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## Video call or chat? Negotiation of meaning and issues of face in telecollaboration



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### ABSTRACT

In an attempt to evaluate the influence of the type of digital medium on language learner communication, this study examines *negotiation of meaning* during interaction between native speakers and non-native speakers of English in a task-based advanced second language classroom via two forms of real-time one-to-one computer-mediated communication: *video calling* and *instant chat-messaging*. It investigates the nature, scope, and possible patterns of negotiated interaction in both types of digital communication modes. Dyadic groups consisting of non-native speakers and native speakers from two different universities collaborated in a series of one-to-one digital real-time interchanges. The digital discourse produced during the telecollaboration sessions was analysed within the framework of the *negotiation of meaning* theory, following the Varonis and Gass model of non-understandings (1985). It was found that negotiation of meaning episodes occurred in both types of real-time interaction but that they yielded their own distinct patterns of negotiated interaction. The data suggest that communication through video calling triggers more potential loss of face issues for the second language learner than communication through chat, which has a direct effect on the trajectory and outcome of the interactions.

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## 1. Introduction

This article presents the findings of a study into second language (L2) learner initiation of negotiation of meaning during two modes of one-to-one synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC): video call and real-time chat. The aims of this study were to examine the relationship between negotiation configurations and the type of synchronous mode of computer-mediated communication, i.e. to investigate if and how the digital mode of real-life communication affects the ongoing interaction in a language learning environment; whether any consistent patterns can be observed for each mode of communication; and what causes these occurring patterns. Dyads consisting of undergraduate native (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of English carried out an L2 learning task using both video call and real-time text chat. The data – transcripts of the video call sessions and chat-scripts – were coded for negotiation of meaning episodes, and analysed for learner-initiated signals of non-understanding.

It is important to consider and investigate the possible effect of both of these synchronous computer-mediated communication modes on the dynamics of interaction, because real-time, one-to-one digital interaction is implemented

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more and more in educational language learning environments. The digital platforms that are now available within most educational contexts in many parts of the world facilitate communication and collaboration beyond institutional constraints and national boundaries, and provide educators with the possibility to create digital communication environments and forums (Belz, 2005; Kramsch, 1987; Prior, van der Laaken, & van der Zwaard, 2009; Prior, Johnson, & van der Zwaard, 2011; Thorne, 2008; Warschauer, 1996, 1997). Linking up students from different parts of the globe, which used to be an expensive and time-consuming effort involving plane trips and youth hostels, has, technically speaking, become a matter of acquiring the right equipment and downloading the appropriate software: interactive computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies in the L2 classroom give language learners the opportunity to collaborate with native speakers of the target language without leaving their own classrooms (Helm & Guth, 2010; Guth & Marini-Maio, 2010; Lamy & Goodfellow, 2010; Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008).

## 2. Issues in computer-mediated communication

Research studies have claimed a number of benefits of computer-mediated communication, especially in studies comparing written CMC interaction, such as text chat, and traditional face-to-face interaction. Beauvois (1992) indicated that participants communicating through text chat generally showed more motivation and produced a richer lexicon due to the non-threatening and comparatively anonymous mode of chat communication. Other studies comparing written CMC and non-digital face-to-face confirmed that text chat generally yielded higher learner participation and more equal footing, particularly because the participants felt less communication pressure (Abrams, 2003; Chun, 1994; Condon & Cech, 1996; Freiermuth, 1998, 2001; Freiermuth & Huang, 2012; Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2008; Meunier, 1998; Warschauer, 1997). More recent studies, however, have found contradictory results. In a study comparing the effectiveness of different types of digital and non-digital real-time communication, including video call as the digital equivalent of face-to-face communication, Yamaha and Akahori (2007) report that communication and comprehension through video call was the most successful because the participants felt reassured by the presence of their partners' image. Similarly, Yamaha (2009) and Ko (2012) found that the availability of the counterpart's image during communication creates an awareness of social presence, and enhances a more active and effective communication in an L2-environment.

### 2.1. Chat and video call: differences and similarities

The two types of one-to-one synchronous computer-mediated communication – real-time chat and video call – differ in various ways (see Table 1). Naturally, chat sessions are based on written texts, meaning that a message needs to be typed and can be modified, and reviewed before it is sent off. This makes turn-taking slower and more deliberate than in video call, which resembles face-to-face conversation in that it involves both audio and visual information exchange: the interactants see each other's image and hear each other's voices. It, therefore, includes prosodic, paralinguistic, and non-verbal features of communication and can be said to suffer from 'tyranny of succession' (Leech & Short, 2007), meaning that words or sentences that have been uttered can be modified but never erased.

There are also similarities. Both SCMC-modes have a significant common denominator: the communicative event is live, which means that messages are encoded and decoded during interaction in real time. Even though chatting is based on written text, it is still regarded as a speech-like modality because messages are sent back and forth during real-time communication: a "conversation in slow motion" (Beauvois, 1998) as it were, or "a quiet phone call", as Carl from the television show *The Simpsons* explains the phenomenon of written digital communication to Homer (cited in Pasfield-Neofitou, 2012, p. 5).

