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Developing LSP needs through simulations of international conferences: The case of L2 simulations vs. L3 simulations

Abstract

Linguistic diversity is an important principle of language education policies in Europe. The aim of this paper is to present the use of simulation as a pedagogical tool in L2 and L3 language instruction. The paper describes how international conferences as simulation exercises were integrated in the course programmes of English for specific purposes (ESP) and French for specific purposes (FSP). It presents the main characteristics of the course design in view of students' future professional needs and the Common European Framework (CEF) correspondence. Based on the action research and student feedback acquired through a series of simulation cycles, it puts forward some strengths and weaknesses of the approach as reflected in the experience of L2 and L3 environments respectively. The results indicate that international conference simulations increase student motivation, and offer numerous possibilities for the development of all four language skills, cooperative learning skills, negotiation skills, intercultural skills, discipline related skills, and transferable skills, in L2 as well as in L3 settings. Thus they could be used as a means of promoting linguistic diversity in different LSP teaching / learning settings.

Keywords: LSP, simulation, international conference, cultural diversity.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present the use of simulations as a possible answer to the LSP programme design requirements. We integrated simulation exercises in the ESP and French for specific purposes (FSP) course programmes at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. In the first section we outline some characteristics of the principle of linguistic diversity, which is often linked with multilingualism. The question of active multilingualism is namely becoming increasingly important for students and experts involved in different types of mobility in the European Union (EU). In the second and third section the background and participants are presented.

In the next section we highlight the specificities of simulations as a pedagogical tool. Then, the applied model of conference simulations is described. In the last two sections we discuss and evaluate the comparative results obtained through action research and student feedback in L2 and in L3 environment. It is argued that simulations of international conferences set a framework, in which students benefit from a complex situation, offering numerous possibilities to learn different foreign languages as vectors of cultural diversity, and of specialised fields.

1. Multilingualism and cultural diversity in Europe

Faced with its successive enlargement cycles, the EU is increasingly becoming aware of its multilingualism and cultural diversity. Having opened itself to new markets it had to face the shock of increased number of language combinations. The EU institutions have to deal with the need for intensified mobility of European experts and adequate translation services.

The EU decided to highlight multilingualism as its specificity in numerous documents. Thus the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union puts forward the respect of linguistic diversity. In 2007, the issue got an additional institutional impetus with the creation of the post of the European Commissioner for Multilingualism. Within the ambit of the Council of Europe, the concept also features as one of the driving forces behind the definition of language policies. The latest instruments go even further in this direction, claiming that Europe should move toward plurilingual education.

Even though European language policies unequivocally insist on promotion of linguistic diversity, the topic seems to be rarely dealt with in LSP literature. The available literature mostly deals with the question from the socio-political point of view, considering the major consequences of social and political change for language policies, and addresses the topic of language endangerment in European context (Ferguson, 2007), as well as in some other typically multilingual contexts. There may be several reasons for this situation.

The first reason seems to be the undisputed emergence of English as the *lingua franca* on a global scale and especially the predominant use of English language in scientific communication. This situation produces a gap between the avowed goal of linguistic diversity on the one hand and the constraints of academic publication on the other hand. The second reason is to be found at the level of study programmes: despite the overall European dedication to student mobility a quick glance at different "non-linguistic" undergraduate study programmes offering LSP courses, shows that most of them do not include the choice between several foreign languages. The third reason is of a more practical nature and it concerns the students' level of language proficiency: not all the students can be expected to have

the adequate level of language proficiency to effectively function in LSP courses for both chosen foreign languages.

These conditions seriously limit the target group of students currently involved in LSP courses in two foreign languages. The lack of available literature is therefore understandable but also regrettable in the light of increased importance of student and expert mobility. Addressing the question of how to provide for adequate LSP programmes for L2 and L3 could contribute to the search of effective tools for the development of active multilingualism that would meet the needs of the students, involved in the exchange programmes, and of the changed profiles of European experts. This paper discusses the possibilities to use simulations of international conferences to develop active multilingualism.

2. Background

Regarding the role of the tertiary level education, an EU Action Plan 2004 – 2006 to promote linguistic diversity in language policies suggests that: "Higher Education institutions play a key role in promoting societal and individual multilingualism. Proposals that each university implement a coherent language policy clarifying its role in promoting language learning and linguistic diversity, (...), are to be welcomed" (2003: 8). Along these lines and based on a needs analysis carried out among the students, our faculty decided to put foreign languages among the top priorities in its programmes. Promoting language learning was thus recognised at the faculty level, but the question of linguistic diversity was not explicitly mentioned. The current situation regarding L2 and L3 instruction points to a lesser, (though relatively high when compared to other Slovene faculties) degree of orientation towards multilingualism. Two foreign languages are obligatory only for students of two out of thirteen undergraduate programmes.

