



## **Networked Interaction in Foreign Language Acquisition and Research**

Progress Report

Public Part

## Project information

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## Executive Summary

This report is aimed at all those involved in foreign language learning and teaching processes at both secondary and tertiary levels, who are interested in innovating, enriching and making more motivating and effective learning and teaching processes with the use of e-tools. The target audience are teachers, teacher trainers, teacher trainees, educational policy makers, researchers, school and faculty boards, material developers and publishers.

The NIFLAR project seeks to contribute to innovation and improvement in foreign language education by enriching the educational context of both foreign language learning and teacher training programmes with the assistance of synchronous ICT Tools: video-web communication and voiced enabled 3D virtual worlds.

The project aims to offer actual practice and hands-on experiences in online collaborative language learning activities and immersive environments and thus support competence development to address intercultural concerns and successful integration of so-called second-generation web technologies into language education.

With the combination of innovative synchronous tools and appropriate pedagogical principles the project aims at making learning and teaching of Foreign Languages a more attractive experience, thus contributing to enhance motivation and to achieve higher level of intercultural communicative competence and pedagogical achievements.

In the NIFLAR project collaborate 6 consortium partners: the Universities of Granada and Valencia in Spain (specialists in foreign language teacher-training and intercultural pragmatics), University of Coimbra in Portugal (specialists in teacher training, and Portuguese Linguistics), University of Palacky in Olomouc (Czech Republic; specialised in Dutch language teaching) and TELL Consult in The Netherlands (specialist in implementing ICT-tools in language teaching) under the coordination of Utrecht University (specialists in teacher training, intercultural pragmatics, integration of ICT tools in education, task development and assessment).

As associated partners collaborate in NIFLAR the following institutions: Nevsky Institute from Saint Petesburg and Novosibirsk State Technical University in Russia (specialized in exploring and implementing new ICT tools in education), University of Concepción in Chile (specialized in intercultural pragmatics and implementation of innovative ICT tools in education) and two secondary schools ( Comenius College in Hilversum, The Netherlands and IES Alhambra, in Granada, Spain).

The consortium met in January 2009 to officially start the project. In the first year preparatory work for curriculum innovation has been carried out: foreign language learning and teaching approaches used in partner institutions were examined and ICT requirements reported before developing pedagogic criteria for implementation of network interaction. For the e-platforms pedagogic tasks with a focus on developing intercultural communication have been developed, for the dyadic synchronous interactions in the project's target languages, piloted and evaluated.

Plans and prospects for the future are (1) to create a database on networked interaction tasks for the different target languages and at different proficiency levels, (2) to conduct follow up networked sessions at secondary and tertiary levels, (3) to report on the added value of integrating networked interaction in language teaching, and (4) to propose strategies on how to adequately integrate and investigate second generation ICT-tools in secondary and tertiary education.

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Concept

# 1. Project Objectives

The NIFLAR project seeks:

- (1) To expand and enrich the foreign language teaching context, favouring authentic, contextualised interaction with peer native speakers (pre-service teachers) through two innovative synchronous e-tools: video-web communication and voice-enabled 3D Virtual Worlds.
- (2) To improve foreign language teaching approaches by creating opportunities for students to engage in on-line meaningful interactions with peer native speakers according to the objectives set by relevant tasks which favour information exchange and intercultural awareness.
- (3) To make foreign language teacher training more authentic, effective and innovative by encouraging pre-service teachers to engage in on-line peer-interactions with their future target group (learners of a foreign language), analyse interactions within virtual environments, reflect upon and be aware about the complexity of learning processes in order to learn to apply methodologies that enrich learning contexts and to develop pedagogic strategies addressed to overcome potential difficulties which may arise during the learning process.
- (4) To study the added value of integrating these e-learning tools in foreign language and teaching processes.
- (5) To enhance motivation of both target groups -foreign language learners and pre-service teachers- by:
  1. Providing challenging, authentic and innovative learning environments (video-web communication and 3D virtual worlds) and interaction tasks
  2. Promoting ( in addition to individual learning) collaborative learning and learner autonomy (peers interact in dyads or groups cross-culturally)
  3. Favouring experiences of enjoyment and success (authentic interaction with native peers, participation in simulated TL culturally relevant contexts and events in a 3D virtual world)
  4. Supporting authenticity of learning (Dörnyei, 2001; 2005) by favouring Integrative motivation (learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community). Stimulate positive intercultural contacts respecting conditions essential in successful exchanges:
    - (a) Equal status between the individuals/groups within the contact situation
    - (b) Shared pursuit of common goals
    - (c) Perception of common interests
    - (d) Intergroup cooperation
    - (e) Authority support
    - (f) Friendship potential
    - (g) Possibility to share and empathize with others
  5. Developing activities, in collaboration with students, teachers and teacher trainees, requiring active participation with peers and which involve combination of entertainment, leisure, game with learning a language and its culture as recommended by High Level Group of Multilingualism (HLGM, 2007)

The present project aims to offer actual practice and hands-on experiences in online collaborative language learning activities and immersive environments and thus support competence development to address intercultural concerns and successful integration of so-called second-generation web technologies into language education.

