

# Virtual Exchange Genres: what Can Genre Theories Inform us about the First Synchronous Session?

## Gêneros do intercâmbio virtual:

o que as teorias  
de gênero podem  
nos informar sobre  
a primeira sessão  
síncrona?

## Géneros de intercambio virtual:

¿qué nos pueden  
informar las teorías de  
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## Abstract

Virtual exchange or telecollaboration refers to pedagogical practices that connect geographically distant learners who work together towards a common goal. Despite the growing interest in telecollaborative practices and research, few studies have concentrated on investigating the genres that emerge in such contexts. This study shares the understanding that genres are goal-directed events organized in rhetorical patterns and used by members of a discourse community. It aims to explore the first synchronous session between dyads in a telecollaborative project directed to language learning, Teletandem, from a genre perspective. In particular, this paper describes the rhetorical organization patterns of the genre. Data were selected from MulTeC (Multimodal Teletandem Corpus) and comprise transcripts of ten initial Teletandem Oral Sessions (iros) – the first synchronous encounter – from three learning scenarios, which were held in Portuguese and English and recorded between 2012 and 2015. The research involved analyzing each transcript to describe the genre patterns and discuss the specificities in iros organization relative to the learning scenarios. Results show that iros has a flexible and scenario-dependent structure in which the actions of greetings and introduction, information exchange, negotiation, and saying goodbye are prevalent.

### Keywords

language learning; virtual learning; genre

## Resumo

Intercâmbio virtual ou telecolaboração refere-se a práticas pedagógicas que conectam alunos geograficamente distantes que trabalham juntos para um objetivo comum. Apesar do crescente interesse pelas práticas e pesquisas telecolaborativas, poucos estudos têm se concentrado em investigar os gêneros que emergem em tais contextos. Este estudo compartilha o entendimento de que os gêneros são eventos direcionados a um objetivo, organizados em padrões retóricos e usados por membros de uma comunidade discursiva. O objetivo deste trabalho é explorar a primeira sessão síncrona entre pares em um projeto telecolaborativo voltado à aprendizagem de línguas, Teletandem, a partir de uma perspectiva de gênero. Especificamente, este artigo descreve os padrões de organização retórica do gênero. Os dados foram selecionados do MulTeC (Multimodal Teletandem Corpus) e consistem em transcrições de dez Sessões Oraís de Teletandem (iros em inglês) iniciais – o primeiro encontro síncrono – a partir de três cenários de aprendizagem, que foram realizados em português e inglês e gravados entre 2012 e 2015. A pesquisa envolveu a análise de cada transcrição para descrever os padrões de gênero e discutir as especificidades na organização da iros em relação aos cenários de aprendizagem. Os resultados mostram que a iros possui uma estrutura flexível e dependente do cenário, na qual prevalecem as ações de saudação e apresentação, troca de informações, negociação e despedida.

### Palavras-chave

telecolaboração; MulTeC; organização retórica; sessão síncrona

## Resumen

El intercambio virtual o telecolaboración refiere a prácticas pedagógicas que conectan a estudiantes geográficamente distantes que trabajan juntos hacia un objetivo común. A pesar del creciente interés por las prácticas e investigaciones telecolaborativas, pocos estudios se han concentrado en investigar los géneros que emergen en dichos contextos. Este estudio comparte el entendimiento de que los géneros son eventos dirigidos a un objetivo organizados en patrones retóricos y utilizados por miembros de una comunidad discursiva. Su objetivo es explorar la primera sesión sincrónica entre parejas en un proyecto telecolaborativo dirigido al aprendizaje de idiomas, Teletándem, desde una perspectiva de género. Específicamente, este trabajo describe los patrones de organización retórica del género. Los datos fueron seleccionados de MulTeC (Multimodal Teletandem Corpus) y consisten en transcripciones de diez Sesiones Orales de Teletandem (iros por sus siglas en inglés) iniciales, el primer encuentro sincrónico de tres escenarios de aprendizaje que se llevaron a cabo en portugués e inglés y se registraron entre 2012 y 2015. La investigación involucró analizar cada transcripción para

describir los patrones de género y discutir las especificidades en la organización de ritos en relación con los escenarios de aprendizaje. Los resultados muestran que ritos tiene una estructura flexible y dependiente del escenario en la que prevalecen las acciones de saludo y presentación, intercambio de información, negociación y despedida.

