Videoconferencing in University Language Education

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(Eds.)

Masaryk University
Brno 2018
The author outlines a detailed range of practical measures to ensure the success of using videoconferencing to develop research writing. The examples given highlight the technical challenges, but effective solutions and measures are presented. Clear parameters are listed and explained in using videoconferencing, and the importance of grounding parameters such as co-presence, visibility and audibility is stressed. The importance of establishing a community focus of support with both students and teachers can help with key issues of giving, receiving and acting on feedback.

The article features detailed feedback from students on the effectiveness of the programme.

1.2 Developing Research Writing by Videoconference

John Morgan

The author outlines a detailed range of practical measures to ensure the success of using videoconferencing to develop research writing. The examples given highlight the technical challenges, but effective solutions and measures are presented. Clear parameters are listed and explained in using videoconferencing, and the importance of grounding parameters such as co-presence, visibility and audibility is stressed. The importance of establishing a community focus of support with both students and teachers can help with key issues of giving, receiving and acting on feedback. The article features detailed feedback from students on the effectiveness of the programme.

1.3 Using Videoconferencing to Develop the Research Literacy Skills of Off-campus Graduate Students

Olga Kozar, Juliet Lum

The authors focus on the needs of geographically disperse researchers, who are able to gain a sense of community and increase their confidence through videoconferencing. The article gives practical advice and shows how writing research groups can be set up and best supported. This chapter also presents how language educators can play a flexible role in facilitating such a programme and addresses relevant technical issues and workarounds. Key points and options relating to structure, timing and frequency are discussed in detail.

2.0 Videoconferencing: Students in Focus

077-123

2.1 Intercultural Strategies and Development through Global Online Collaboration

Nadezhda S. Rudenko

The author highlights the intercultural aspects of global online communication and how videoconferencing can be an effective tool for developing intercultural skills. Key to successful programme delivery is developing strategies which promote a wide range of skills: communication, teamwork, and cross-cultural navigation. Such skills are especially relevant for today’s globalised workplaces and globalised workforce. The importance of role giving, taking and sharing and the way these influence group dynamics are discussed.
2.2 Roles of the Learner in Videoconferencing
Judit Hári, Irena Podrásková

The authors concentrate on the variety and scope of roles filled by learners, the potential development of associated transferrable skills, and the way videoconferencing facilitates this process. Key learner roles and their outcomes are described. Detailed advice is given as to how students can maximise their skills and how technology can best support them. A range of task-based collaborative activities are presented, and the underlying theory and practice are both described in order to balance their rationales.

2.3 Student Voices
Libor Štolpánek

This chapter gives voice to the students using videoconferencing. In some cases for the first time. By doing so, a clear picture emerges of the challenges, frustrations, but ultimately beneficial experiences felt by students. The views and feelings expressed act as useful compass points for teachers setting up such courses. These can be helpful in avoiding future pitfalls.

3.0 Videoconferencing: Teachers’ World

3.1 Daring to Videoconference: Ideas for Teachers
Álona Hradilová, Kirk Vincent

The authors use a case study with students of law to illustrate both the possibilities and limits of videoconferencing. This detailed article outlines the stages of course development, syllabus writing, integration of subject matter and technology, and mechanisms to ensure a successful outcome. Useful advice is provided not only in technical aspects but also in areas related to interpersonal transactions. This includes ensuring that student groups from different countries have time to acquaint themselves informally before embarking on the more formal aspects of the programme.

3.2 The Role of the Teacher in Videoconferencing
Markéta Dankošová, Stefan Sundh

The authors offer a detailed and informative insight into the changing role of the teacher in light of technology-driven changes in classroom teaching. Videoconferencing is an area which both demands and inspires a new methodology, and this article outlines the variety of speculative roles which help to ensure successful delivery. The case study chosen provides a wealth of examples which illustrate the scope of collaborative teaching and learning made possible by videoconferencing. These examples also provide a clear indication of the required skills and the consequent need for targeted staff development programmes to help develop the teachers of the future.