The NIFLAR project promotes blended learning directed to enhance peer interaction in the TL. As the High Level Group of Multilingualism reports “there is a limit as to what can be expected of formal education, and because of this, additional learning opportunities should be created and made available” (HLGM Final report, 2007: 9). The NIFLAR project proposes a combination of formal face-to-face instruction with teacher and classmates and peer on-line interactions making use of Video-web communication tools (also called web conferencing) and Virtual Worlds.

With the combination of innovative synchronous tools and appropriate pedagogical principles the NIFLAR project aims at making learning and teaching of FLs a more relevant, rewarding and attractive experience, which will contribute to enhance motivation and to achieve higher level of intercultural communicative competence.

Concept

## 2. Project Approach

All partners in NIFLAR share the wish to innovate as to improve the quality of and innovate foreign language curricula, teacher training programs, and consolidate international research forums on networked interaction. Moreover, all partners are interested in exploring the possibilities virtual interactive tools, particularly video-web and virtual worlds, offer to facilitate distant collaboration and enrich learning contexts.

The pedagogical approach followed by NIFLAR is socio-constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) with social interaction being the main artefact triggering learning by stimulating participants to meaningfully collaborate with each other to accomplish relevant interaction tasks. For the development of tasks, the main approach followed is that of Task Based Language Learning (Ellis 2003; Willis 1996; Long & Doughty 1996), where tasks (in our case interaction tasks) become the motor around which teaching and learning processes are organized.

NIFLAR is characterised for its richness due to the different aspects it covers: there are 4 target languages, target student groups participating at tertiary and secondary levels, the use of two synchronous environments (video-web communication and virtual worlds), there are various institutions participating from different countries, and official consortium partners (6 institutions) collaborating with associated partners (5 institutions)... This complexity in richness requires a clear management structure for guaranteeing adequate monitoring and quality control of working processes and development of products. For this, instruments have been developed and are described in the NIFLAR quality plan: (1) description and responsibilities according to management role (manager, WP coordinator, language cluster coordinator, partners within the language cluster); (2) tools for evaluating work in progress (within the project as a whole, within the specific language cluster); (3) tools for evaluating quality of interaction tasks developed; (4) surveys for evaluating students' and learners' participation in the pilots and follow up sessions; (5) interviews for evaluating participants' experiences in pilots and follow ups; (6) research foci for research proposals in NIFLAR. Additionally, NIFLAR members meet virtually on regular basis to discuss emergent topics making use of the project tools (video-web communication and Second Life) and we had two NIFLAR face-to-face meetings one at the beginning in January 2009 in Utrecht and the last one which took place at the end of November 2009 in Granada.

Within the NIFLAR strategic plan exploitation and dissemination of experiences and results are key concerns. In this sense the NIFLAR exploitation and dissemination strategies are aimed at (1) promoting the project among European partners and institutions contributing to the consortium, academics, HEI involved in language teaching and teacher training, teacher organisations, teacher trainers, languages teachers, researchers, educational material developers and publishers and educational policy makers and (2) to inform about the project implementation, the issues it addresses, its functionalities and the results. Two main strategies have been formulated:

- a. Raising awareness about the project, the issues it addresses and the e-tools used in it amongst partners and institutions involved in the project;
- b. enhancing the visibility of the project, its outcomes and results