### Palabras clave

aprendizaje de lenguas; aprendizaje en línea; género

## 1. Introduction

The development of digital and online communication tools has led to changes in how we communicate and connect with people from different places and locations. Such changes have also been evident in the language classroom, where there has been a growing interest in promoting intercultural and virtual mobility projects (Vinagre & González-Lloret, 2018; Leone, 2019; Oskoz & Vinagre, 2020; Dooly & Vinagre, 2021; Barbosa & Ferreira-Lopes, 2023). While the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the promotion of a virtual component (Lee, Leibowitz, and Rezek, 2022), projects that foster intercultural contact and collaboration have been a trend even before the pandemic (Telles, 2009; O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016; Funk et al., 2017).

Such initiatives have been recognized as telecollaboration or virtual exchange (VE), among other terms (O'Dowd, 2018, 2021; Dooly & O'Dowd, 2020; and Dooly & Vinagre, 2021). Broadly defined, VE is “the process of communicating and collaboratively learning with peers from different locations through the use of technology” (Dooly & Vinagre, 2021, p. 2) in exchanges that allow authentic intercultural experiences (Fondo, 2021). VE corresponds to pedagogical initiatives that connect geographically distant learners through online communication tools.

VE may have different designs and intended outcomes (Anikina, Sobinova & Petrova, 2015; Lee, Leibowitz, and Rezek, 2022), but it frequently includes an information exchange task (O'Dowd & Ware, 2009), typically at the beginning of the exchanges to enable participants learn about each other. The fact that information exchange tasks at the beginning are common suggests the relevance of exploring the first contact between learners. Additionally, literature in the field suggests that it is important for learners to undergo a process of becoming aware

of how to interact online and that they are guided toward developing the skills to collaborate in digital learning settings (Gutiérrez et al., 2022).

Identified as a specific model of VE, Teletandem learning also involves advising learners to get to know one another better (Aranha & Cavalari, 2014). Teletandem was first proposed by Telles & Vassallo (2006) as a means of engaging language learners in Brazil in intercultural contact with Portuguese learners abroad to mutually assist each other with learning each other's languages. Based on tandem principles (Brammerts, 1996), learners typically form pairs and should observe the principles of separation of languages, autonomy, and reciprocity (see Vassallo & Telles, 2006; Salomão et al., 2009; Picoli & Salomão, 2020).<sup>1</sup> Communication between learners can be both synchronous and asynchronous, but participants are expected to meet synchronously every week in Teletandem Oral Sessions.

The practice can also be promoted in different modalities, which may presume the support of institutions and integration into language classes or not. When supported by both partner institutions and included as part of the syllabus of both classes, it is named institutional integrated Teletandem. When the institutions provide the support, but the practice is not part of the language classes, it is named institutional non-integrated Teletandem. When supported by an institution in only one country it is semi-institutional. Similarly, when promoted within both partner institutions, but incorporated into the language classes in only one institution, it is named

<sup>1</sup> Most publications address the three principles as presented by Vassallo and Telles (2006). The principle of separation of languages is also named as bilingualism and equality. Literature on tandem learning, however, often focuses on the principles of autonomy and reciprocity, and publications diverge on the third principle (see Funk et al., 2017; Tardieu & Horgues, 2019)

institutional semi-integrated Teletandem (Aranha & Cavalari, 2014; Cavalari, 2018).

Over the years, Teletandem has established itself as “a fruitful context that potentially reaches different areas of linguistic investigation” (Rampazzo & Cunha, 2021, p. 9), in which the topic of telecollaborative genres is gradually increasing, but still remains an underinvestigated area. Nevertheless, given that genres are goal-directed communicative events that exhibit rhetoric organizational patterns and assist members of a community in reaching their communicative purposes (Swales, 1990, 2019), the study of virtual exchange genres may elucidate how those involved in such initiatives fulfil their goals. The understanding provided by genre theories may help inform researchers, practitioners, and learners regarding what to expect from VE and how to maximize benefits from it.

These things considered, this paper aims to contribute to the investigation of Teletandem genres. Highlighting the relevance of the initial information exchange tasks, as argued above, this study concentrates on the initial Teletandem Oral Session (iROS) – the first synchronous encounter – to describe its rhetorical organization. The research questions that guide this inquiry are: “What are the recurrent rhetorical patterns of iROS?” and “To what extent are the rhetorical patterns related to the characteristics of the context?”

