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Towards a model of scaffoldings during multimodal online interactions in a teletandem environment

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how, during teletandem sessions, learners of Chinese and French as a second language provide each other with various types of scaffolding aiming at promoting their learning. Teletandem (Telles 2009) is a form of telecollaboration (Belz & Thorne 2006) exploiting desktop videoconferencing and based on the tandem method (Helmling 2002), where two learners of different mother tongues cooperatively learn each other's language. In particular this study is based on data (about 10 hours of recordings) belonging to a Sino-French Teletandem project developed at the Dalian University of Foreign Languages (China) : Teletandem Dalian (Cappellini & Rivens, *in press*).

Within a sociocultural framework (Lantolf 1994) based on the work of the Soviet psychologist L. Vygotsky, the metaphor of *scaffolding* (Bruner 1983) refers to what a tutor does in order to help a learner in performing an action in his *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD), that is an action slightly beyond his actual possibilities. However, scaffolding was theorized in an adult-child and expert-learner relationship. Our study aims at adapting this notion to teletandem learning, where not only there is an adult-adult relationship, but even the expert-learner roles need to be questioned (Cappellini & Rivens, *in press*).

To do so, we integrate the sociocultural framework with a conversation analysis (CA) framework (Develotte *et al.* 2011), taking into consideration the roles enacted during the teletandem interactions as well as the channels and modalities of online multimodal conversations. These include not only verbal and kinesthetic features similar – but not equal – to face-to-face communication, but also the written modality and other features of desktop videoconferencing environments (Lamy & Flewitt *in* Develotte *et al.* 2011).

The study shows that there are two main types of scaffolding during teletandem interactions. The first one, communicational scaffolding, is due to communicational breakdowns and could promote learning because of the double status of language in teletandem interactions: means of communication but also object of learning. This type of scaffolding usually involves a pair-pair relationships characterized by crossing expertises (Cappellini & Rivens, *in press*). The second one, tutorial scaffolding, takes place without relation to communicational needs and involves a tutor-learner relationship.

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