



## Online Exchanges for Language Learning: a French-American Telecollaboration Project in a 3D Virtual World

**Wenjun Tang**

Laboratoire de Linguistique et Didactique des Langues Etrangères et Maternelles Université Stendhal-  
Grenoble 3 (France)

[wen-jun.tang@e.u-grenoble3.fr](mailto:wen-jun.tang@e.u-grenoble3.fr)

### **Abstract**

In this contribution, we will present an inter-university and binational project which involves a 3D multi-user virtual environment - Second Life (SL) in foreign languages learning. This one-month project, led by a researcher from the University of Grenoble (France), in collaboration with a researcher from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA), is designed to investigate interactions between two groups of learners staying in their respective countries but getting together via their avatar in SL in order to learn the language and culture of the others. Exchanges occur in an oral and synchronous manner. Our hypothesis is that the exchanges and the immersion in an environment like SL help these two groups of learners in their target language-culture practice and learning. This paper presents only the first few results.

Five sessions are designed by enhancing the culturally defined sets in SL, such as visiting different places which represent the U.S or France in order to promote exchanges and interactions in the two target languages. As mentioned Sadler, "the goal of this sort of exchange [telecollaboration] is not necessarily to enhance the grammatical knowledge of the participants (although that certainly may happen), but instead to enhance the ability of an individual "[...] to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognize as being different from our own" (Guilherme, 2000: 297). The end goal is to create speakers who are competent in intercultural communication".

Learners are invited to write to us after each session so that we can better understand what they think about the project and about the use of SL in their learning. An online questionnaire is set in order to collect data on the profile of the participants such as age, sex, levels in French and in English, experience on the use of online tools for learning the target language and their motivation to participate in the project. All sessions are recorded and the semi-structured interviews are conducted at the end in order to gather additional information. They will be transcribed for qualitative data analysis.

Despite the limited duration, the technical problems and the binding schedules, all participants seem to have enjoyed the experience. The presence of their avatars allowed them to follow the sessions from any locations and to communicate with students who live on another continent by immersing in a common environment. They are also placed in real situations in order to use the target language. The playfulness of the environment was very much appreciated and some learners even felt to have made progress in their oral expression.