Data for this study were selected from the Multimodal Teletandem Corpus (MulTeC), a bilingual and multimodal learner corpus with files collected from a Teletandem partnership between São Paulo State University, in Brazil, and the University of Georgia, in the United States (Aranha & Lopes, 2019). Participants took part in the integrated modality of the project in different years. Therefore, they were all attending language classes at their universities.

The sections that follow are Literature Review, in which the theoretical background on genres and virtual exchange genres is explored; Methods, which detail the context and analysis procedures, results and discussion, and final remarks.

## 2. Literature Review

Despite having concentrated mostly on academic and professional genres, the concepts provided by genre studies in the New Rhetoric and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) traditions have also been successfully applied to the description of general genres (Moreno & Swales, 2018), and, more recently, to the discussion of virtual exchange genres (Rampazzo, 2017, 2019, 2021; Rampazzo & Aranha, 2018, 2019a, 2019b).

As people get together in communities and follow social conventions for effective communication, they make use of genres to achieve their goals. As Devitt (2021, p. 18) emphasizes, “genres don’t just sit there; they do something”. Thus, it is expected that those involved in VE will form a community in which genres emerge and assist members of the community in accomplishing tasks. In this section, we will first present an overview of the genre theories. Then, the Teletandem context will be explored, followed by a review of how the concepts from genre theories have been applied to the discussion of VE genres.

### 2.1 Genre Studies in the New Rhetoric and ESP Perspectives

In her seminal work, Miller (1984) highlights the connection between genre and recurrent situations. Genre is used to refer to rhetorical responses to situational demands, which become comparable as the responses start being used in similar situations through the typifications of the rhetorical action (Miller, 1984).

Genres are rhetorical categories of social action, they are culturally dependent, and assist in shaping the rhetorical experiences of communities (Miller, 1994, 2015). As explained by Miller, Devitt, and Gallagher (2018), because they are used as part of collective experience, genres allow us to capture large-scale patterns of symbolic interactions and encompass individual intentions and social exigencies.

Sharing the assumption that discourse is both “socially situated and designed to achieve rheto-

rical goals” (Swales, 1990, p. 5), Swales presents his understanding of the concepts of genre and community. The author, renowned for his contributions to English for Specific Purposes, argues that genres are a class of communicative events that typically possess features of stability and are employed by a discourse community to achieve their shared communicative purposes. At the time, the concept of communicative purpose was the privileged criterion for the identification of a genre, which was later revised (Askehave & Swales, 2001). According to Askehave and Swales (2001), the concept of communicative purpose is still a relevant one, however, the analyst should submit the genre to a “repurposing” process after observing the context in which it occurs, its structure, style, and content.

In terms of genre analysis, Swales’ (1990) contribution is the proposition of a model, CARS – Create a Research Space, which comprises the prototypical structure of research article introductions. While the model has been criticized over the years for the uncertainty of moves identification and analysis replication (Moreno & Swales, 2018), it has also led to the creation of new models and successful application to the investigation of a variety of academic and non-academic genres (Swales, 2009; Aull and Swales, 2015). Swales (1990) proposes that genres are organized in patterns of action, namely *rhetorical moves*. The author defines a rhetorical move as a “discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function (...) [which is] flexible in terms of its linguistic realization. (...) It is a functional, not formal, unit” (Swales, 2004, p. 228-229). Reiterating this, it is not a set of words or expressions that determine a move, but, instead, its function or the purpose it aims at achieving. A move, then, may be realized differently in diverse texts, provided that it aims at accomplishing the same rhetorical function.

Additionally, a rhetorical move may be seen as a content-based unit (Paltridge, 1994; Aranha, 1996), which means that the boundaries between moves are drawn essentially on categories based on content. More recently, Moreno and Swales (2018) discuss the concept of rhetorical move, emphasizing that it

is a rhetorical construct whose linguistic realization is flexible. The authors argue that rhetorical moves are realized by the presence of one or more specific functions (steps), and their boundaries may be uncertain.

Based on the aforementioned authors, it may be said that when a community perceives a situation as similar to others, they start applying certain forms of action that were successful before to reach their purposes – the genres. Despite being an abstract concept, genres are realized through texts, which are organized in rhetorical patterns of actions. In other words, a portion of text – which may vary from a sentence to one or more paragraphs– fulfils certain rhetorical functions. These portions of text are named by Swales (1990) as rhetorical moves, and texts belonging to the same genre will display the same rhetorical moves, with some variation depending on the genre. Such concepts have been employed in the discussion of virtual exchange genres that occur within the institutional integrated Teletandem.