4.0 Videoconferencing: Reflection and Realism

4.1 Realising aBerNo
Miranda Katharina Capocchi

The author provides a detailed case study and reflective account of the aBerNo project. The course, making full use of videoconferencing, covered all four language learning skills through the teaching of key academic skills. The article covers key stages in the course's development and highlights the work expected and outcomes achieved. Many technology-related issues are discussed, as are assessment procedures. The author provides a personal insight into the workings of a carefully developed project designed to enhance both the linguistic and academic skills of high-level students.

4.2 VC Technology: Master or Servant of Education?
Anjuli Pandavar

The author underlines the importance of having a clear rationale for using videoconferencing. A detailed case study illustrates the pitfalls and challenges of technology and looks at key examples of mismatches. These include mismatches between the different expectations of students and teachers, between theory and practice, between ideal aims and actual outcomes, and between the ideal applications and actual limitations of the technology on offer. The article discusses a range of problems and issues but also points to solutions and workarounds. It emphasises the importance of considering not only how technology is used and which type is chosen but also why technology is used at all.
"Yes, interesting. But who were they and what just happened?"

Working with Disparate HE Groups via Videoconferencing

Jo Eastlake, Martina Šindelová Skupnová

The authors highlight the processes and outcomes of videoconferencing using an active participation approach. Two contrasting student groups at different universities were able to participate in a varied programme of tasks using creativity to improve socio-linguistic skills. The course was task-orientated, with the learners generating or sourcing the majority of materials. A mix of the theoretical and the practical was used to underpin the programme.

5.0 Videoconferencing: Technology and Management

205–227

5.1 Management of Videoconferencing: Challenges and Strategies

Libor Štěpánek

The author looks at key issues facing managers in establishing effective videoconferencing courses in higher education. The issues highlighted are of a practical nature, but ones which cannot be ignored by those in charge of managing resources, including creating the right physical space, looking at timing and intercultural questions, and making proper use of both physical and human resources. This chapter provides an overview and helpful checklist to maximise the added value and quality of courses for all stakeholders.

5.2 Technological Considerations Regarding the Use of Videoconferencing in Education

Marek Blažek

The author presents a personal and professional overview of key technology issues in videoconferencing. The tone is both authoritative and informative, and the range of information covers most aspects of use. It provides a good introduction to videoconferencing for the novice, whilst existing users will benefit from the detailed options outlined in the technical sections. The article will help teachers not only to expand their knowledge of this developing field but also to organise their videoconferencing courses.
Roles of the Learner in Videoconferencing

Judith Háhn
Irena Podlásková
Videoconferencing as a method of language teaching and language learning is usually built on group work and collaborative learning (Budíková et al., 2008; Denksteinová and Podlásková, 2013; Dooly, 2007; Háhn and Podlásková, 2016; Hradilová et al., 2008; Morgan, 2008; Morgan et al., 2007; Štepánková and Hradilová, 2008). In most cases (cf. INVITE project 2008–2008; Denksteinová and Podlásková, 2013; Háhn and Podlásková, 2016), two groups of learners are interacting via a shared screen, which creates a special context for group dynamics. The present chapter introduces the informal and formal roles that learners can take when participating in group interaction during videoconferencing sessions. In addition, the task-based collaborative roles that may feature the three main stages of videoconferencing will be described with examples. The authors share their experience in this regard based on the joint ESP videoconferencing sessions they arranged between Hungarian and Czech students in 2014 (cf. Háhn and Podlásková, 2016) and between Finnish and Czech students in 2015 and 2017.

Roles and group dynamics

Foray (2006: 3) defines groups as “two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships”. In videoconferencing, the social links that connect the students can be multilayered. VC meetings are usually embedded into the syllabus of an ongoing language course, which means that the students on one side of the screen usually have regular class meetings before and after the videoconferencing sessions. Their social ties are set by their shared group membership and course history. These relations can be strengthened further by their collaborative preparation for the VO meeting and also by the physical space they share during the live session. The organizing principle is based on the concept of planned groups (Foray, 2006: 6), which means that they are formed around specific tasks and are formally organized.

