English was a foreign language, which was a common asset enabling communication. To the Chinese students, learning the language was the main benefit, as some of them were very proficient, while a few had problems in oral communication. Among the Polish students the main benefit was the cultural knowledge, development of intercultural competence and a chance to overcome psychological barriers in communication.

In the reports the students also mentioned drawbacks of the project. A few complained about their partners' level of proficiency in English. The reported problems, however, did not concern the discourse or social relations. The most disappointing social fact was that one person on each side withdrew from the project. In addition, the students complained about technical problems, such as the low quality of voice transmission online and about time differences.

¹ Application for the European Commission's award *European Language Label*, 2013.

4. Conclusions

The outcomes of the analysis give insights into the characteristics of students' discourse in intercultural oral communication between Polish and Chinese students. Although there is no access to recordings of what was actually said, the examination of the students' reports shows that they could construct meaning of the world in communication with their foreign peers. The students were also able to control the essential features of the discourse, despite the geographical and cultural distance, in order to make the participation in the project a valid life and educational experience. The analysis emphasizes the role of the exchange in the development of students' confidence in maintaining satisfactory communication in intercultural contacts through practising solving problems they face in interaction. It was an added value to the project, which aimed at enhancing linguistic, cultural, intercultural, pedagogical and technical skills in students. It shows that European-Asian intercultural online projects may provide opportunities to build knowledge and manage discourse phenomena at the tertiary level.

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