## 3. Computer-mediated communication and L2 learning

### 3.1. Negotiation of meaning in CMC

Negotiation of meaning can be defined as a series of conversational turns, usually initiated by the learner. Due to non-understanding, the conversational flow is interrupted and an interactional repair sequence is started, aimed at reaching

**Table 1**  
Comparing interaction through one-to-one chat and video calling.

One-to-one real-time chat	Video calling
Text-based: activity of typing and reading	Audio-visual: activity of speaking and listening
Intentional emotions through emoticons	(Un)intentional emotions
Non-adjacent discourse patterns	Sequential/adjacent discourse patterns
No image of counterpart	Image of counterpart (cyber face-to-face)
Slow turn-taking: time to encode and decode messages	Turn-taking 'suffers' from tyranny of succession (Leech & Short, 2007): words or sentences that have been uttered can be modified but never erased, and call for immediate reaction
Saved messages	No log of saved messages

shared understanding and solving the breakdown in communication. It is claimed to promote L2-acquisition, mainly because it forces learners to check and clarify utterances before the flow of meaningful interaction can continue. Since the early 1980s its benefits for L2 learning in the non-digital classroom have been widely investigated (Ellis, 2003; Gass & Mackey, 2007; Long, 1983a, 1983b; Mackey, Abbuhl, & Gass, 2012; Nakahama, Tyler, & van Lier, 2001; Pica, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1996; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987; Oliver, 2002; Varonis and Gass 1985a, 1985b). More recently, the development of network-based language classrooms and digital platforms has opened up a new arena of negotiation of meaning research.

Studies in this field generally investigate one type of digital communication, such as real-live chat (Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011; Fernández-García & Martínez-Arbeláiz, 2002; Kitade, 2000; Kötter, 2003; Lee, 2001, 2009; Shekary & Theririan, 2006; Tudini, 2003, 2007); or voice chat (Kenning, 2010; Kitajima, 2013). Other studies compare non-digital or traditional face-to-face interaction to chat (Chen & Wang, 2008; Freiermuth, 2001; Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Smith, 2003a, 2003b; Warschauer, 1997; Yanguas, 2010); or asynchronous (e.g. email) to synchronous computer-mediated interaction (Abrams, 2003; Perez, 2003; Sotillo, 2005; Stockwell, 2010). To our knowledge, no extensive research has been done into one-to-one video calling, or into comparing negotiated interaction in one-to-one chat and video calling in a language learning environment. We may therefore conclude that, although Stockwell (2010) claims that different modes of CMC directly influence how learners express and communicate their ideas, research on the effect of different modes of computer-mediated communication on the interaction between native speakers and non-native speakers, and ultimately on the L2 learning process, is still in its infancy and remains as yet largely unexplored.

### 3.1.1. The Varonis and Gass model

The so-called *Model of Non-understandings* (Varonis & Gass, 1985a, 1985b) is widely used to assess episodes of negotiation of meaning and has also been applied to digital L2 learning (Smith, 2003b; Wang, 2006; Yanguas, 2010). The model claims that negotiation of meaning episodes can be divided into two main parts: a trigger and a resolution:

TRIGGER	RESOLUTION
T →	I → R → RR

A TRIGGER (T) uttered by the speaker during interaction, is considered to be any part of the discourse that prompts non-understanding on the part of the hearer. During the RESOLUTION, the non-understanding episode is 'dealt with': the INDICATOR (I) is the episode in which the hearer signifies the non-understanding arresting the progression of the conversation. This leads to a RESPONSE (R) of the speaker to the indication of non-understanding. The final prime is the REACTION TO RESPONSE (RR) uttered by the hearer (and initiator of the negotiated routine), which usually marks the end of the negotiated routine, i.e. the non-understanding has been resolved and the flow of the discourse can continue. Examples of RR-utterances are 'Okay', 'I see', 'alright', or 'I understand'. They act as markers that signal a pop back to the dominant interaction. An example of the model at work is given in Table 2.

In Table 2, the word *figure* as expressed by the native speaker during the interaction serves as the TRIGGER (T) of the negotiation episode. The non-native speaker's subsequent explicit reply of 'A what?' serves to INDICATE that meaningful interaction, i.e. the horizontal flow of the communication, is temporarily suspended. The NS RESPONDS to the indicator by elaborating on the trigger in order to solve the non-understanding. With the NNS's utterance of 'Alright' (RR), the NS presumes that the negotiation episode has come to an end and proceeds the interaction.

### 3.1.2. Negotiation of meaning and issues of (loss of) face

As discussed above, SLA-research claims that negotiation of meaning is beneficial for the language acquisition process. In other words, the more language learners engage in negotiated episodes, the better; or, the more they indicate non-understanding, the better. As the Varonis and Gass model illustrates, negotiated interaction relies on one of the interactants starting up the negotiation for meaning by indicating non-understanding, resulting in a sequence of correction, repair, or abandonment.