Depending on the number of students in the group, the teacher can decide to arrange a VC meeting for the whole group that attends the course or divide the students into smaller groups. Based on their VC experiences, the authors recommend that 4–7 students should be seated on each side of the screen. The members of the VC group are comprised of two groups, and the chance of individual participation decreases if there are too many present. Too few members, on the other hand, could also be problematic. In our experience, the optimum class size is six per group.

The term group in VC can refer to the following levels of group formation:

Level A:
Participants who attend the same language (e.g. Business English) course in an institution. They meet regularly in classes, follow the same course syllabus, must meet the same requirements and are taught by the same teacher.

Level B:
Participants who share the same physical space during the VC, i.e. they are in the same room at the same time, facing a common screen. The group has a chairperson. This group is created from the participants who are in the same group at Level A. Depending on the number of course members, either all of them participate in the VC at the same time (i.e. Level A = Level B) or only some of them do. In the latter case, the group formed at Level A is divided into two or more groups for separate VC meetings.

Level C:
A smaller group of 2–4 participants who prepare a joint task for the VC. This micro-group can be formed by divid-
This chapter focuses on the roles that students take at Level B, i.e., in groups where the members share a physical space during a VC event. As highlighted by Fischer and Tenbrink (2003), participants occupying the same location tend to feel that the group on the other side of the screen is not only spatially but also socially distant. This cognitive perception of distance can thus lead to much weaker feelings of group identity and social immediacy at Level D than at Levels A and B.

Group dynamics is the study of group processes, which involves the scientific description of the groups in terms of their nature, their development and the interrelations between their members (see Cartwright and Zander, 1968; Lewin, 1947). Groups are not static; they can act and react in pursuit of a common goal, which can trigger different roles for the members. According to Forsyth (2006: 11-12), roles “specify the general behaviours expected of people who occupy different positions within the group”. In this interpretation, a role is a set of behaviour patterns that members of a group may follow. There are two main types of roles: naturally emerging or “informal” roles and assigned or “formal” roles (Dörnyei and Murphy, 2003). We discuss both the formal and informal roles that students can take in VC meetings.

Level D:
All the participants who attend the same VC meeting or a series of joint VC meetings. They share a social media space (e.g., a closed Facebook group) where they can introduce themselves, raise and discuss questions, and share materials before and after the VC. They also share the topics and/or goals of the VC project.

This results in multilayered groups and multilevel interdependence between the group members. Figure 1 shows an example of such an arrangement between a Hungarian group and Czech group (Level A) of students. Both groups are divided into two smaller groups (Level B) and separate VC meetings are set up for them. In addition, the students are asked to collaborate with students of the same or other nationality in smaller groups (Level C).

This figure illustrates the different layers of group formation at VC meetings.
Informal roles

There can be great variation in participant behaviour at VC meetings. Some might dominate the discussion by initiating and taking turns, while others prefer to be less active. During the live session, the teacher usually stays in the background and the participants manage the discussion themselves. A VC meeting is a collaborative setting with positive interdependence among the group members (Laal, 2013) as the tasks can only be accomplished in a joint effort. Some members may help their peers with information or vocabulary, while others may offer support in the form of corrections or confirmations. The group members can thus follow different behaviour patterns, which allows for the emergence of different roles.

Each role has its set of expected behaviours attached to it (Dörnyei and Murphy, 2003). With regard to the groups that take part in VC sessions, the roles and attached behaviour patterns can only be observed during the live meeting, even though the students may have already adopted informal roles at the preparation stage.

In this section, the roles that the authors observed in three VC meetings of Czech and Hungarian students are described. The sessions were arranged between the University of Pécs, Hungary and the University of Pardubice, Czech Republic in the spring of 2014. The findings show that the informal roles the participants took mostly persisted over the three sessions. The videoconferences (65–60 minutes each) were built into the schedule of BA Business English courses. The participants were second-year business students learning English for specific purposes and with English language skills at B2 level. When preparing for the VC, each group (Czech and Hungarian) had to work on a topic that was to be discussed at the meeting (cf., Háhn and Podlasková, 2016).