The promotion of the project, during its first year, focused on four ways of disseminating information (1) *Communication materials web-based* ([www.surfgroepen.nl/sites/niflar/](http://www.surfgroepen.nl/sites/niflar/) is the internal communication site to share information and documents that includes access to the video-web communication platform, Adobe connect; [www.niflar.eu](http://www.niflar.eu) is the public website and the front face of the project; [niflar.ning.com](http://niflar.ning.com) is an open interactive social network for team members and all those interested in experimenting with new ICT tools in language education; and [niflarstudents.ning.com](http://niflarstudents.ning.com) where participating students share their views on the interaction

sessions); (2) *Conferences*, as an important way of promoting results (NIFLAR colleagues were present at: SLanguages 2009; Challenges 2009; Diverse Conference 2009; II Jornadas Nacionales sobre Estudios Universitarios, Colloquium Neerlandicum, Eurocall 2009, 3rd International Congress FIAPE 2009, Landelijke Studiedag Levende Talen 2009, XXV Annual Meeting Associação Portuguesa de Linguística) and Surf conference 2009, the Dutch foundation for ICT in HE; (3) *Graphic Identity*, since a common graphic identity in all dissemination materials allows for better visibility and recognition as well as branding of the project. So, at the very beginning, a logo was created for the project that is used in all dissemination tools. Likewise, the dissemination materials (leaflets, powerpoint presentations) have a common or similar layout; and (4) *Publications* (several papers will be published or are in the process of being reviewed).

Concept

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

The major results achieved in the first 11 months refer to:

1. Sharing and defining pedagogical goals among NIFLAR partners following social constructivism.
2. Getting familiarized with the project's virtual environments (video-web communication tools, such as Adobe Connect or oovoo; and virtual worlds such as Second Life). Developing and adapting tutorials for use during pilots.
3. Learning to implement tools in education through different initial phases: checking hardware equipment and internet connections and developing strategies to organize synchronous encounters.
4. Defining **criteria for development** of interaction tasks according to the literature on Second language Acquisition Research and Task Based Language Learning (see table 1).

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The task exposes the learners to **rich TL input**.

Does the task:

- provide input that is authentic/unmodified, relevant/challenging and multimodal?
- enhance interactional modification or negotiation of meaning?
- elicit the use of authentic resources both before and during performance?
- elicit the use of both predefined resources and resources provided by the interlocutors themselves?

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The task elicits **meaningful TL use**

Meaningfulness: Do the learners:

- use the language pragmatically and communicatively?
- use the language to engage in activities involving real-world processes of L use?
- have the choice how to use the language, that is, no linguistic forms are prescribed in advance?

Use: Does the task:

- involve some kind of gap (information, reasoning, culture)?
- have the right balance between language-demanding and content-demanding processing?
- promote learning by doing (processing and interaction)
- promote collaborative learning?

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The task requires de learners to focus on **form**

Does the task:

- create a "semantic space" in order to elicit processing specific L forms?
  - promote the detection and use of relevant chunks?
  - elicit feedback on form by the native speaker (NS) on language of the learner?
-

- Provide opportunities to focus on form when learner need arises (negotiation, elaboration, recasts etc.)?
- 

The task has a clearly defined communicative **outcome**

Does the task:

- have a clearly defined purpose that is relevant for all interlocutors?
  - have a clearly defined communicative end product?
  - elicit following a logical, relevant and challenging procedure?
  - provide instructions that meet the needs of all interlocutors?
  - aim at subjective, personal information exchange, related to objective, factual resources?
  - Is the task both open (not fixed, prescribed) and determined (goal-oriented)?
- 

The task enhances **strategic** awareness on language learning and use

Does the task:

- elicit planning, feedback and reflection
    - on language use
    - on communication
    - on intercultural issues
- 

The task enhances focus on **intercultural** linguistic competence

Does the task:

- require learners to focus on intercultural topics, beliefs, contrasts?
- elicit focus on everyday, implicit cultural habits, and beliefs?
- create intercultural awareness, but providing topics that contrast students' own beliefs? and habits with that of their interlocutors?
- elicit awareness and reflection not only on target culture, but on own cultural habits and beliefs as well?

General:

- Are clear stages in task sequencing provided?
- 

The task takes the communicative and intercultural competence **level** of all interlocutors into account

Does the task align with proficiency level on oral interaction and intercultural awareness:

- with respect to task goal?
  - with respect to task topic?
  - with respect to task procedure?
- 

The task makes effective use of the challenges and opportunities **video-web communication** or **virtual world**

Video-web communication:

- Is non verbal communication (gestures etc) supported?
- Are there no additional task demands caused by dislocated communication?
- Are there no additional task demands caused by fixed location (limited by webcam view)?
- Is the use of both shared and separated resources provided?