2.1. Participants

In all of the undergraduate programmes offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences students are asked to choose their L2 among 5 foreign languages. L2 is obligatory for all the students at least during the first two years of their studies. For the students of International Relations and of European Studies two foreign languages are obligatory in the first four years of their studies. Before entering the university programmes, most Slovenian students have been learning English for eight years; consequently most of them choose this language as their L2.

The given framework results in practically 90% of first year and second year students attending different ESP courses. The ESP courses are diversified according to the students' chosen field of studies (Sociology, Political Science, International

Relations, European Studies, etc.). By contrast, L3 (FSP among others) is obligatory only for students of International Relations and European Studies. Other students can choose it as an elective course. L3 languages attract fewer enrolled students. Groups have to cope with mixed abilities and study interests.

Simulations were introduced in the course programmes of ESP and of FSP in the third and in the fourth year of studies. This choice was guided by several factors: a relative homogeneity of groups (predominantly European Studies and International Relations students); the presumed students' interest in international affairs; the students' relatively advanced level or independent user level of L2 and L3 respectively; the students' advanced knowledge in the core subjects; and the search of synergies with some other core subjects, which also used simulations as a pedagogical tool (i.e. International Organizations, Negotiations, International Relations). We have been using simulations as part of the programme since 2000 in FSP and since 2004 in ESP. The participants of the analyses discussed in this paper were students enrolled in these two courses. While the ESP groups are invariably very big (sometimes exceeding 50 students per group), the FSP groups are smaller (15 students per group). With reference to the level of foreign language proficiency the results of the entrance tests indicate that the ESP group is usually rather homogenous, but the students in the FSP have more varied levels of knowledge, ranging from A2 to B2, sometimes even C1. All the LSP courses are two-semester courses with 30 weekly sections. Students attend 1 two-hour section per week.

2.2. Needs analysis

It has been generally accepted among LSP teachers that the typical student profile and the targeted professional needs determine the nature of the LSP course and set the basic framework for the course design. In our case, these two parameters underscore the importance of oral and of written communication skills, as well as other field related competences. In their professional careers, most of the students of International Relations and of European Studies are typically going to be faced with the need to use foreign languages to communicate effectively in their expert field. They expect to find jobs in Slovene ministries, in multinational firms, in European institutions and in international organisations. Their future professional contexts will require an advanced level of linguistic and expert competence.

As regards the global scale of common reference levels in the Common European Framework (CEF) it can therefore be claimed that the desired outcome for our students would be to achieve level C1, where the speaker can "understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning; can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions; can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, professional purpose; can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices" (Council of Europe, 2001: 24). Due to students' divergent initial levels of language knowledge in the groups these objectives are more or less difficult to

achieve. Most ESP students would term them as realistic, while the FSP students are more doubtful about them. But in line with the concept of active multilingualism the CEF descriptors can serve as a framework for the definition of students' multilingual profiles (Goullier, 2007:17).

These characteristics of students' professional needs and competences based multilingual profiles seem to induce naturally towards flexible pedagogical solutions based on a student-centred approach encompassing a high level of active student involvement and a high level of technical skills.

3. Simulations as instructional approach

3.1. Simulations vs. some traditional instructional approaches

Simulations can be counted among constructivist approaches. When compared to traditional teaching methods, such as lectures, tutorials and individual research, where the learner is more or less a receiver of the information, simulations are based on peer interaction. Their distinguishing features are task-based or problem-based, collaborative and active learning in real-life situations, where knowledge is built by the students themselves.

But the distinction between traditional methods and simulation is somewhat misleading because of the oversimplified picture of 'traditional methods'. Moreover, simulations are not a new invention. The Harvard model simulation of the League of Nations started in 1920. Since 1950s simulations have existed in various disciplines. Among others they are also used in courses dealing with international relations and in language courses. Already some 35 years ago some French researchers were discussing the death of manuals as the basic tool of language teaching programmes. They recognised the advantages of simulations as opposed to traditional teaching methods. First, they introduced them into general language classes, but later they also became part of LSP courses (Yaiche, 1996: 12-14).