## 2.2 Institutional Integrated Teletandem

Based on tandem learning (see Tardieu & Horgues, 2019), Teletandem promotes autonomous language and cultural learning. It has been successfully run at São Paulo State University (Telles and Vassallo, 2006; Benedetti, Consolo & Vieira-Abrahão, 2010; Aranha & Cavalari, 2014; Silva & Salomão, 2022), and has exceeded the boundaries of its birth institution and is currently offered at other Brazilian universities (Cavalari, 2018; Lopes, Queiroz & Fernandes, 2022; Author, forthcoming) in partnership with institutions abroad.

In Teletandem, learners tend to meet regularly in Teletandem Oral Sessions – the virtual encounter. Following tandem organization (Brammerts, 2002), Teletandem may be carried out in different modalities (see Aranha and Cavalari, 2014; Cavalari, 2018), one of which is the institutional integrated Teletandem (iITTD). iITTD is promoted by two partner institutions and is fully integrated into the language courses in which participants are enrolled.

The characteristics of iITD are thoroughly described by Aranha and Cavalari (2014), who explain participation is mandatory for students. Because it is offered as part of a discipline, learners are also assessed for their participation and are required complete a series of interrelated tasks (Aranha & Cavalari, 2014; Cavalari & Aranha, 2019).

Typically, learners involved in iITD are expected to accomplish the following tasks: attend an orientation or tutoring session - similar to Gutiérrez et al. (2002) description of the pre-mentoring phase of VE;<sup>2</sup> engage in Teletandem oral sessions; exchange texts written in the target language to be revised/corrected by their partners; write reflective diary entries after each Teletandem oral session; participate in mediation sessions – group reflection moments led by the teacher-mediator; and complete questionnaires (Aranha & Cavalari, 2014).

Teletandem has also been described, by Aranha and Leone (2017), as a complex learning environment in which the macro and microtasks that are proposed and realized are organized in pedagogical scenarios that vary according to the needs and characteristics of each Teletandem partnership. According to the authors, the planned Teletandem pedagogical scenario actualizes itself into a learning scenario when put into practice. The learning scenario concept describes the Teletandem modality, the institutions involved, students' sociodemographic profiles, professors and mediators involved, accomplished tasks, duration, and the number of sessions (Aranha & Leone, 2017).

Previous research suggested that, for each Teletandem group and semester, a new learning scenario is formed (Rampazzo, 2017; Rampazzo and Aranha, 2018; Lopes, 2019; Aranha and Wigham, 2020). The characteristics of a given learning scenario may have an impact on how learners engage and interact with each other (Rampazzo, 2017), which may, in turn, result in a different rhetorical structure

2 During this phase, instructors can prepare learners to deal effectively with technology use, instruct them on acquiring organizational skills, and raise awareness of common concerns regarding intercultural contacts.

for the genres that emerge in the context. In other words, depending on the scenario, the realization of a given genre may be slightly distinct.

### 2.3 Teletandem Genres

The first account of Teletandem genres comes from Aranha's (2014) proposal that the interactions that occur in iITD are repeated rhetorical situations. The author bases her argumentation on the understanding that those involved in Teletandem form a community, the Teletandem Community (Silva, 2012; Rampazzo & Aranha, 2019a), whose members share common goals and are expected to use genres to achieve such objectives.

Regarding the tasks, Aranha (2014) argues that they are recurrent and typical and allow for the development and use of a variety of genres. To test such a hypothesis, she analyzed the initial 15 minutes of the initial Teletandem Oral Session (iROS) and identified that learners acted in similar manners as they tried to establish and maintain contact.

Later, expanding on Aranha's (2014) study, the Author also investigated the first 15 minutes of iROS from a different sample. Their data were composed of ten sessions from two learning scenarios of the same Teletandem modality. In one scenario, there was a previous pairing and learners first contacted each other asynchronously in a text exchange in their target language. Conversely, the first contact between dyads in the other scenario was during iROS, and there was no preceding text exchange.

Corroborating Aranha's (2014) results, the author and others argue that the initial 15 minutes of iROS is organized in different rhetorical moves, in which learners (i) exchange information and (ii) negotiate. A third move, (iii) text discussion, occurs when learners are required to exchange texts in the target language before iROS. Based on the findings, the authors state that the prototypical structure of iROS "may vary according to the peculiarities of the learning scenario" (Rampazzo, 2017), at least in the initial 15 minutes.