Virtual Worlds:

- Is the virtual context sufficiently culture-specific/-focusing/-contrasting?
  - Is the virtual context sufficiently relevant and attractive for the task goal?
-

- Is the virtual context sufficiently prototypical, without being caricatural?
  - Is the virtual context used in a socially, cognitively, affectively, creatively and spatially effective and challenging way?
  - Does the virtual context provide a safe environment (e.g., no other listeners/interlocutors are present at lower levels)?
  - Is the number of interlocutors relevant for the communicative goals, topic and procedure?
  - Is sufficient familiarization provided with environment and technical aspects of virtual communication?
  - Does the task trigger oral communication, that is, is intensive oral communication needed for successful task completion
- 

Table 1: template for intercultural communicative competence (ICC) task design and evaluation in video-web communication and virtual worlds.

5. Developing, piloting and adapting **tasks** for interaction with a focus on intercultural information exchange and taking advantage of the specific affordances of each virtual environment.
6. Preparing and carrying out **pilots in video-web communication environments** with university students:
  - a. Pilots at large scale: Dutch & Spanish (160 students).
  - b. Pilots at small scale: Portuguese & Russian (20 students.)

#### Pilot on video-web communication in Dutch

NIFLAR's objectives were integrated in foreign language and pre-service teachers' courses at two universities: Dutch foreign language courses at A2 and B1 levels (CEFR) at Palacky University in Czech Republic and the Educational Master Course Language Education at Utrecht University (The Netherlands). 36 Czech students of Dutch as a FL and 32 Dutch pre-service teachers participated in the study. The pilot took place between February and April 2009 and lasted 10 weeks.

The objective of this integration was for the FL learners to enrich their learning context by facilitating authentic interactions through video-web communication with NSs in a peer to peer basis. As for pre-service teachers the integration aimed at getting them familiar with pedagogical processes of innovating and enriching educational contexts by reflecting about and experimenting with ways to introduce, coach and monitor networked interaction in language teaching. During the course pre-service teachers (1) discussed and reflected about crucial issues concerned with task elaboration for networked interaction (elaboration criteria, conditions for networked interaction, focus on intercultural communicative competence, proficiency levels according to the CEFR, research on networked interaction), (2) they engaged in task elaboration for video-web communication, (3) they elaborated pre-and post tests in order to measure learners' communicative growth, (4) they conducted the interactions one to one during 25 minutes each through video-web communication according to the tasks they elaborated for the exchanges and (5) they finally monitored and evaluated the experience.

#### Pilots on video-web communication in Spanish

Two pilots with video-web communication were carried out in Spanish:

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1. The first one was conducted in November-January 2009 and collaborated Utrecht University and the University of Concepción (in Chile). The pilot was twofold :

a) **8** Dutch students of Spanish at B2 proficiency level (according to the Common European Framework of Reference) from Utrecht University collaborated with **8** native speakers of Spanish studying English (A2 proficiency level) in Concepción in a tandem setting and carried out 5 interaction tasks in English and in Spanish, one per week in both languages.

b) **10** Dutch students of Spanish at B2 proficiency level (Common European Framework of Reference) from Utrecht University collaborated with **10** Chilean students of Spanish Pedagogy in Concepción and carried out the same 5 interaction tasks in Spanish, one per week.

The video-web communication platform Adobe-Connect, turned out to be very unstable for interactions to be conducted between the Netherlands and Chile, and Skype, Messenger and Oovoo were used as alternatives. These environments worked pretty well.

Many organizational problems were faced for arranging the synchronous meetings due to different time zones (5 hours), different academic calendars (summer holidays in Chile) and educational load (Chilean students having many lessons and few gaps to arrange the meetings). But most of the participating students were very positive about the project. One student in Utrecht reported to carry out tasks and talk about interesting cultural issues with the Chilean student on the weekends for 2 to 3 hours!

2. The second pilot was conducted during February, March and April 2009 and collaborated **11** pre-service teachers from the University of Valencia, **11** pre-service teachers from the University of Granada and **32** Dutch students of Spanish at a B1 proficiency level (according to the Common European Framework of Reference). The interaction formats were mostly one to one and in some cases one pre-service teacher with two learners of Spanish. In this pilot the video-web communication tool Adobe Connect was used. Interactions could be carried out through this platform but technical problems such as echo, delay in the communication did emerge during the interactions. In spite of these technical troubles participants liked the project and found learning much more significant and motivating than the formal university teaching approaches

#### Pilots on video-web communication in Portuguese

Three interaction tasks (developed for A2 en B1/B2 proficiency levels) have been piloted among participants from the universities of Coimbra (**8** native speakers of Portuguese), Utrecht (**4** learners of Portuguese) and Valencia (**4** foreign language learners of Portuguese) who interacted in a one to one basis.