The three VC sessions were video-recorded, and the recordings were then analysed to see what forms of behaviour and thus what roles developed.

Structured observation (Forsyth, 2006: 31) was used to analyse participants' behaviour in order to observe the informal roles taken by students. Two main components were considered when describing and identifying the roles: the students' participation rates and the peer support they gave. As for the participation rates, the unit of analysis was the TCU (turn constructional unit), which is a smaller component of a turn in the conversation (Sacks et al., 1974, as cited in Numa, 2000: 69). A TCU is a segment of speech (e.g. a sentence, phrase or word) which completes a communicative act (Sacks et al., 1974, as cited in Numa, 2000: 69–70). When a speaker completed a TCU (i.e. participated in the discussion by saying something in English), a mark was made on the observation sheet. The individual participation rates were determined by calculating the proportion (%) of the TCUs for each participant in their own (Czech or Hungarian) group. The analysis thus did not include the length of the TCUs. As two groups were interacting, it seemed to be reasonable to focus on the frequency of the TCUs in order to get an overview of the students' participation in the three meetings (see Forsyth, 2014). When describing the roles, the TCUs will be referred to as “turns” for the sake of simplification, even though a turn in Conversation Analysis terminology can consist of one or more TCUs (Numa, 2000: 70).

The other component that was observed about the participants' behaviour was peer support. If a participant offered some peer support, s/he was identified as 'supportive'. The following forms of behaviour were considered as supportive (based on Philip et al., 2014):

1. Language-related support
   - corrective feedback, with mostly implicit corrections and reasts;
   - verbal and non-verbal confirmation of what someone else said;
   - co-construction of sentences;
   - clarification requests and confirmation checks;
   - taking over of complete turns; and
   - vocabulary support;
2. Task-related support
   - corrective or supplementary feedback and support, which is content-related;

3. Background (whispered) discussions among the group members, mostly in L1

In the case of peer support, marks were made in the observation sheet if a participant provided any of the above listed forms of support. By combining the participation rates and the person’s inclination to peer support, the following informal roles were identified.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominator</td>
<td>A dominator is a VO participant who takes more than 40% of speaker turns in the group. This person is highly active in asking and answering questions and feels responsible for keeping the conversation going. If there is a question addressed to the whole group, this person believes it is his or her task to answer it. In case there is silence, it is usually the dominator who breaks it, e.g. by expressing an opinion or by raising a question. The dominator is also supportive of others and is ready to help them with both language and content. In the first VO meeting between the Czech and Hungarian students, the chairpersons acted as dominators (see Table 1). This was probably because both were leader types in their own groups and the teachers thought they would be ideal chairs for the first VO. As the very first VO meeting can be stressful for students, it seems reasonable to choose more social and easy-going students to act as chairs. However, the formal role of being a chair carries the risk of dominating behaviour as the selected person assumes it is part of the job to dominate the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active contributor</td>
<td>An active contributor is an ideal participant in VO meetings. This role involves the combination of peer supportive behaviour and active, but not dominating, participation in the conversation. An active contributor has a participation rate of 10–39%, which means that this person takes part in the discussion but also lets others have their say. The active contributor prefers to initiate turns instead of waiting to be selected by other speakers. As can be seen in Table 1, the presence of two dominators in the group (VC3 in the Czech group) can hinder the emergence of this role, while the absence of dominators can facilitate this kind of behaviour pattern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active listener</td>
<td>An active listener rarely supports others. Even though this person might initiate speaker turns, s/he prefers to be selected, i.e. called upon by other group members to talk. With a conversation participation rate of 0–9%, an active listener is a silent observer most of the time. If active listeners are assigned formal roles (e.g. chairperson), they can become active contributors (see Table 1, VC2 and VC3 Hungarian group). In the Czech-Hungarian VO series, the number of active listeners decreased on the Hungarian side.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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ian side when there were no dominators present in the third VC. A possible explanation for this could be that with no dominator being there, these participants had more opportunities to contribute to the discussion and became active contributors. In the Czech group, on the other hand, with at least one dominator present in each session, most of the active listeners maintained this behaviour pattern in all sessions. This again might imply that there are other factors that can make a participant become an active listener, such as being a reserved type of person or lacking confidence in using the foreign language.