Recent research into the use of simulations seems to confirm the initial assumption about the positive impacts of this instructional approach. Crookall and Arai (1995) and many other authors, cited in Halleck et al. (2002: 331) note the usefulness of simulations in L2 instruction because of their "interdisciplinarity and interculturality". Similarly, Kovalik and Kovalik (2002: 352) recognize the ability of simulations to "build bridges among people coming from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds". Ip and Linser (2001: 6) report on the success of role play web-based simulations in political science and point to the advantages of using simulations for assessment purposes. Cheng (2007: 67) highlights the beneficial effects of simulation-based L2 writing instruction, especially "student awareness of discipline-specific generic features", increased "discourse competence and writing accuracy".

3.2. Simulations of international conferences: overview and rationale

Simulations of international conferences are often used in the International Relations, in political science curricula, and in language courses to achieve different pedagogical objectives. Thus Halleck et al. (2002) describe how a simulation of an academic conference was incorporated into an international composition class. Multilateral conferences introduce also the notion of negotiation. This "interactive problem solving as the metaphor for negotiation" (Kelman, 1996: 99) is widely associated with role-playing and gaming. The cases and the rules impose interactive patterns on the players, and thus they construct a new reality.

In the described ESP and FSP environment at the Faculty of Social Sciences, simulation cycles were designed to encourage students to actively participate in real-life situations, to grasp the logic of such events, and to acquire the necessary language skills in L2 and in L3. Due to institutional requirements simulations were integrated into the weekly two-hour sections and were therefore planned as extensive cycles rather than intensive sessions, which would have been closer to the real-world context. At the beginning, the simulations were carried out independently from other courses. But given that students were involved in several parallel simulation cycles with several subject teachers and a heavy workload for each of them, our aim was to integrate LSP simulations with another course. As a result, the applied simulation model gradually started to follow a conceptual framework used for the course named International Organizations, while the language course is focused on the linguistic aspects of the process.

During a typical simulation process, students are initially acquainted with the case. They identify, define and analyse the problem. Table 1 presents two typical simulation scenarios. The scenarios were designed by the subject teacher of International Organizations.

Scenario 1 **International Sanctions – a review**

Articles 41 and 42 of the United Nations Charter provide the possibility of introducing economic and other sanctions against a state that does not comply with demands of the Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter. Criticisms began to emerge, however, about the rationale of using sanctions, especially if they include comprehensive economic sanctions for a longer period. The losses suffered by the national economy because of sanctions are many: shortage of jobs, restricted supply of food and other goods, medicine, etc. Effects of sanctions are therefore felt by the whole population of the country in question. Right now, for example, we may be witnessing the most draconic sanctions to date in the Palestinian Authority. They are targeted against the government, although ordinary people suffer most.

The General Assembly will consider an adoption of a document in which the efficiency of international sanctions will be evaluated. Should the governments reconsider the use of sanctions? What kind of reform of the 'system of sanctions' should be undertaken and implemented?

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Scenario 2 Child malnutrition

According to UNICEF, "Undernutrition is implicated in more than half of all child deaths worldwide. Undernourished children have lowered resistance to infection; they are more likely to die from common childhood ailments like diarrhoeal diseases and respiratory infections, and for those who survive, frequent illness saps their nutritional status, locking them into a vicious cycle of recurring sickness and faltering growth. Their plight is largely invisible: three quarters of the children who die from causes related to malnutrition were only mildly or moderately undernourished, showing no outward sign of their vulnerability. Poverty, low levels of education, and poor access to health services are major contributors to childhood malnutrition."

Malnutrition is a complex problem, which requires a wide and multi-aspect attention. The situation is particularly critical for the developing world, and especially in war-torn places in Africa. The General Assembly will review actions taken so far to tackle this problem, and will consider an adoption of a document - a special action plan to stop malnutrition in Africa, with an emphasis on countries where the problem is particularly grave.

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Table 1: Examples of simulation scenarios

Each student is assigned a well defined role, comparable to the one they might encounter in their professional life: they act as state representatives, presiding officers or journalists in an international conference. As protagonists they get certain duties. These duties are carried out in individual steps as the conference simulation unwraps. Typically, the steps would include the outputs presented in Table 2. Similar models can be found in numerous variations of conference simulations around the world (the most famous being the Harvard National Model United Nations simulation) to introduce students to the issues of multilateral diplomacy, globalisation, international politics, etc., but information on how they contribute to students' development of language skills is scarce.