From a socio-interactive perspective, however, initiating negotiation of meaning is a dispreferred repair sequence: in most situations people, whether they are language learners or not, prefer to wait for their interlocutor to resolve the trouble source rather than to explicitly ask for clarification or explanation (Schegloff, 2000; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977). This systematic preference for self-correction is closely related to the concept of 'face' (Brown & Levinson, 1978 [1987]; Goffman, 1967). Following Wagner-Gough and Hatch (1975), who criticized language research paradigms that isolated use of

**Table 2**

Varonis and Gass model with data and observations from study under discussion.

1.	NS	<i>There's a figure as well.</i>	TRIGGER (T)
2.	NNS	<i>A what?</i>	INDICATOR (of non-understanding) (I)
3.	NS	<i>A figure ... like a little statue.</i>	RESPONSE (R) (NS tries to solve the non-understanding by elaborating on the TRIGGER)
4.	NNS	<i>Alright.</i>	REACTION TO RESPONSE (RR)
5.	NS	<i>The figure is British</i>	Interaction has popped back up

language from meaning, and Block (2003) who stresses that SLA-research would benefit from a socially informed paradigm, Reinhardt (2008) calls for a synthesis of both the transactional-interactionist approach and the socio-cognitive approach to the analysis of negotiation of meaning, including issues such as face and solidarity.

In studies into NS–NNS interaction, then, we will need to concede that in negotiation of meaning episodes there are two forces at work: the social force of not wanting to admit to non-understanding due to issues of face, or what Ervin Goffman qualifies as “impression management”<sup>1</sup> (1959, p. 123), and a task-oriented-force of having to negotiate for meaning in order to finish a learning task successfully (Bannink, 2002).

Hence, the questions addressed in this study are if and how these issues are manifest in a digital setting when studying online interaction and how these forces are negotiated in different digital settings.

#### 4. The research project: design and methodology

This study is part of a larger digital task-based group-to-group collaboration project between two cohorts of Dutch and Australian students working together via a variety of digital platforms, both asynchronous (email, facebook, and wiki) and synchronous (live chat, one-to-one video calling, and group-to-group videoconferencing). This intensive, intercultural collaboration took place for the duration of one academic semester and resulted in a 50-min group-devised, digital theatre play that was performed to audiences at both sides through live interactive videoconferencing media. Specifically, the data derive from the one-to-one task that formed an intrinsic part of the group-to-group collaboration project.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the task was embedded in an authentic group-to-group task-learning situation with the real contextualized collaborative outcome of the digital performance. The goal of this study was not revealed to the participants.

##### 4.1. Research questions

1. How does the nature of the synchronous digital medium influence negotiated interaction? Are there significant differences in patterns of negotiation of meaning in online chat and video-call during one-to-one NS–NNS interaction?
2. Do social constraints, such as L2-communication apprehension due to issues of (loss of) face, influence negotiation of meaning episodes in online chat and video-call during one-to-one NS–NNS interaction? And if so, how?

##### 4.2. Participants

The participants in this study were sixteen undergraduate students: eight non-native and eight native speakers of English. The non-native speakers were Dutch first-year undergraduate students between 18 and 20 years of age. All had Dutch as a first language and a similar background in English-language education at secondary school (comparable to an International Baccalaureate Programme Diploma); their proficiency level in English can be considered as advanced. The native-speaking participants were third-year Australian undergraduate students of Drama and Education, between 21 and 24 years of age. None of the participants had ever telecollaborated on a one-to-one level in an educational context before.

##### 4.3. Task design: choices and considerations

A task on cultural humour was developed that would warrant NNS–non-understanding, even at an advanced proficiency level. In order to recognize potentially different negotiation patterns in both modes of interaction, a number of jokes were selected that were so culturally specific that even a native speaker of English of non-Australian origin would have to engage in negotiation of meaning in order to understand. In other words, there was a near certainty that the NNS would have to engage in negotiation of meaning in order to reach mutual understanding.

The task required the participants to devise a dramatic scene in which a Dutch immigrant, who had just arrived in Australia, is initiated into typically Australian humour and jokes. The ideas generated for this scene would be included in the final script of the digital theatre performance the groups were in the process of creating. Each participant was given five jokes on their task sheets: Australian jokes for the Australian students (see example in Table 3 below); Dutch jokes for the Dutch ones. The students were instructed to start the task by exchanging their jokes and by comparing and contrasting Dutch and Australian humour in the samples they had been provided with.

<sup>1</sup> Goffman (1959) compares the human self to a theatre: when we interact we are on stage where we have to put on a performance; when we do not interact we are off-stage, in the wings where we do not have to worry about impression management.