Passive listener

A passive listener integrates a set of avoidance strategies, which leads to the person's marginalisation during the VC. The passive listener's participation rate is similar to that of the active listener (0–9%), but his or her behaviour differs. While an active listener might initiate some turns and support other speakers, the passive listener behaves like an outsider. This participant never initiates turns, only speaks when asked to do so, and never supports others. A passive listener does not really follow the conversation; instead, s/he might engage in non-task related activities, e.g. playing on the smartphone. Passive listeners often rely on help from others in the form of both task- and language-related support. Based on the authors' experience, the following factors can trigger this behaviour pattern: more than 7 people in a group, presence of dominators, reserved personality type, and poor language skills. Passive listeners might even try to avoid further meetings after the first VC session.

The question arises how the teacher can ensure balanced participation rates and peer support during the VC. There are certain factors that cannot be influenced. Students bring their own personalities, emotions, attitudes and foreign language skills to the VC meeting, which can hardly be influenced at short notice by the teacher. However, certain steps can be taken in preparation for the event. The number of group members on each side of the screen should be maximised to provide enough opportunities for everyone to contribute. Before the live session, the teacher should assign and also describe the formal roles that the students can take in the VC (see next section). The students should also be prepared on how to communicate in a foreign language in a meeting-like situation.

The authors recommend practicing a routine turn-taking procedure before the live VC meeting and/or assign the chairperson with the task to regularly activate passive listeners. Depending on the fluency of the learners, the teacher can provide and teach a list of conversational phrases that the participants can use during the VC, e.g. “Sorry to interrupt, but...” or “Let's move on to the next point...” The teacher should pay special attention to the preparation of those students whose language skills are weaker. In addition, to increase the feeling of social immediacy between the two groups, it is advisable to seat the participants around a small table close to the screen.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the informal roles that the students took in three Czech-Hungarian VC meetings.

Formal roles

Videoconferencing as a group interaction activity allows for formal role taking. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) call attention to the benefits of role allocation by claiming that formal roles can actually reduce the stress and uncertainty that can emerge before and during group work. If the students get clear guidelines regarding their responsibilities, they will know what is expected of them and thus feel more comfortable with group work. As stated by Dörnyei and Murphey (2003: 119), “role allocation increases the learning potential of the group and fosters
Table 1: Informal roles at three VG meetings between Czech and Hungarian students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>VC1</th>
<th>VC2</th>
<th>VC3</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>VC2</th>
<th>VC2</th>
<th>VC3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>D/chair</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D/chair</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>AO</td>
<td>AO</td>
<td>D/chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>AO</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>D/chair</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>AL</td>
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<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AC/chair</td>
<td>AL</td>
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<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>AC/chair</td>
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<td>I</td>
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<td>K</td>
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<td>AL</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

D = dominators  
AO = active contributors  
AL = active listeners  
PL = passive listeners

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the development of abilities in different members". This is especially true in a videoconferencing situation, where the participants need to act in a context different from the traditional classroom.