Stage	Outputs
1. The preparation stage (Pre-negotiation phase) Planning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflict awareness - Needs analysis - Selection of objectives - Selection of strategies - Anticipation of other party's needs, objectives and actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A written version of the Country's Foreign policy profile - A written version of the Position paper describing the problem, the objectives and the Strategies - A written version of the Opening speech - The rules of procedure adopted by the conference
2. Simulation of the international conference (Negotiation phase) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint shaping of ideas for solution - Influencing the other side - Generating solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communications between the states representatives - Official correspondence - Newspaper articles, interviews with the state representatives - Press conferences, press releases - Draft resolutions - Delivery of a speech - Contributions in negotiations - Participation in meetings and in caucuses - Conclusion of an agreement - Adoption of the final document

3. Evaluation and reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-Assessment - Peer-Assessment - Evaluation interviews
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Table 2: Stages and outputs in a typical cycle of international conference simulation

We designed additional course-book materials to help the students with the tasks. The materials encourage students to tackle background readings related to the nature of the topics they are dealing with. Moreover, they analyse the typical documents produced in an international conference, such as opening speeches, diplomatic correspondence, country profiles, declarations, treaties, rules of procedure, etc.

Like Cheng (*ibid.*: 72), we feel that genre analysis is one of the crucial tools to understand and apply different rhetorical patterns, which prove to be highly conventional and standardised in international conferences. These patterns go well beyond the types of texts our students have been accustomed to read in foreign language, i.e. newspaper articles, academic articles, textbooks. But as opposed to Cheng (*ibid.*: 78), who opens the question of who should carry out the genre analysis tasks – the teacher or the students – we believe that a certain degree of deductive approach is necessary in providing this kind of input, especially because our students are more interested in the functional aspects of language than in the issues of discourse analysis.

Typical outputs were also used for assessment. The goal of the simulation was to produce a resolution. This final document should reflect the search for consensus by all the parties involved. A debriefing session was organised to evaluate the results of the negotiation.

4. Results

4.1. Student response

Coursework for the class was evaluated throughout the negotiation cycle to measure students' initial performance and to compare performance after instruction. At the end of each negotiation cycle we used individual interviews and discussion section to evaluate student learning.

Students' LSP needs were difficult to appraise in advance, not only because of mixed abilities but also because they were developing through the negotiation cycle. Coleman distinguishes three types of discourse structuring in negotiations: the structure of the reality of simulation, the structure of the learner's task and the structure of the discourse that the learners are expected to acquire (Kovalik and Kovalik, 2002: 347). This seems to be reflected also in students' perception of their

LSP needs. At the beginning of the cycle, teamwork, negotiation skills, and discipline related skills were highlighted by students as the most useful skills in this project. Students realised very quickly that their contributions had direct influence on the group as a whole and they appreciated the group spirit. They also understood that they needed to be well informed about the subject of negotiation and about the country they represented. Finally, they recognized that negotiation skills were necessary if they were to achieve the desired goals. Surprisingly, students were initially less aware of the language impact in the process of mutual influence.

However, the importance of clear and accurate communication came increasingly to the forefront when they were faced with new situations and eventual misunderstandings, and it gradually became evident that the rhetorical skills were also important and that an analytic approach to language questions provided a basis for reassurance in the negotiation. This was usually a trigger for most students to start learning language, but it is difficult to talk about a well expressed tendency.

The results indicate that simulations are complex situations, where a blend of different kinds of skills is required. The comparisons between different generations, simulations and groups fail to yield a clear answer as to which skills to stress at a particular point of negotiation. Rather than talking about the relevant language skills at individual stages of the simulation, our experience shows that the teacher should be skilful enough to grasp every opportunity offered by the simulation dynamics in order to introduce the language issues. This spontaneity was highly valued by both groups of students. They viewed simulation as a new reality, an entity, in which it gradually became difficult to distinguish the language from the non-language competences.

4.2. Language competences

Negotiators should be able to explain their position in concrete terms, avoiding ambiguities, and making sure that the other party understood the communication. When necessary, they should also be able to conceal information to use it for strategic purposes and to achieve their rhetorical aims. The other party must be engaged in active listening. In multilateral settings this communication will involve multiple communication channels, obeying different discourse rules and conventions. This framework provides a fruitful ground for language learning involving the four language skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking. However, considerable differences were observed between the L2 and L3 group in terms of LSP needs. While L2 students listed the need for better understanding of the situation, of the country they represented and improved negotiation skills, L3 students put more stress on the development of listening and reading skills. Considering the levels of language analysis, L3 students' perception of their needs was more oriented towards vocabulary work and text analysis. These activities had a priority over the productive skills in general, while the L2 students felt the need to be coached on the relevant public speaking skills.