#### Pilots with video-web communication in Russian

Several tasks have been developed and piloted during interaction sessions from March to October by the Russian cluster (18 tasks at A1 level, 1 at A2 level and 3 at B1 level). In the pilots participated **9** native speakers from Nevsky institute, **5** native speakers from Novosibirsk, **7** learners of Russian from Utrecht University, **13** from Valencia and **4** from Granada. All the participants have interacted in a one-to-one format using the video-web communication tool *Adobe Connect*. Many technical (sound and/or vision falling down, delays or echoes) as organizational problems due to different time zones (Saint-Petersburg 2 hours; Novosibirsk 5 hours) were faced. Alternatives might be looked for in the future.

## 7. Preparing and carrying out two pilots in Second Life.

7.1 The first pilot was conducted in June and July 2009. The participants the pilot were two foreign language learners of Spanish at B1 proficiency level (CEFR) from Utrecht University and two native pre-service teachers of Spanish from the University of Valencia and the University of Granada. All students volunteered to participate in the pilot experience with Second Life and had been involved during March and April 2009 in a project using video-web communication tools to conduct five interaction tasks in a cross-cultural communication setting. The pilot aimed at studying the following issues: (1) to analyse the kind of interaction the tasks elicited in the virtual world, by means of the task evaluation template; (2) to explore the possibilities of existing SL worlds for enhancing interaction; (3) to study whether and how the conditions anonymity versus familiarity may play a role in modeling interaction; and (4) to compare student experiences on interactions conducted through video-web communication versus Second Life.

Four tasks were developed for the pilot:

Task 1 aimed at stimulating information exchange and reflection upon intercultural similarities and differences. Students were asked to meet at an intercultural learning space in Second Life <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Bluepill/230/194/67>. Once there, they had to individually complete a questionnaire related to a chosen nationality. Afterwards, all four students rejoined at the NIFLAR space and discussed their findings, trying to explain differences and similarities with their own culture.

Task 2 aimed at stimulating to explore Hispanic locations in Second Life and to interact with other avatars being there. The task was conceived as a preparatory step for task 3. Students were paired: Dutch students together and Spanish pre-service teachers together. Dutch students went to Barcelona, Jalisco and Al-Aldalus. Pre-service teachers were asked to explore some “Hot Spots, the places to be in Second Life” (<http://b-places.com/>). The landmarks had to be Hispanic related and they had to discuss their adequacy for teaching and types of activities that could be done there.

For task 3, the students were paired native – non native, as it was a continuation of task 2. The main objective was to share experiences and tour together some of the locations visited in task 2. They had to tell their partner what were the things that they liked/disliked in the places they visited, in which way were the three places similar and different, something that surprised them and their experiences when trying to communicate with other avatars. After that, they had to choose one of the three locations, teleport their partner there and show them around.

Task 4: was conceived as an evaluation of the experience. The students met at the NIFLAR space in Second Life and were given a number of aspects to discuss: general evaluation of their experience in a virtual world, things that worked and things that did not work.

During the project three sources of data were gathered: interaction recordings, questionnaires and interviews.

When analyzing the recordings a clear difference was found in terms of verbal engagement and interaction behavior depending on task goals. Action oriented tasks (tasks 2 & 3) elicited much action and a lot of movement, but interactions displayed large episodes of silence, while communication tasks (tasks 1 & 4), which focused mainly in information and opinion exchange, were characterized by a dynamic verbal turn-taking exchange among participants, with almost no space for silences and with little action.

Questionnaires were administered both to the foreign language learners and teacher trainees at the end of the pilot. We were particularly interested in (1) the adequacy of tasks, (2) the

learning experience, (3) adequacy of SL for learning purposes and (4) comparison between video-web communication and SL.

Tasks were in general terms positively rated and the virtual world Second Life was unanimously selected as the most adequate environment for enriching learning possibilities, although foreign language learners seemed to feel more comfortable using video-web communication than SL. Among the negative aspects of using Second Life for learning languages were some problems with audio that prevented the participants from doing the activity properly and left only the text chat option, and the fact that in *Second Life* one cannot use facial expressions to support interaction. Some of the positive aspects found by the participants were more things to talk about, a new way of teaching and learning and a more relaxed way of talking due to its anonymity. As for the learning experiences, FL learners reported to have learned particularly to talk more fluently and with more confidence in the target language.

7.2 In November 2009 we started the second pilot in Second Life. This time 5 pre-service teachers, 3 from Granada and two from Valencia, and 7 Dutch students of Spanish from Utrecht are participating in it. After the initial encounters, the tutorial, the plenary session in second life, the first official task has been successfully carried out by all participants.