Before the VC, the teacher can assign specific roles to the group members according to which they are expected to behave in the meeting. Having a formal role means having responsibility for a task, which can help the student avoid or overcome a less desired informal role (e.g., being a passive listener). The formal roles should be rotated among the students if there are more VCs. The authors suggest the following formal roles for VC meetings:

### Facilitator

A facilitator assumes part of the chairperson's responsibilities. There can be two types of facilitators in VC meetings: one who focuses on content-related goals and one who focuses on the conversation. The content facilitator's main responsibility is to ensure that the meeting's objectives are met. This person should enhance the accomplishment of the task(s) set for the meeting by making statements on decisions, e.g., "So we have agreed that... now we can move on to the next point." A conversation facilitator should make sure that the participation of members is balanced. This person could select speakers to answer questions raised by the other group (e.g., "And who would like to answer this question?" or "Anne, what about you?") and thus keep the discussion moving forward. The authors recommend that the teacher choose students with good foreign language skills for these tasks, especially in the first VC, because this role requires the ability to follow and contribute to the discussion.

### Chairperson

A chairperson is responsible for managing the conversation. S/he opens the meeting, greets the other group, and introduces the members of his/her own group. The chair should also make sure that the assigned task is accomplished by reminding the others of the agenda. It is his or her responsibility to involve the others in the conversation, e.g., by encouraging others to ask or answer questions. When selecting the chairperson, teachers tend to choose the most social and linguistically fluent student. On one hand, it is a good idea as VC meetings in a foreign language can be stressful for students. On the other hand, there is a risk that a confident and outgoing person may dominate the discussion. To avoid this, teachers should carefully describe the chairperson's responsibilities. Another strategy could be to choose two students to act as chairs. If there are the two of them, the task does not seem so overwhelming. In the third Czech-Hungarian VC, for example, two shy students were selected by the teacher to act as chairs for the Hungarian group. This formal role helped them move out of their comfort zones as passive listeners and become active contributors (see Table 1 above).

### Secretary

A secretary's main task is to observe and take notes, i.e., recording the main points raised during the meeting. Such student should not be expected to write down everything that has been said in the meeting, but s/he can at least take notes on the main points. The teacher can aid the secretary's note-taking by preparing a template before the VC (see an example in Figure 2). There can be multiple secretaries, and a follow-up task for them could be to compare their notes and write up the final minutes together. This role can be ideal for shy students and also for those whose speaking skills in the foreign language are not so strong.
**Meeting's objective:**

**Present:**

- Group 1:
- Group 2:
- Chairperson(s):

**Agenda:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point 1</th>
<th>Presented by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Suggestions/ideas:**

- 
- 

**Decision/Action:**

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*Figure 2: Template for the minutes of a VC meeting*
Time-keeper

A time-keeper has a less challenging task. In keeping an eye on the clock, this person should consider the amount of time the group can devote to the discussion of each point on the agenda. This person should remind the others how much time they have left and also urge them to finish the discussion when time is up. This role can be assigned to students with weaker language skills in the first VO, but for later meetings the time-keepers can be those who had more challenging formal roles earlier.

Before the videoconference

Before the VC, the teacher explains the tasks and connected collaborative duties that learners are expected to perform. At the preparation stage, the students can act as information seekers, social media collaborators, presentation designers, task-focused language learners and team players.

Task-based roles in collaborative learning

Videoconferencing is based on a learner-centred approach (Denksteinová and Podlasková, 2013; Háhn and Podlasková, 2016). The authors see the teacher as a facilitator assigning the formal roles described in the previous section. The teacher also assigns roles indirectly, via the tasks that the students need to do before, during and after the VC. These roles are therefore task-based and reflect the nature of the task, e.g. a learner instructed by a teacher to design a presentation is considered here to take the role of a presentation designer. This section focuses on the roles that a learner can take by completing the tasks set in the VC process. The example tasks are from the authors' joint VCs held between Czech and Hungarian (2014) and Czech and Finnish (2015 and 2017) students.

Collaboration is a core feature of videoconferencing. According to Dooly (2007: 215), collaborative learning goes beyond the concept of traditional group work as the students need to complete different tasks but the individual outcomes serve a common goal. In VCs, the participants are responsible for their own assignments and also for contributing to the success of the joint outcome (cf. Chen and Willits, 1999; Dooly, 2007). By completing the tasks assigned by the teacher, each student performs different roles in their contribution to the common goal.