After that, other studies concentrated on iROS from a genre perspective: Rampazzo discussed it

as an occluded genre based on Swales (1996) and Loudermilk (2007), and Aranha and Rampazzo (2022) explored the concept of negotiation in tele-collaboration. Rampazzo (2019) argues that because iROS is not a public genre, learners need to rely on other genres and previous experiences to co-construct iROS, which may lead to a more flexible genre structure, as the genre repertoire may vary from person to person.

Considering the studies of iROS, it may be argued that participants follow similar communication patterns, even though there is some flexibility in how it is materialized (Author). Such a flexible structure seems to be constitutive of the genre, but it is important to note that only the initial 15 minutes have been studied. Therefore, it is relevant to examine iROS in its full length to determine whether the distinctions in its structure are prevalent after the 15 minutes have been completed.

Nevertheless, because of iROS's seemingly malleable characteristics, in this paper, I opt for using the term *rhetorical action* to describe the rhetorical patterns of iROS instead of rhetorical moves. The proposition is motivated by the fact that the term 'move' has been extensively used to describe genres with formulaic structure, i.e., in such genres, moves tend to occur in a fixed order and with more specific functions (Aull & Swales, 2000; Moreno & Swales, 2018). Additionally, Swales' (1990) intent was that the identification of moves served the purpose of offering models to students who wanted to initiate into a community. Although the results of this study may help illustrate what to expect from VE contexts, the aim of this research is not to offer a model. The choice of the expression *rhetorical action* points to a more fluid concept and is more adequate to the VE environment in which iROS occurs.

Conversely, the identification of a rhetorical action follows the same procedures used to determine rhetorical moves, i.e., the analyst reads through the text and identifies the parts that aim to accomplish a rhetorical function realized through certain content. On the other hand, given that the option for the term *rhetorical action* points to a more fluid concept, it is important to note that the distinction

of steps within actions is not pertinent here. This is because previous studies also suggest that there is more flexibility in their realization and that it is complex to determine very specific functions and boundaries within larger portions of text (Rampazzo & Aranha, 2018, 2019b).

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 MulTeC

The corpus analyzed in this study was retrieved from MulTeC (Multimodal Teletandem Corpus) (Aranha & Lopes, 2019), a multimodal and bilingual learner corpus (Lopes, 2019, Aranha & Wigham, 2021). It includes data and metadata generated from Teletandem partnerships between São Paulo State University in Brazil and University of Georgia in the United States from 2012 to 2015. It includes data generated from institutional integrated and semi-integrated Teletandem modalities, resulting in a total of 581 hours of recordings of Teletandem Oral Sessions and 351 chat registers, produced by both learners from Brazil and the US, and additional texts produced by Brazilians only, such as 666 learning diaries, 956 texts written in the target language, and 132 questionnaires.

#### 3.2 Data and Participants

Primary data for this investigation consist of ten recordings of ten iROS: three from 2012, two from 2013, three from 2014, and two from 2015. The selection criteria were: (i) all iROS were from the institutional integrated modality; (ii) the session from the same year was required to integrate the same learning scenario. The option for iROS from different scenarios follows previous studies (Rampazzo & Aranha, 2018, 2019b) and is consistent with the aim of identifying the extent to which the rhetorical patterns are related to the context specificities.

For didactic purposes, this paper adopts the nomenclature iROS-1, iROS-2... to describe the sessions. The transcribed sessions resulted in 46,604 words. Following the methodology outlined by the author, sessions were grouped into three scenarios as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Learning Scenarios Descriptions

	Learning Scenario A (2012 and 2013)	Learning Scenario B (2014)	Learning Scenario C (2015)
Length	10 weeks	9 weeks	9 weeks
Tasks related to itos	8 Teletandem Oral Sessions; Learning Diaries; initial and final Questionnaires; Tutoring session; Text Exchange starting after itos; free conversation expected to occur in itos.	7 Teletandem Oral Sessions; Learning Diaries; initial and final Questionnaires; Tutoring session; Text Exchange occurring before itos (student from the American University sends the first text); free conversation and revision of text expected to occur in itos.	7 Teletandem Oral Sessions; Learning Diaries; initial and final Questionnaires; Tutoring session; Introductions email Exchange occurring before itos; free conversation and revision of emails expected to occur in itos.
Pairing	Random pairing on the day of itos depending on the computer learners chose to use.	Random, but previously arranged.	Random, but previously arranged.
Quantity of itos selected per scenario for this study	5	3	2