#### 8. Preparing and carrying out a **pilot with video-web communication with secondary school learners** (8 learners).

In November 2009 the first pilot with secondary schools started. This is one of the most interesting challenges within the NIFLAR project, to study whether networked interaction has a place in secondary education among teenagers. The results with tertiary students are very encouraging but very little is known about the use of these tools in secondary education. Coordinating the synchronous sessions in secondary schools turned out to be complex for organizational reasons (e.g. conflicting time schedules). Flexibility and support from the school directions are indispensable requisites for undertaking projects such as this. In the pilot four learners from the Comenius College in Hilversum (The Netherlands) and four learners from The Alhambra School in Granada (Spain) participate according to a tandem structure: they conduct 3 interactions in cross-cultural dyadic format in Spanish (being the Spanish learners the peer experts) and three in English (being the Dutch learners more expert peers). Pre-service teachers of English and Spanish from Utrecht University and of Spanish from Granada University have developed the interaction tasks at A1 level (Spanish) and A2 level (English) and supervise the sessions. The first session (30.11.09) which was conducted in Spanish and where they talked about themselves, who they are, where they live etc. had immediately a very positive and tangible impact as learners liked and enjoyed the sessions in spite of the difficulty of communicating with unknown fellow-pupils. After this session it seemed that learning a language had acquired a different dimension, a function it did not seem to have before: learners realized that they were not learning for getting a grade, to pass an exam but because they wanted to communicate with, to come to know the other peer. In the lessons, books and dictionaries started flying around as learners wanted to make sure they knew how to express themselves on the specific subjects.

#### 9. Creating a **structure for introducing and carrying out interaction projects**:

It is a prerequisite for success in projects using synchronous technology to respect and monitor the different stages adequately (see table 2).

Stages	Pre-service teachers	Foreign language learners
Initial stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share project objectives</li> <li>• Plenary meeting participants through the virtual environment</li> <li>• Check hardware equipment and internet connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share project objectives</li> <li>• Plenary meeting participants through the virtual environment</li> <li>• Check hardware equipment and internet connections</li> </ul>
Preparatory stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get familiarized with the synchronous environments: tutorials</li> <li>• Workgroup sessions on tasks development, Computer Mediated Communication, CEFR and Intercultural Communicative Competence</li> <li>• Development of interaction tasks in groups</li> <li>• Creation of evaluation schemes for interaction sessions</li> <li>• Development of pre-/posttests (in order to measure communicative growth)</li> <li>• Creation of interaction groups</li> <li>• Informal interaction with group members to know each other and get used to the environment as ice breaking strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get familiarized with the synchronous environments: tutorials</li> <li>• Creation of interaction groups</li> <li>• Informal interaction with group members to know each other and get used to the environment as ice breaking strategy</li> </ul>
Interaction stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction sessions (quantity and duration of sessions depends on target language and proficiency level (between 3 and 5 sessions lasting 25 to 120 minutes))</li> <li>• Reflection after interaction session on teacher's role, task evaluation, the role played by the environment, quality of the interaction and learner's communicative competence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction sessions (quantity and duration of sessions depends on target language and proficiency level (between 3 and 5 sessions lasting 25 to 120 minutes))</li> <li>• Reflection after interaction session on task and sessions evaluation, quality of the evaluation</li> </ul>
Evaluation stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentations of experiences</li> <li>• Evaluation experience with surveys + interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentations of experiences</li> <li>• Evaluation experience with surveys + interviews</li> </ul>
Final stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposing changes for next edition</li> <li>• NIFLAR Certificates of participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposing changes for next edition</li> <li>• NIFLAR Certificates of participation</li> </ul>

Table 2: stages in synchronous interaction exchanges

10. Analysing **pilot results** (Video web communication). The main results could be summarized as follows:

- a. Motivation/enjoyment: The students liked the sessions very much.
- b. Relevance: the tasks being carried out in cross-cultural settings through video-web communication enhance meaningful communication.
- c. Learning experiences of foreign language learners as reported in surveys and interviews. They say to have become more confident talking in the target language and to have learned to talk more fluently. Vocabulary and grammar are also mentioned as learning goals achieved through the interaction sessions. Foreign language learners also report to have learned new facets of the target culture in a dynamic and pleasant way.
- d. Learning experiences of pre-service teachers as reported in surveys and interviews: they say to have learned (1) how to use and implement synchronous tools in language teaching processes to enhance authentic interaction in the target language, (2) to develop adequate interaction tasks that promote intercultural communicative competence, (3) to be aware of the problems foreign language learners face when trying to communicate in the target language and to use pedagogical strategies to help learners overcome these problems making use, among other strategies, of the multimodal affordances that the specific environment offers.
  - a. Intersubjectivity and social empathy: participants do not just carry out pedagogical tasks together but work also to create intersubjectivity and friendship. After the conclusion of the official sessions interaction partners keep in contact and even visit each other in real life.
  - b. Problems are experienced with the technique not always working properly ('Technical desperation') and with time availability for carrying out synchronous sessions (one of the challenges of the project).