<sup>2</sup> Most L2-research projects are classified as either classroom-based or experimental laboratory-based, the settings of which may influence research findings (Gass, Mackey, & Ross-Feldman, 2005). Although the participants of this research study carried out the tasks in a computer lab after regular class time, due to its embedding into the larger ongoing group-to-group project it should still be considered as classroom-based research.

**Table 3**

Examples of Australian jokes as Australian NS had to communicate to Dutch NNS.

**Joke 1:**

A Pom, fresh off the plane at Sydney airport, is trying to negotiate Australian customs. Finally, when it's his turn to get his passport stamped, the customs officer (C.O.) starts rattling off the usual questions:

C.O. How long do you intend to stay?

POM – 1 week.

C.O. – What is the nature of this trip?

POM – Business.

C.O. – Do you have any past criminal convictions?

POM – I didn't think we still needed to!

**Joke 2:**

Q: How do you know if you're a bogan?

A: You let your 15-year-old daughter smoke at the dinner table...

...

in front of her kids.

#### 4.4. Procedures

Over a period of several weeks a total of eight dyads of NS–NNS ( $n = 16$ ) carried out the task. Participants were unknown to their overseas counterparts, apart from the occasional glimpse of each other on the screen during the plenary sessions. The non-native speakers conducted the task from the university computer lab (the researchers were present in case of technical calamities and to monitor time-on-task, but were not within hearing distance); due to the time difference between Australia and The Netherlands, the native speakers participated from their home computers. Both the native speakers and the non-native speakers were given the task without preparation time and without specific instructions other than those provided on the task itself. The participants were not given a specific time limit beforehand, although some dyads were told by the researchers to finish the task after an hour.

The task that each NS–NNS dyad performed was divided into two: the first half of the task was performed through live-chat, the second half through video call, or vice versa. In other words, each dyad needed to communicate through both modes of synchronous computer-mediated communication in a counterbalanced design. The Skype® video call sessions were recorded with Vodburner®, a licensed program, which allows clear split-screen visual recordings of both participants, for transcriptions and analysis of non-linguistic features (e.g. gestures, body language, and facial expressions). The Skype® chat sessions were conducted through Skype accounts created especially for the research study; Skype automatically saves the chat scripts (including intervals of time between turn-taking<sup>3</sup>), which can be accessed for analysis.

### 5. Data: background and analysis

The data collected for this study consist of approximately 8 h of transcripts of recorded audio–video communication sessions, and print-outs of one-to-one chat scripts from eight chat sessions. They offer examples of negotiated interaction in video call and in chat from two different jokes as communicated by different NS–NNS dyads. The negotiated routines have been coded for negotiation of meaning according to the Varonis and Gass *Model of Non-understandings* (1985a, 1985b), and the turns, including pauses in video call, have been numbered. Expressions of non-verbal, prosodic, and paralinguistic communication have been added in the observations-column.<sup>4</sup>

The data comprised of transcripts and chat scripts of the interactions of the following four task activities:

1. Getting to know each other;
2. Exchanging jokes;
3. General discussion;
4. Brainstorming for scenes for the digital theatre project, based on activities 2 and 3.

For this study only the learner-initiated negotiated interaction from activity 2 (exchanging jokes) was selected, mainly because this was the stage of the task where the core information had to be exchanged, and where the stakes of (not) starting up negotiation of meaning were high, especially for the NNSs: if the joke was not understood, the course and outcome of the entire task would be affected.

<sup>3</sup> This feature is important when conducting research into negotiated routines, since a lengthy interval between turn-taking could be noted as an indication of non-understanding.

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of simplicity, all participants are referred to as 'he', regardless of gender.

## 5.1. Data 1 and 2

In Excerpts 1 and 2 below, the Australian native speaker (NS) communicates two different jokes to the Dutch L2 learner (NNS). Both jokes have similar lexical TRIGGERS – bogan and pom<sup>5</sup> – and are negotiated by the same dyad during the same task-session: Excerpt 1 through video call and Excerpt 2 through chat.

Excerpt 1: Dyad 1; video call; bogan-joke.

Turn	Speaker	Transcript	Coding	Observations
1.	NS	Ok. Question: how do you know if you're a bogan?	TRIGGER	
2.	NNS	What? Say it again. I couldn't hear you.	INDICATOR	Clutches headphones
3.	NS	How do you know if you're a bogan?		
4.	NNS	What's a bogan?	EXPLICIT INDICATOR	
5.	NS	Someone that really has no manners, or class ... or anything like that ...	RESPONSE	NNS laughs Pauses (as part of the punchline)
6.	NNS			Pause – NNS does not indicate RR
7.	NS	... and the answer is ...		Pause
8.	NS	... you let your 15-year-old smoke at the dinner table ...		
9.	NNS			Pause
10.	NNS			Laughs
11.	NS	... in front of <i>her</i> kids		Emphasizes <i>her</i>
12.	NNS	Wow ...	REACTION TO RESPONSE	NNS fidgets and bites on his finger – laughs out loud again
13.	NNS	Alright ... I've got a really long joke		
14.	NS	OK		