Quite naturally, the observed differences partly originate in the students' initial level of proficiency. While the FSP students felt weaker in understanding written and oral texts, the ESP students were rather confident in this respect. This group difference can be explained by the role of individual languages in the overall Slovene education system: English is the predominant first foreign language in the secondary schools, students have access to media, films, music in English language; most of them can understand written and oral texts in TV news, current affairs programmes, and have no problems with everyday spoken interaction. The FSP students on the other hand, get fewer opportunities to hear and use French language; they perceive it as complicated and difficult to understand. Therefore they considered the negotiations tasks as demanding. They appreciated the fact that a considerable degree of deductive approach was used in their group, and that each task was broken down into small steps, such as: analysing a speech, understanding the structure of the speech, analysing the persuasive effect of the speech, etc., before they were actually asked to perform the tasks themselves.

When asked about the results of the simulations, the two groups also differed in their response. On the whole, our L2 and L3 students did not find that the tasks were too difficult. Especially the L3 students felt that they had improved their listening and reading skills. They were able to understand the gist, although listening for details was still a difficult task, especially in lengthy negotiations. They observed that they had learned a lot of specialised vocabulary. They were able to read highly complex legal documents, such as treaties, resolutions, etc. They also improved their productive skills. Even though most of them were very reluctant to talk at the beginning, they all dealt with the situation without much obvious effort. The shy students were gradually 'forced' into interaction by the dynamics of the simulation. They upgraded their productive skills and when videotaped they observed that their spoken production became more spontaneous, clearer and better structured. They could express their opinion, but they were still occasionally confused by the unpredicted questions.

L2 students, by contrast, felt a considerable development in productive skills, while they felt less improvement in understanding written and oral texts. The areas of improvement they highlighted were: persuasive speaking, clarification of arguments, negotiation techniques, confidence building in public speaking, tone variation, precision of written and oral expression, preparing draft documents, and writing diplomatic correspondence.

The simulation process is a long cycle, which gives a lot of opportunities for growth and assessment. Rather than testing the students' knowledge at the end of the cycle, we graded each output separately. This allowed the students to slowly build on the acquired competences. The partial results of the assessment also allowed us to better monitor student progress and to intervene in the process when necessary. This was viewed as preferable to final exam by both groups of students.

4.3. Strengths

As compared with weaknesses, in our situation the simulations present an overwhelming number of strengths for L2 and for L3 settings. Our students listed the following benefits:

Increased field relevance and perception of meaningful activities in LSP.

Students engaged in simulation activities expressed satisfaction with the fact that what they were doing was also relevant in other core subjects. They perceived simulations as meaningful because they believed that this situation was not only a means to pass an exam but also an opportunity to experience a real-life situation and an authentic task. This encouraged them to increase their active effort.

An encouraging and competitive environment, which promotes student active involvement and creativity.

While in traditional instruction students can easily blend with the environment and become passive because communication is impaired especially in large groups, simulations enable more equal student participation. As Haleck et al. observed (2002: 33) simulations provide a stronger motivation for students as individuals. Thus group motivation is raised, and cooperative learning can take place. Peers function not only as interlocutors but also as allies or contenders. Even though simulations are controlled environments with stringent rules, oriented towards a common goal, they tend to get out of the teacher's ambit. This is particularly the case with simulations, which involve negotiations.

Negotiations are highly complex processes, where the steps are known in advance, but due to the involvement of many actors, their divergent personalities, behaviours, negotiation styles and negotiation skills, group dynamics and other factors, the final outcome is difficult to predict. Conflicts may arise. They are partly conditioned by country histories, and by the scenario, but some of them are sparked by the negotiators' personalities, lack of experience, and unwillingness to compromise.

If the instructor can use the situation to foster interactive learning, this adds some suspense to learning and enhances creativity.

Learning while playing.

Once involved in this process the actors are gradually tricked into merging with their role to the point where they actually start behaving in accordance with its profile. They forget that they are learners and the traditional role of the teacher as the carrier of knowledge loses its importance.

Learning about myself and about language as part of social realities.