11. Pilot on possibilities of developing a virtual world in **OpenSim**.

With a view to sustainability and scalability and to provide a safe environment for secondary school pupils that can also serve as a practice space providing experiential learning experiences for student language teachers the project has opted to expand its Second Life base at Virtlantis (the launchpads hosted by Second Life English) with developments on the *Open Simulator* platform, an open source version of *Second Life*. NIFLAR has also joined the Open Sim pilot and community supported by SURFnet (NL national HE IT service provider) aimed at developing an infrastructure for 3D in (NL) Education. The global specifications for landscaping the NIFLAR SIM have been established.

12. Designing tools for evaluation experience (pre- and post-questionnaires, interviews, reflection postings after each session).

13. Defining **research** focus & methodology to study the added value of integrating networked interaction in foreign language curricula.

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The main research foci in NIFLAR have been established as being the following:

- 1.1. **Main research focus:** To investigate the added value of interaction with NSs through VIDEO-WEB COMMUNICATION &/or VIRTUAL WORLD in the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence of participants (as compared to traditional settings).
- 1.2. To describe which aspects of ICC are developed in interaction with NSs through VIDEO-WEB COMMUNICATION &/or VIRTUAL WORLD. Is intercultural awareness enhanced?
- 1.3. To study the role different conditions play in the development of ICC:
  - Role of tasks
  - Role of technique: affordances of the environments, technique working properly or badly, VIDEO-WEB COMMUNICATION versus VIRTUAL WORLD
  - Role of individual issues (language learning proficiency level, ICC level, personal factors, willingness to communicate...)
  - Role of pre-service / in-service teacher (+/- involvement)
  - Degree of subjectivity being reached in interaction among speech partners
  - (...)

Table 3: main research foci in NIFLAR.

#### 14. Disseminating experiences and results

- a. Through the niflar websites ([www.niflar.eu](http://www.niflar.eu); [niflar.ning.com](http://niflar.ning.com); [niflarstudents.ning.com](http://niflarstudents.ning.com))
- b. Conferences: During the first year of NIFLAR, several members of partner institutions attended conferences where they presented the project and issues it addresses:
  - SLanguages 2009 (Second Life, 8th-9th May 09)
  - Challenges 2009 (Braga, Portugal, 14th-15th May 09)
  - Diverse Conference 2009 (Aberystwyth, UK, 24th-26th June 09)
  - Colloquium Neerlandicum (Utrecht, Netherlands, 23rd-29th August 09)
  - 3 presentations at Eurocall 2009 (Gandía, Spain, 9th-12th September 09)
  - 3rd International Congress FIAPE 2009 (Cádiz, Spain, 23rd-26th September 09)
  - II Jornadas Nacionales sobre Estudios Universitarios, 2<sup>nd</sup> National Symposium (Castellón, Spain, Universitat Jaume I, 7th-9th September 2009)

- XXV Annual Meeting Associação Portuguesa de Linguística (Lisboa, Portugal, 22nd-24th October 09)
- Annual Conference Levende Talen (Zwolle, The Netherlands, 6th November 2009)
  
- c. Publications: Some papers have been written by members of the consortium and have been published / will be published in proceedings of conferences:
  - Jauregi, Kristi & Milan Kříž, Het Nederlands en het EU-project NIFLAR (Networked Interaction in Foreign Language Acquisition and Research). In: Colloquium Neerlandicum.
  - Jauregi, Kristi, Rick de Graaff, Silvia Canto and Ton Koenraad, Towards a pedagogical framework for task design in video-web communication and virtual worlds. In: EUROCALL 2009 - New Trends in CALL: Working Together.
  - Jauregi, Kristi, Milan Kriz and Huub van den Bergh, Integrating networked interaction in foreign language learning and teacher training programs. In: EUROCALL 2009 - New Trends in CALL: Working Together.
  - Jauregi, Kristi & Rick de Graaff (2009): Communicative tasks for language students and teacher trainees in video web communication and virtual worlds. In Natasa Brouwer, Bas Giesbers, Bart Rienties, Leendert van Gastel (ed.) Proceedings of Student Mobility and ICT: Dimensions of Transition. Sponsored by Lifelong Learning Programme and Surf Foundation. Universiteit van Amsterdam 16-17 December 2009 (191-201).  
[http://www.fdewb.unimaas.nl/educ\\_v2/STEP/Documents/Proceedings\\_S\\_ICT2009\\_Final.PDF](http://www.fdewb.unimaas.nl/educ_v2/STEP/Documents/Proceedings_S_ICT2009_Final.PDF)