**Source:** The author, based on information available in MulTeC

In Learning Scenario A, dyads did not know beforehand who they would meet and had not engaged in asynchronous communication before itos. In Scenarios B and C, however, learners had received their partners' contact information in advance. In Scenario B, the learner in the American university was supposed to write a text in Portuguese to be sent to their partner, who would revise and comment on it during itos. In Scenario C, learners were told to exchange emails in the target language to introduce

themselves. During itos, they were expected to revise each other's emails.

In regard to the participants, their information is presented in Table 2, which includes their phenotypic sex and institution, majors, and self-assessed proficiency level in the target language based on CEFR descriptors.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The letter "F" stands for female and "M" for male. "I" represents the Brazilian university and "U" the American one. US participants did not provide their self-assessed proficiency level.

**Table 2.** Participants information

Learning Scenario	Session	Identification code	Major	Self-assessed proficiency level in the target language
A	iros-1	I9F2	Languages	B1
		U0M12	Economy	-
	iros -2	I9F11	Languages	B1
		U0F21	English	-
	iros -3	I9M1	Languages	B1
		U0F29_sm	History	-
	iros -4	I9F12	Languages	B2
		U0F22	Sociology	-
	iros -5	I9M4	Languages	C1
		U0M14	Portuguese and Italian	-
B	iros -6	I9F9	Languages	-
		U0F19	Business	-
	iros -7	I9F13	Languages	-
		U0F23	Spanish and International Relations	-
	iros -8	I9M4	Languages	C1
		U0M14	Doctorate in Ecology and Geography	-
C	iros -9	I8F7	Languages	B1
		U0F7	Sciences	-
	iros -10	I8F14	Languages	B2
		U0F24_sf	Not applicable	-

**Source:** The author, based on information available in MulTeC

All Brazilian participants were majoring in Languages and were, at least, independent users of English. In iros-3 and iros-10, learners in the us acted as substitutes for the original partners. Most learners were in their early twenties.

### 3.3 Analysis Procedures

This qualitative study involves the analysis of textual, non-numerical data through genre analysis procedures. To answer the first question, “What are the recurrent rhetorical patterns of iros?”, the rhetorical

actions were identified based on their functions. Following the approach of Moreno and Swales’ (2018), the transcripts were manually analyzed. The argumentative parts were segmented and labeled as a rhetorical action.

Initially, the analysis considered the rhetorical actions previously suggested by Rampazzo in her analysis of the first 15 minutes, namely, information exchange, negotiation, and text discussion. The observation of the data, however, motivated the recognition of two additional actions: introductions

and saying goodbye. A second analyst, also a member of the Teletandem community, observed 20% of the data to establish the reliability of the research (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The analysis categories were discussed and the results were compared. The agreement rate was approximately 86%. The disagreements were discussed and resolved.

The discussion led to a revision of the rhetorical action of introduction and inclusion of an action of greetings. The analysis, then, considered six rhetorical actions in iROS: greetings, introduction, negotiation, information exchange, text discussion, and saying goodbye. Given that the concept of rhetorical action is fluid and boundaries are imprecise, certain portions of text may fulfil more than one function. When that is the case, the rhetorical actions are integrated into one another.

Besides identifying the rhetorical actions in iROS, the analysis considered the number of words through the tool *Word Count* from Microsoft Word. In addition, using the *Elmedia* Video Player, the number of minutes participants dispensed in each rhetorical action was calculated. Such numerical counting provides a more general vision of the rhetorical patterns in iROS and indicates the actions that are more or less relevant to participants.

Finally, to answer how rhetorical patterns relate to the characteristics of the context, the learning scenarios were reconstituted (Table 1). After identifying the specificities of each scenario, correlations were established between the scenarios and iROS materialization in terms of rhetorical actions.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The presentation of the results is based on the understanding that iROS is going through a process of standardization (Rampazzo & Aranha, 2019b). For this reason, the discussion of each of the iROS rhetorical actions and their exploration in relation to the learning scenarios also highlights the similarities in the occurrence of such actions throughout the different iROS that constitute the corpus of this research. In other words, this analysis reveals how the rhetorical actions appeared across the sessions in

this sample given that the prevalence of the actions indicates it has become a pattern. Additionally, this study examines the distinctions in the occurrences of the actions as this examination supports the argument that iROS structure is malleable and scenario-dependent.