Simulations also offer numerous opportunities for students' personal development. Often students discover their hidden potentials during the simulation. Statements like "I never thought I was capable of doing something like this," or "I did not know I could negotiate so well," are simply proofs that simulations open up possibilities to take on a new personality and to explore a new world, perceived as a new reality, where people get to know themselves from a new angle.

In simulations, language learning is only a small part of larger dynamics, where students come to understand discourse as a constitutive part of social norms regulating the chosen situation. Thus they get a more holistic, culture-based view of the simulated event. As Halleck et al. (2002: 300) we observed that simulations facilitate cross-cultural communication because the students started to better understand not only the state they represented, but also other states, and the foreign language they were using as a working language. Parallel simulations in two foreign languages proved to contribute to the students' multilingual language profile.

Though the goal of encouraging cultural diversity and multilingualism was not initially recognised as an important priority it became increasingly clear that simulations of international conferences can actually have an impact on student awareness of these issues, therefore they could be used as a means to promote linguistic diversity.

Better results in assessment.

According to Ip and Linser (2001: 7) students involved in simulations obtain comparatively better results than the students involved in traditional forms of assessment because weaker students understand the material better because the process offers numerous possibilities for immediate feedback and because they do not feel the pressure of an exam. This also proved to be the case with our students. They predominantly felt that it was easier to get a good mark in the simulation than in a traditional language test.

4.4. Weaknesses

On the whole, simulations proved to be a valuable opportunity for LSP development, but the participants also noticed some weaknesses:

Difficult course organisation in terms of adaptation to the group dynamics and simulation dynamics.

As with other constructivist methods a cross-curricular approach to the organisation of simulations would be more beneficial to search for synergies with other courses and use an integrated approach to simulation organisation, but this opens difficult issues of coordination with subject teachers, and schedule problems. Moreover, a lot of simulation activities were performed in informal meetings, which also raises the questions of how to effectively monitor the process.

Demanding and time consuming for the teacher and for the student.

Jung and Levitin (2002: 371) point out, that simulation imposes a heavy workload on the students as well as on the instructor. This proved to be true also in our case. International conferences are characterised by a heavy framework of rules and procedures. Since preparation is time consuming, both parties need to be aware of the requirements and they should perceive them as motivating. Especially in L3 the weaker students might consider it as too demanding if they are not offered sufficient support with vocabulary, training in public speaking, framing of written and oral outputs.

Difficult assessment.

This instructional approach also raises questions of how to assess student performance. Yaiche (1996: 166) notes that it is extremely difficult to measure the impact of simulations on students' development. However, experience shows that in terms of language development the method is at least as efficient as the traditional methods (ibid.). Given the fact that 'objective' measurement seems to be ineffective in such a complex learning situation, student perception of their own development seems to be more reliable than traditional tests, administered at the beginning and at the end of the learning process. This requires some additional training of students, who are not always motivated for self-assessment because they feel that this should remain exclusively the task of the language teacher. We have developed assessment tools for grading of individual student contribution, but they are more achievement based than levelled with the CEF requirements.

5. Conclusion

Despite many difficulties, which mainly arise from the constraints of course organisation, and from some other technical limitations, the results indicate that international conference simulations are a valuable tool to develop all four language skills, cooperative learning skills, negotiation skills, intercultural skills, discipline related skills, and transferable skills, in L2 as well as in L3 settings. Thus, they can be used to enhance active multilingualism and to promote cultural diversity.

However many aspects of simulations would require further investigation into the underlying processes and into their effect on language learning. In particular, the results suggest that a differentiated approach should be taken in terms of students' specific L2 and / or L3 needs. With a view to elaborating the respective instructional approaches, several aspects could be explored. Firstly, a systematic analysis of oral and written student produced text corpora would enable a more targeted definition of linguistic grey areas, which are currently being covered only on the basis of assumptions on student LSP needs, and are introduced in the learning process as *ad hoc* interventions. The second field that would require further elaboration is the question of ICT integration in the simulation process. This would help the language teacher to better monitor interactions in the out-of-class activities. Finally, a closer inquiry into how simulations match the CEF would be needed in order to better evaluate student progress on the scale.

All in all, it can be claimed that simulations enable the students to feel more self-confident and more competent in communicative, cultural, and in discipline related aspects. These qualities are essential for effective functioning not only in the field of international relations but also in other professional environments. The approach therefore offers numerous possibilities for application in different LSP teaching/ learning contexts.

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