In Excerpt 1, the negotiation routine is started up by the NNS in turn 2. He indicates, both verbally and non-verbally, that he encounters channel trouble, which results in non-understanding <(clutching headphones with both hands and leaning towards the screen) What? Say it again. I couldn't hear you>. Because the NNS appears to be blaming technology for his non-understanding, the NS responds by repeating the TRIGGER without providing any new input. This is an adequate response to the NNS's turn: he is neither more nor less informative than necessary ('maxim of quantity'; Grice, 1975). In turn 4, however, the NNS indicates non-understanding for a second time, this time with an explicit, unambiguous indicator that he encounters lexical trouble: <What's a bogan?>. The NS reacts with a definition of the trouble source in turn 5, and leaves a short pause (turn 6), presumably to give the NNS a chance to respond. When this does not happen, the NS pops back up to the dominant interaction and continues with the joke in turn 7. In turn 9 the NS inserts another pause. This can be regarded as the drum roll before the punch line, as indicated paralinguistically on the task sheet with three dots (see Table 3). The NNS, however, thinks the silence marks the end of the joke, or punch line, and starts to laugh (turn 10).

This laughter can be interpreted as a strategy to save his own face (in case of non-understanding), or alternatively, as a strategy to save the face of the NS (in case of understanding). However, whether the NNS pretends to understand or genuinely thinks this is the end of the joke, the short silence in turn 9, immediately followed by his laughter in turn 10, seems to be an expression of negotiation of face – socially desirable or appropriate behaviour in order to avoid loss of face – rather than negotiation of meaning or task-appropriate response. The alternative would have been for the NNS to *not* laugh and either to wait for the real punch line, or to indicate non-understanding for a third time in a very short stretch of discourse. However, despite the fact that negotiating for meaning would be in the interest of the ongoing interaction, the task and the tele-collaboration project, it is significantly absent. In his turn, the NS seems to guard the NNS's face by not explicitly stating it was not the punch line; instead, he proceeds to deliver the real punch line in turn 11.

In turn 12 the NNS laughs for a second time, once again indicating that he has understood and appreciated the joke. But the NNS's non-linguistic squirminess – fidgeting and biting his finger – could well be interpreted as an expression of discomfort as he probably realises all too well that his premature laughter gave away that he was avoiding loss of face (i.e. covering up his non-understanding by laughter) rather than negotiating for meaning in the interest of the interaction. Similarly, the NS does not comment on the NNS's untimely laughter nor does he attempt to explicitly check whether mutual understanding has been reached, i.e. whether the NNS has understood the joke. Instead, he shows solidarity with the NNS by concurring (in turn 14) with his counterpart's rather hurried suggestion to move on to the next task element in turns 12 and 13: <Wow ... alright ... I've got a really long joke >.

When we compare Excerpt 1 with Excerpt 2 – same dyad, different mode – we see a similar lexical TRIGGER – the word *pom* – but a markedly different negotiation pattern.

<sup>5</sup> Although most non-Australian native speakers of English do not know the word *bogan* either because of its cultural specificity, to a non-native speaker of English *bogan* is 'just' another word they are unfamiliar with, like the word *pom* in the succeeding joke.

## Excerpt 2: Dyad 1; chat; pom-joke.

Turn	Messenger	Chat script and time between turns	Coding
1.	NS	[10:18:13] A pom fresh off the plane at Sydney airport, is trying to negotiate Australian customs. Finally, when its his turn to get his passport stamped, the customs officer starts rattling off the usual questions:	
2.	NS	[10:18:30] C.O.: How long do you intend to stay?	
3.	NS	[10:18:40] Pom: 1 week	
4.	NS	[10:18:57] C.O.: What is the nature of this trip?	
5.	NS	[10:19:06] Pom: Business	
6.	NS	[10:19:28] C.O.: Do you have any past criminal convictions?	
7.	NS	[10:19:45] Pom: I didn't think I still needed to!	
8.	NNS		26-s pause
9.	NS	[10:20:11] It was so long and not very funny	
10.	NNS	[10:20:17] It made me laugh	
11.	NNS	[10:20:21] Well, laugh	
12.	NNS	[10:20:30] I justed <sup>a</sup> pushed some air through my nose hahahaah	
13.	NS	[10:20:40] Really I only liked the end part	
14.	NNS	[10:20:45] Yeah, me too	
15.	NNS	[10:20:50] But what's a pom exactly?	INDICATOR
16.	NS	[10:21:04] A British person	RESPONSE
17.	NNS	[10:21:07] Ahaa	REACTION TO RESPONSE
18.	NNS	[10:21:11] And why is it called a pom	Pushing down
[...]			
25.	NNS	Do they only use the word in Australia?	Pushing down
27.	NNS	Interesting, 'cause I've never heard the word before.	Pushing down

<sup>a</sup> None of the chat scripts have been corrected for spelling or grammatical errors.