Information seeker

In preparation for the VC, the student often acts as an information seeker when finding specific information and searching through data related to the task. S/he is responsible for the relevance of the information or data, correct citation of the source and, above all, compatibility of the source material within his or her group.

Example task:
The learners are asked to prepare a list of questions relating to their VC partners' university (e.g., university programmes, teaching methods, tuition fees, student organisations, etc.) in a shared document and find relevant data to answer their VC partners' questions.

Lessons learnt:
The teacher should emphasize the difference between assumptions/opinions and facts and encourage students to support their findings with arguments and cite their sources.
Social media collaborator

A social media collaborator cooperates with his or her VC group members and completes tasks using social media as a collaboration platform (e.g., closed Facebook group established by the teacher for this purpose). S/he is responsible for establishing contact with assigned or chosen VC group members and should possess sufficient digital proficiency. The teacher acts as a Facebook group administrator and can remind students via his or her posts to proportionally balance informal chats and formal task completions.

Example task:
In addition to standard introductions including, for example, age, field of study and hobbies, the learners are asked to introduce themselves by posting an image expressing their cultural identity in the closed Facebook group before the live VO. All the members are invited to ask questions and comment on the introductions. The untitled picture serves as an ice-breaker, triggers further questions and helps to establish essential contacts for further collaboration via social media.

Lessons learnt:
Some students feel uncomfortable using social media in a semi-official, teacher-controlled way. The teacher can arrange a group discussion on their fears before they start collaborating via social media.

Presentation designer

A presentation designer creates his or her own presentation and/or compiles group presentations. S/he is responsible for information relevance, suitable design, language accuracy and timely upload.

Example task:
The learners create a shared presentation about a chosen social identity (gender, age, sexual, racial, ethnic, religious, class, regional and subcultural) and describe it from their own cultural backgrounds. The presentations are uploaded to the closed Facebook group for the other group members to study before the VC.

Lessons learnt:
The teacher should set the presentation upload deadline sufficiently in advance of the live videoconference to accommodate upload delays, allow time to study the presentations and prepare/distribute answers.

Task-focused language learner

A task-focused language learner uses the language as an instrument to complete the given task. The learner’s responsibility is to find and confirm vocabulary to successfully communicate the message in a given communication language.

Example task:
The learners prepare a set of questions concerning intercultural issues and questions about customs, foods or taboos in their countries that require explaining often unique and hardly translatable terms (e.g., pomlázka in Czech—an Easter whip made from willow branches).

Lessons learnt:
The teacher can offer language assistance and avoid intercultural misunderstandings during the live VO meeting.
Lessons learnt:
As the learners sometimes try to present or even read the materials that have already been shared within the group (e.g. on Facebook), the authors suggest that the teacher thoroughly explain the prevailing format of a live VC as a discussion and opinion exchange platform rather than a presentation platform.

Team player
When preparing for the VC, the learners need to collaborate on tasks behind the scenes, i.e. outside the official learning environment of the classroom or that of the Facebook group. They need to act as members of a team and allocate tasks.

Lessons learnt:
To ensure balanced cooperation, the teacher can ask the students to report on their share of the work before the live VC. Another way to encourage collaboration is to ask the learners to provide proof of their social media collaboration (e.g. posting chat screenshots in closed Facebook groups).

During the videoconference
During the VC, the roles in collaborative learning naturally transform from the preparatory stage into the live VC stage (e.g. a presentation designer becomes a presenter) or emerge during the live VC and can also be seen as informal roles mentioned in the previous section (e.g. listener). This section presents several challenges learners face in their roles and offers suggestions how to overcome them.

Presenter
A presenter's task is to present specific information or data and support them with arguments.

Example task:
The presenter summarises only the main points of the shared presentation and asks the main question to be discussed in the live VC. For example, the question “How are sexual identities represented in your country’s media?” was asked under the topic of sexual identity.

Supporter
A supporter provides further explanation, confirms or completes the presented information, and offers his or her own opinion or language support.

