



Communication in the virtual classroom in higher education: Languaging beyond the boundaries of time and space



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ABSTRACT

The empirical study presented here focuses upon naturalistic social interaction in online synchronous communities within higher education. Our interests here relate to accounting for the communicative strategies employed by participants who are dealing with a common task, and how these specific tasks are negotiated within the constraints and opportunities accorded in the *multimodal multilingual* virtual setting. Taking sociocultural theoretical points of departure, we focus on students' languaging and use of tools when they have access to a range of resources inside the online videoconferencing program. The study is based upon screen recordings of both student-only and teacher-lead meetings during one semester in the online course *Italian for beginners* offered by a Swedish university. The analysis is two-fold: we provide an overview of the interactional patterns at the general lesson level in the data complemented by a micro-interactional analysis of selected slices of everyday life from two meetings. Our findings indicate that students make use of several resources that dialectically shape how they get positioned within the virtual community culture. These identification processes function as ways of enriching and nurturing learning, both of appropriating the target language, as well as enabling ways of being in *multimodal, multilingual* communities of practices.

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During their fifth online meeting in the course *Italian for beginners I* offered by a Swedish university, students A and D are focused on a task where they are required to discuss their favorite dish. They can hear each other's voices in the virtual environment and in addition to having access to an interactive whiteboard, they can text-chat on the screen (see Fig. 1). The participants do not put on the webcam function available in this environment.

Excerpt 1 represents the social interaction that takes place in this setting 5.23 min after the start of the student-only online meeting.

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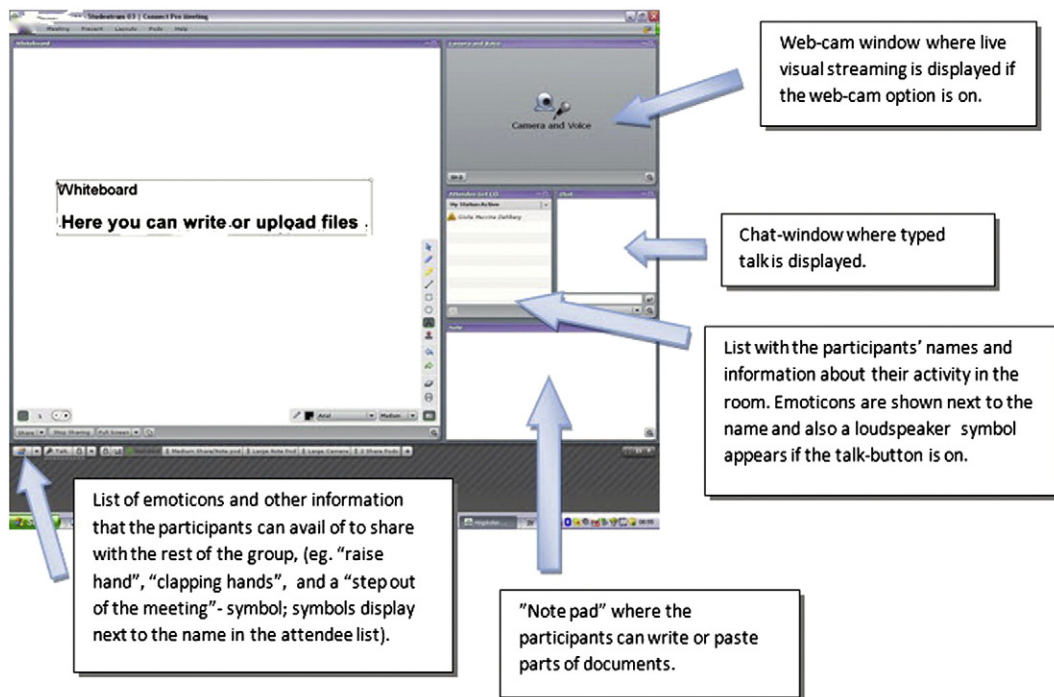


Fig. 1. Screenshot of a synchronous virtual environment with up to five pod windows (all texts and labels in the environment are in English).

Excerpt 1. “Le lenticchie” (It. Lentils)¹

- 01 A: "ok" (.) nästa?
"ok" (.) next?
- 02 D: Eh (.) quale è il tuo (.) piatto (.) preferito
Eh (.) what is your (.) favorite (.) dish
- 03 (1)
- 04 A: oj (.) "ò": (3) *il mio piatto preferito är nån slags bröd med linser på* ((laugh))
Oj (.) "ò": (3) my favorite dish is a sort of bread with lentils on ((laugh))
- 05 D: "mhm"?
- 06 A: *ingen aning vad det heter*
no idea what it's called
- 07 D: *pane?* (.) con
bread? (.) with
- 08 A: *pane con "ee" :: (.) [co:n]*
bread with "ee" :: (.) [wi:th]
- 09 D: [ingen aning] heller
[no idea] either
- 10 A: >nu vill jag veta det var är ordboken< (.) här!
>now I want to know where is the dictionary< (.) here!
- 11 D: den har jag inte på plats
I don't have it here
- 12 (2)
- 13 A: *pane con:: (3) >vänta vänta vänta< (.) lenticchia! (0.5) [pane] con len-ti-cchie*
bread with:: (3) >wait wait wait< (.) lentil! (0.5) [bread] with len-tils
[len?]
- 14 D: *Lenti?*
- 15 D: (3)
- 16 (3)
- 17 A: *len-ti-cchie*
len-tils
- 18 D: L-E-N-T-I ?
(1)
- 19 (1)
- 20 A: L -I-L-E-N-T-I-C-C-H-I-(.)A (.) det är singular (1) *[ska jag skriva? jag kan skriva]*
L-I-L-E-N-T-I-C-C-H-I-S (.) it's singular (1) [shall I write? I can write]
- 21 D: [lenti]cchia?(1) var det ett] H med där?
[lenti? (1) was it with an] H there?
- 22 A: *Len-ti*

¹ See Transcription Key.

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