In turns 1–7, the NS feeds the NNS short chunks of the joke, ultimately taking seven turns to get to the final punch line and giving the NNS time to process and digest each line. A socially appropriate response to the joke by the NNS, however, remains significantly absent: what follows is a pause of 26 s. The turn that follows (9) is taken by the NS who ends the uncomfortable silence with a meta-comment. Possibly in an attempt to save both his own face and that of his counterpart he makes a disparaging remark *<long and not very funny>* about the joke itself. This is followed by a response on the part of the NNS, stretched out over three turns. The first turn (*<it made me laugh>* (turn 10) is followed by a qualifying *<well, laugh >* (turn 11). The use of the discourse maker 'well' in the second turn suggests additional information about the laughter is about to follow (Jucker, 1993), which is what happens in the third turn *<I justed pushed some air through my nose hahahaah>* (turn 12). This sequence of turns seems to imply agreement with the NS's assessment of the joke as not being very funny. The next two turns of the exchange yield even more evidence for this interpretation. When, in turn 13, the NS modifies his response from *<not very funny>* (turn 9) to the more detailed *<really I only like the end part>* the NNS responds with an affirmative *<yeah, me too>* (turn 14).

Still, the NNS could be in over his head here: he has joined his counterpart in an evaluation of the joke and has therefore claimed understanding. In view of Excerpt 1 above, it is safe to say that, had this interaction taken place through video call, this may well have rounded off the interaction about the *pom*-joke. From a negotiation of face point of view, NNS has passed the point of no return here, since it would be inappropriate to start up negotiation of meaning after having already communicated understanding. However, in the next number of turns, the NNS does exactly that: he suddenly starts up a negotiation routine about the word *pom*, implicitly revealing that, in the previous turns, he only pretended to have understood and appreciated the joke, since without understanding the word *pom* the joke is perplexing. As opposed to the video call session, where the NNS explicitly indicated not to know what a *bogan* was, but left the NS's brief explanation for what it was, during the chat session he pushes down more: *<why is it called a pom?>* (turn 18) and *<do they only use the word in Australia?>* (turn 25). As an ultimate REACTION TO RESPONSE, in turn 27, the NNS admits never to have heard the word before.

So there are marked differences in the way non-understanding and the subsequent negotiation of meaning trajectories evolve in these data. Since we hypothesize that the specific mode of communication plays an important role here, we need to bring in different dyads to find out if the differences corroborate our hypothesis and are genuinely systematic.

## 5.2. Data 3 and 4

In Excerpts 3 and 4 below, the *bogan*-joke is negotiated by two different NS–NNS dyads. In Excerpt 3 through video call and in Excerpt 4 through chat.

Excerpt 3: Dyad 2; video call; bogan-joke.

Turn	Speaker	Transcript	Coding	Observations
1.	NS	<i>I don't think ... I don't know if you'll understand it, but ...</i>	Anticipating a trigger	
2.	NNS	<i>OK</i>	Continuation signal	Nods
3.	NS	<i>How do you know if you're a bogan?</i>	TRIGGER	
4.	NNS	<i>If you're a ...?</i>	INDICATOR (implicit – echo)	Leans toward the camera
5.	NS	<i>A bogan</i>	RESPONSE (minimal)	
6.			Non-verbal INDICATORS: mimicry and a lull	NNS: frowns – does not utter a response
7.	NS	<i>It's a very lower class Australian</i>	RESPONSE	
8.	NNS	<i>Oh, ok I'm not ...</i>	REACTION TO RESPONSE INDICATOR	Smiles Shakes head
9.	NS	<i>You let your 15-year-old smoke at the dinner table in front of her kids.</i>		
10.	NNS	<i>Yeah. Ok. Yeah</i>	REACTION TO RESPONSE (verbal and non-verbal)	Laughs Nods and smiles
11.	NS	<i>So yeah, we make fun of ourselves a lot ... and our language is a huge part of our jokes as well. And if you don't understand the language, it makes it hard to get the joke.</i>		
12.	NNS	<i>Yeah ... yeah</i>	REACTION TO RESPONSE	Evasive: Looks away from the camera, fidgets with scarf and hair