It is the combination of tasks for both oral communication and intercultural competence, of target languages, of both video web communication and 3D virtual worlds, and of both language learner activities and language teacher professional development activities that enhances the added value, significance, transferability and sustainability of the project outcome.

## 4. Partnerships

The consortium consists of partners with broad experience in teaching, research and development for foreign languages. In the consortium participate both language departments, ICT for education departments and teacher training departments. Their combination of expertise and European coverage guarantees the involvement of at least four less-taught European languages, collaboration with and application to both secondary, tertiary and teacher education, and cutting-edge practical and theoretical experience on networked distant interaction for foreign language learning.

All participating European institutions, both for secondary and tertiary education, are convinced that the implementation of video-web communication and contextualized interaction in 3D virtual worlds will make their language learning and teaching practice more challenging, effective and successful for both their students and teachers and try collaboratively to contribute from a different geographic position to create a multicultural, competitive and dynamic knowledge-based European learning environment and knowledge society (Lisbon, 2000).

As for the European aim to stimulate and enforce multilingualism the NIFLAR project focuses on learning and teaching of four less-taught but internationally relevant European languages. It specifically aims at strengthening intercultural competence in oral communication, whereby close multilateral collaboration among partners at, management, pedagogical and research levels is essential and comports an absolutely added value. At the same time, the NIFLAR project stimulates and enhances language teachers and teacher trainees to use challenging communication support tools, by focusing on video web communication and contextualized interaction in 3D virtual worlds. Through a multilateral collaboration with partners in different European countries target groups at the different geographical regions are more easily reached for dissemination objectives.

## 5. Plans for the Future

In the second year NIFLAR members will (1) contribute to create a database for elaboration of adequate networked interaction tasks for the different target languages (Dutch, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish) at different proficiency levels and with a focus on enhancing intercultural awareness, (2) conduct follow up networked sessions at secondary and tertiary levels with video-web communication and/or virtual worlds, (3) elaborate a research guide on pedagogical issues related to CMC for pre-service teachers, (4) carry out different research studies respecting the NIFLAR research foci, (5) share lessons learned with the target groups (teachers, teacher trainers, researchers, material developers and publishers, educational policy makers, (6) report on the added value of integrating networked interaction in language teaching as result of the evaluation of pilot and follow up sessions in the form of teacher guides and best practices, (7) propose strategies on how to adequately integrate second generation ICT-tools in secondary and tertiary education, (8) disseminate results through the websites, conferences, seminars, publications and mailing-lists, and (9) develop a sustainability strategy to continue collaboration after the project's life time.

Concept

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

In order for the EU to become a multicultural, competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy (Lisbon, 2000), the teaching and learning of foreign languages for mutual understanding, social cohesion and collaboration plays a key role. NIFLAR tries to contribute to the challenges of a multilingual Europe by:

- 1) Providing learners interactional opportunities to become intercultural and communicatively more competent in four less-taught but internationally relevant European languages.
- 2) Strengthening intercultural competence in oral communication, while stimulating and enhancing language teachers and teacher trainees to use challenging communication support tools, focusing on video web communication and contextualized interaction in 3D virtual worlds.
- 3) Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity
- 4) Innovating and improving the quality of foreign language learning at secondary and tertiary level. This is being done by broadening and enriching the learning and communication context, with the assistance of ICT interactive tools. The first results of NIFLAR have started to contribute to enriching the educational context of foreign language learning and teaching and to make it more authentic, relevant and attractive.
- 5) Promoting the quality and transparency of Member States' education and training systems using innovative interactive tools for language learning, which enhance the quality of language education and training in Europe.
- 6) Raising awareness to less used European languages: Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian.
- 7) Enhancing Innovative use of ICT in learning and conducting research on it. This project fully explores all possible applications of both e-tools (video web communication and virtual worlds) in language learning and teacher training. It is creating a variety of documents on the use and implementation of the specific ICT tools.