### 4.1 Greetings and Introductions

In previous research, Rampazzo and Aranha (2018, 2019b), who had analyzed the first 15 minutes of iROS only, had placed greetings and introductions within the rhetorical action of information exchange. Nevertheless, the analysis of the data for this research revealed that greetings typical of salutation and name exchange correspond to actions localized at the macrostructural level, that is, they are not simply an information exchange action, but, instead, function as an opening to the conversation.

Even though they fulfil different functions, greetings and introductions are presented in the same section because they tend to be imbricated into one another (Excerpt 1).<sup>4</sup> Such amalgamation occurs in seven iROS (iROS-1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10).

#### Excerpt 1. Rhetorical Actions of Greetings and Introductions (iROS-10)

- 1 B: [[smiles]] Hi
- 2 E: Hi [[smiles]] finally
- 3 B: yeah finally [[laughs]]
- 4 E: [[laughs]] sorry for the technical difficulties
- 5 B: oh that's ok that's ok
- 6 E: [[laughs]] ok I'm not actually I'm not UOF24 your partner your regular partner is ah absent today so I'm just a volunteer
- 7 B: yeah
- 8 E: to help ok so my name is UOF24\_sf
- 9 B: yeah my my name is I8F14
- 10 E: I8F14?
- 11 B: yeah
- 12 E: nice to meet you
- 13 B: nice to meet you too [[they both laugh]]

<sup>4</sup> "B" stands for Brazilian learner, and "E" for the learner in the American University.

- 14 E: so ah what do you what do you want  
to do today during our call?
- 15 B: I don't [[laughs]] I don't know [[UOF24\_sf laughs]] I  
don't know what to talk about so... [E: ok] how are you?
- 16 E: ah I'm fine [[they both laugh]] ah... ah... [[laughs]]

The occurrence in Excerpt 1 illustrates that, in iROS, participants tend to start the session with greetings (lines 1-2) – it is usually the very first action (iROS-1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10), exchanging names (lines 8-9) (iROS-1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10), and repeating the names to make sure they understood it correctly (lines 10-11) (iROS-3, 5, 6, 7, 10). In the beginning, participants commonly state they are pleased to meet each other (lines 12-13) (iROS-1, 2, 3, 10).

In addition, Excerpt 1 demonstrates the conciseness of both rhetorical actions. Such actions occupy an average of 23 seconds per iROS. Their brevity seems to be associated with the function they aim to achieve. Saluting and exchanging names are situations in which people do not spend too much time. Actually, in analogous contexts – such as an informal conversation between friends and other genres that learners rely on – greetings and introductions tend to be succinct.

Finally, the excerpt exemplifies that other rhetorical actions may appear in between each other. During these actions, there are brief moments of negotiation when they apologize for the technical difficulties (lines 4-5), explain they are not regular partners (lines 6-7), and try to decide what to do (lines 14-15).

Regarding the scenarios, in learning scenario A, when introducing themselves, participants have to ask for each other's names, as they did not have this information prior to their meeting in iROS. Conversely, in scenarios B and C, because learners knew beforehand whom they were supposed to meet, they simply checked if they were talking to the right person. Greetings tend to be very similar regardless of the scenario.

The actions of greetings and introductions demonstrate the thesis proposed in this paper that the rhetorical actions in iROS are malleable but still typical. While there is some flexibility in their

occurrence, the different dyads realize the functions of saluting and exchanging names in comparable ways.

## 4.2 Information Exchange

Corroborating previous studies on the first 15 minutes of iROS (Author), in this research corpus, composed of iROS in their full length, information exchange also represents the action in which participants spend the most time – an average of 33 minutes per iROS. During the tutoring session, participants are advised to dedicate time to getting to know each other, so it is expected that they talk about themselves and their preferences.

Information exchange is not the first action to occur in iROS. However, as soon as participants greet and introduce each other and/or negotiate any minor issue, they start exchanging information (iROS-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10). Normally, they carry out this rhetorical action by asking each other questions (Excerpt 2).