The NS opens with a pre-sequence (Levinson, 1983) in turn 1: <*I don't think ...I don't know if you'll understand*>, which makes non-understanding less face-threatening for his NNS counterpart. The NNS responds affirmatively with a continuer (Schegloff, 1982) <*OK*> (turn 2), encouraging his interlocutor to proceed. The NS then poses the question of the first part of the joke to the NNS without giving away the answer, as would be expected in the context of the type of joke during face-to-face discourse: <*how do you know if you're a bogan?*>. The NNS reacts by echoing part of the TRIGGER-sentence, without the trigger itself: <*If you're a ...?*>. This is an ambiguous INDICATOR of non-understanding that could either mean channel trouble (as in: *I haven't heard*) or lexical trouble (as in: *I haven't understood*). The NS's response (turn 5) shows that he interprets the echo as – the less face threatening – channel trouble: rather than rephrasing or expanding<sup>6</sup> on the word *bogan*, the NS merely repeats the word and leaves it at that. The NNS's frowning in turn 6 can be interpreted as a non-verbal INDICATOR of non-understanding and an invitation to repair, which shows that this response has not solved the problem. The NS now understands that the problem source is lexical, and what follows (turn 7) is an effectual response ('modified input'; Long, 1981) – <*It's a very lower class Australian!*> – that resolves the initial trouble source. Now mutual understanding, or 'equal footing' (Varonis & Gass, 1985a, 1985b) has been achieved, the conversational flow pops back up to the dominant interaction of the task-at-hand: the telling of the joke. The NNS plays by the rules of the Q&A-joke genre by indicating in turn 8 both verbally <*I'm not ...*> and non-verbally (shaking head) that he does not know the answer. When in, turn 9, the NS communicates the punch line in one go, the NNS laughs and nods (turn 10) and utters a REACTION TO RESPONSE <*Yeah. Ok. Yeah*> but does not push down any further.

In turn 11 the NS seems to wonder whether or not the NNS has actually understood the joke, and utters a meta-comment as an implicit invitation to indicate non-understanding in addressing the relationship between understanding language and understanding a joke. The NNS's verbal and non-verbal response – his evasive <*yeah ... yeah ...*> while looking away from the camera and fidgeting with hair and scarf in turn 11 – is more difficult to mark as task-appropriate than as face-appropriate response. Despite, despite the NS's implicit invitations – the pre-sequence in turn 1 and the meta-comment in turn 11 – NNS does not continue to negotiate for meaning. In short, after two task-appropriate NNS-indicators of non-understanding (turns 4 and 6), face concerns seem to have taken over, which has a direct effect on the interaction.

<sup>6</sup> Varonis & Gass (1985a,b) list a number of responses ranging from least helpful (repeating the trigger) to most helpful (rephrasing/elaborating).

In Excerpt 4, a different dyad negotiates the same joke through chat.

Excerpt 4: Dyad 3; chat; bogan-joke.

Turns	Messenger	Chat-script	Coding
1.	NS	(11:46:05) Q: How do you know if you're a bogan? A: You let your 15-year-old daughter smoke at the dinner table ... in front of her kids. Awful joke	TRIGGER
2.	NNS	(11:46:25) What's a bogan?	INDICATOR
3.	NS	(11:46:48) This is hard to describe but a bogan is essentially an Australian slob	RESPONSE
4.	NS	(11:47:08) If you get that	
5.	NNS	(11:47:21) Is a slob a poor white trash person?	COMPREHENSION CHECK
6.	NS	(11:47:27) Yep	RESPONSE
7.	NNS	(11:47:50) Well, that was hilarious	REACTION TO RESPONSE

As opposed to the NS in Excerpt 2, who sent the long *pom*-joke in manageable chunks, the NS in Excerpt 4 sends both the Q&A part of the bogan-joke and an evaluation— (<Awful joke >) – in one conversational turn, rather than posing the question-part and awaiting response.<sup>7</sup> This could very well be due to the nature of the task itself, which focuses on exchanging cultural jokes in a task-oriented environment rather than a social environment. But it may also be due to the modality of the chat medium itself: the student simply copied and pasted the entire joke from the digital task sheet and sent it off. By unequivocally stating the trouble source <What's a bogan?> in turn 2, the NNS pushes the NS into the most helpful of responses: a definition of the trigger (<... A bogan is essentially an Australian slob>) in turn 3. Instead of waiting for the NNS's response, the NS adds an implicit invitation to negotiate for meaning 20 s later: <If you get that> (turn 4). The NNS, takes up the invitation by extending the negotiation routine with a task-appropriate verification of the word *slob* in turn 6, thus adding an extra layer to the routine.

As in chat Excerpt 2, the NNS clearly sets out to get to the bottom of this joke, which makes the ultimate REACTION TO RESPONSE more convincing as an indication of understanding than the RRS after the punch line in Excerpt 3. In turn 7, the NNS comments on the humour of the joke <Well, that was hilarious> but does so after a convincingly resolved negotiation routine.

## 6. Conclusions and discussion

The negotiated interactions in our data seem to be shaped and influenced by the mode of communication. Since all participants communicated through both video call and chat during task-performance, the unique, distinctive features of the specific mode of SCMC seem to model the pattern of negotiation of meaning episodes.