Lessons learnt:
In the role of supporter, learners often concentrate prevailingly on their own task or the task in their sub-group and are not able to support the remaining team members. The teacher can encourage the coordinator (i.e. chairperson) beforehand to actively invite all team members to get involved in the discussion.

Negotiator
The participants negotiate and make agreements when completing the group task(s) assigned for the live VC. They raise questions, suggest ideas, accept or reject solutions, and propose actions.
Lessons learnt:
The authors organised several training sessions before the VC concerning the process of negotiating, including the appropriate register. This preparation helped the learners to feel more confident in the negotiation process.

Example task:
The learners analyse their VC experience by answering and presenting questions set by their teacher in classes after the live VC (e.g., about the students' roles during the VC, their favourite VC and reasons for it, their reflections on the other culture, their suggestions for ideal VC content).

Lessons learnt:
The teachers should provide clear instructions as to the feedback content.

After the videoconference
The authors used numerous follow-up activities reflecting back on the live VC and learners' roles in this process. The learners analysed their strengths and weaknesses as videoconference participants and their cooperation with other members, chose their favourite videoconference and explained their reasons, provided suggestions as to the 'ideal' videoconference, presented aspects of the other culture they would like to adopt/transfer into their own culture, and answered questions from their peers. The following roles were taken by all participating learners after the VC:

Self-assessor and reviewer
The learners also took the roles of self-assessors and reviewers in a more anonymous setting by completing online questionnaires prepared by the teachers.

Example task:
The questionnaire could contain questions on how the learners feel about their own participation and how, in their view, the VC meetings contributed to their language learning.

Lessons learnt:
The authors suggest completing the online questionnaires in class immediately following the live VC to ensure authentic feedback data.

Feedback giver
By taking the role of a feedback giver the learners provided differently structured feedback, starting with often spontaneous feedback immediately after the live VC meeting or presenting certain assigned aspects of the process in the form of a presentation or an individual interview with the teacher.
Information seeker/presenter

One part of the assigned follow-up tasks for the learners was to research deeper into a chosen aspect of the foreign culture and, taking the role of an information seeker/presenter, to offer the findings of his or her search.

Example task:
The learners create a mini-presentation by finding additional data. For example, in order to learn more about gender equality in the other country, they can find practical examples of that equality and present or comment on those examples in class.

Lessons learnt:
The teachers should provide clear instructions as to this activity, i.e., not presenting already known facts but new perspectives and aspects.

Conclusion

When videoconferencing is built on group-based communication, it offers a fertile ground for role-taking. Each participant becomes engaged in a series of task-based roles that are attached to the three main stages of videoconferencing: preparation, live meeting and follow-up. Before the VC, the students search for information, join a social media platform, design presentations, and work as a team in preparation for the meeting. During the VC, they all present their views and findings, support one another, and act as negotiators. After the live meeting(s), they can take part in various follow-up tasks as feedback givers, reviewers or information seekers. These roles are thus collaborative and are meant for all participants.

In addition to the task-based collaborative roles, it is advisable to assign formal roles that some of the students take during the live meeting. These roles are connected to the nature of the communicative situation (i.e., a video-mediated meeting between two groups) and provide frameworks of behaviour for the participants. The formal roles, if clearly described, can also ensure balanced participation. In case of multiple lives sessions, it is a good idea to rotate the formal roles so that the students can have more varied experiences.

The task-based and formal roles naturally supplement one another, and it is feasible for a participant to be, for example, the chairperson and also assume all the task-based roles that are required for the completion of the overall VC project.

In spite of the careful planning of the assigned roles, there will always be naturally emerging, informal roles in the live group discussions. Some of the students will be more active than others, which may result in dominating behaviour, while some participants might act as passive contributors or listeners. To promote more balanced participation, the teacher should explain the goals of the live session(s) beforehand, develop and describe the tasks, assign the formal roles, and also equip the students with any necessary phrases and vocabulary in the foreign language.
### Bibliography

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