In our data, none of the chat participants pretended to understand a potential TRIGGER during the chat sessions. As opposed to the video call sessions, negotiation of meaning was more to the point and ultimately resolved the trouble source. Additionally, the NNS would push down more by asking more detailed questions about the trouble source. This pattern was consistent, even though half of the participants involved started the task through video call and carried out the second half of the task through chat, meaning that they had met and seen each other. The chat-medium seemed to offer what social anthropologist Kate Fox calls “the illusion of anonymity” (2004, p. 153). Fox illustrates this idea with the partition between priest and confessor in a Catholic confessional box, with the psychoanalyst's couch facing the other way, or the rearview mirror in a taxi: all create the illusion of relative anonymity which makes for less communication apprehension and more uninhibited communication. This is reflected in the different and ultimately more task-appropriate pattern of negotiated interaction of the chat sessions.

As opposed to the video call participants the chat participants were not confronted with the ambiguity of what Goffman calls the “expressiveness of the individual” (1959, p. 14), which consists of two fundamentally different kinds of sign activity: conscious intentional expression that the individual gives and non-verbal, unintentional expression that he gives off. During the video call-sessions, both the NS and the NNS had to negotiate these complex, often contradictory, sign activities in which the L2-learner would give verbal signs of understanding, but give off non-verbal signs of confusion or non-understanding. Interaction through chat, on the other hand, focusses “the entire burden of communication on written characters” (Smith 2003a, p. 47), which allows for more explicit and unambiguous statements of (non)-understanding.

Although, in video call, the NNSs indicated non-understanding several times, the negotiation of meaning sequence was aborted after an average of two indicators of non-understanding of the same trigger. This resulted in unsuccessful task-

<sup>7</sup> On the task-sheet there were no specific instructions on how to communicate the jokes.

completion. What's more, in a number of instances negotiation of meaning was not started at all, although it was obvious that the NNS could not have understood the culturally specific joke. During video call the NNS tended to pretend understanding by uttering a REACTION TO RESPONSE that should be qualified as a covert reaction of non-understanding, rather than as an overt reaction of understanding. This pattern was discursively constructed: by guarding their NNS-counterpart's face and not confronting them with their non-understanding, the NS also acted in the interest of politeness and solidarity rather than in the interest of the task.

Furthermore, in video call, the NNSs have no time to get their bearings, do not see the trouble source in writing, and must respond instantly. This concurs with the findings of earlier studies into non-digital face–face communication and chat messaging (Abrams, 2003; Beauvois 1992; Chun, 1994, 1998; Condon & Cech, 1996; Freiermuth, 1998, 2001; Freiermuth & Huang, 2012; Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995; Kern et al. 2008; Meunier, 1998; Warschauer, 1997), but does not corroborate with the social presence theory of online communication to assess human communication in a telecommunication environment, originally developed as early as 1976 by Short, Williams and Christie. They conceptualized social presence as the degree and awareness of a state of *being there* between two interlocutors during communication: the higher the social presence during communication the more efficient the interaction (cf. Ko, 2012; Yamaha, 2009; Yamaha & Akahori, 2007). In contrast, in our study it was found that the NS–NNS task performance through video call tended to be more face-appropriate than task-appropriate; trouble sources and potential triggers tended to remain fuzzy and unresolved. The intrusive webcam, registering, and transmitting image as well as sound, seemed to pose a threatening and daunting communication environment where issues such as politeness and potential loss of face thwarted successful task completion.

If we consider human interaction in an L2-environment as a social situation in which two forces operate simultaneously – negotiating for meaning is beneficial for language learning, but dispreferred in a 'real world' social environment due to issues of loss of face – then we may draw the conclusion that the participants in our data made different discourse decisions during chat and video call (cf. Freiermuth, 2011). They tended to orient to the task-appropriate force during chat, and to the face-appropriate, social force during video call. Due to the relative anonymity of the chat-medium – particularly because of the absence of audio-visual registration – L2-learners communicated more freely and were not so much concerned with loss of face-issues, which would have prompted them to pretend to understand. This resulted in all tasks being completed efficiently and successfully. During video call, however, in almost half of the negotiated episodes, the NNS's fear of loss of face and the NS's subsequent politeness and solidarity turned out to be stronger than the desire to finish the task successfully, leaving nearly half the tasks unresolved or inconclusive.

In studies critical of negotiation of meaning it is claimed that negotiation of meaning is frowned upon as “pedagogically undesirable for learners” (Aston, 1986, p. 128); learners are hesitant in indicating a problem utterance during task performance because it slows down the interaction and makes them look and feel inept and unsuccessful (Foster, 1998). Similarly, Pellettieri (2000) and Tudini (2007) note that it is important to acknowledge that language learners do not always indicate problems simply because it would disrupt the ongoing conversation. However, the findings of this study suggest that the trajectory and outcome of the interaction – and whether or not L2-learners will indeed engage in negotiated interaction – also depend on the constraints and affordances of the specific mode of communication. It seems as though issues of (loss of) face, then, could be taken quite literally: if the interactants do not *see* or *hear* each other during live interaction, the NNSs seem less inhibited to indicate non-understanding, and hence start up negotiation of meaning more often and more successfully.

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