### Excerpt 2. Information Exchange (iROS-2)

- 1 E: cool so do you have a job right now?
- 2 B: no actually I just study because the... the college it's morning and ah... afternoon and sometimes at night so I don't have a lot of time to do something else do you have a job?
- 3 E: yes
- 4 B: what do you do?
- 5 E: ah I work at a doctor's office
- 6 B: ok you work like secretary?
- 7 E: yes receptionist
- 8 B: oh ok

In addition to talking about the topic in Excerpt 2, occupation, dyads typically talk about where they are from (iROS-1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), their ages (iROS-1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9), family (iROS-1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10), language learning experiences (iROS-1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10), free time activities (iROS-1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), and their academic lives (iROS-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). Similar findings were highlighted by Cappellini, Elstermann, and Rivens Mompean (2020), who argue that Teletandem participants usually focus on their hobbies, and Aranha (2014) and Silva

and Figueiredo (2015), who indicate that learners commonly center the conversation around their academic lives.

What stands out about this rhetorical action is the fact that participants often go from one topic to another as they try to find common ground. In other words, learners explore different themes in their conversation until they find the ones that interest them both. Even though there is a wide variety of topics dyads may talk about, the recurrence of some themes indicates that they recognize the demands of such a communicative situation and end up co-creating a genre with similar patterns. There does not seem to be any scenario-related occurrence of this action or an occurrence associated with the virtual environment.

#### 4.3 Negotiation

Negotiation is the second-longest rhetorical action in this research corpus. In general, participants spend around eight minutes per session negotiating, which indicates its relevance.<sup>5</sup> Following Author, negotiation may be internally or externally motivated. Additionally, the various aspects negotiated throughout itos may occur within any other rhetorical action, and negotiation may be longer or shorter depending on what is negotiated.

Internally motivated negotiation emerges from the conversation, as in the negotiation of meaning or form. Whenever participants feel insecure about language use or face challenges, they stop the normal conversation flow to negotiate language – be it meaning or form. There are 111 instances of negotiation of language in the corpus. In some, learners ask for clarification after not fully understanding what the partner meant. In most instances, however, negotiation of language occurs as the partner spontaneously offers feedback or learners are uncertain about how to express something in the target language (Excerpt 3):

<sup>5</sup> A session tends to last around 50 minutes.

#### Excerpt 3. Rhetorical Action of Negotiation (focus on negotiation of language) (iros-5)

- 1 E: well we see each other a lot though  
he's only three hours away
- 2 B: ok
- 3 E: so to drive three hours to drive
- 4 B: ok
- 5 E: yeah we see each other a lot
- 6 B: ah that's good [[laughs]]
- 7 E: yeah
- 8 B: there's a long time you are together ah  
relationship I I don't know how to say
- 9 E: ah like how long have you been together?
- 10 B: yes yes
- 11 E: ah like we've known each other for eight  
years but we've been dating for three

Negotiation of language in Excerpt 3 (lines 9-10) occurs within the rhetorical action of information exchange as learners were talking about their relationships. Such negotiation tends to be short, given that difficulties and questions about language use are usually quickly resolved. Only occasionally, negotiation of language extends and, sometimes, also motivates the use of the chat tool to provide clarification. On these occasions, the use of a tool typical of the virtual environment, the chat, illustrates a realization of the action that is particular to the online context.

Similarly, the occurrence of the rhetorical action of negotiation, when motivated externally, is intrinsically related to the virtual exchange context, more specifically to the tasks, principles, and specificities of the telecollaborative practice. Such negotiation instances may be motivated by (i) the need to observe the principles of separation of languages or reciprocity, (ii) the need to make sure the equipment is working properly or to fix a glitch, (iii) the demand of making decisions regarding the tasks they have to complete. An example is illustrated in Excerpt 1 (lines 14-15), as participants try to agree on what to do during itos. Nevertheless, regardless of what is negotiated, externally motivated negotiation tends to be short and is a result of learners' understanding that they need to accommodate situational demands.

Differences in the occurrence of the rhetorical action of negotiation are also motivated by dyad pairing. In scenario A, learners are expected to start exchanging texts via email after iTOS. Therefore, they need to pause the information exchange at some point to negotiate the email address exchange. Such an instance does not appear in scenarios B and C, as participants were informed of their partner's email in advance.

#### 4.4 Saying Goodbye

Occupying around 30 seconds per session, the rhetorical action of saying goodbye is the only one with a fixed order. It is the last to occur and is mandatory for all sessions regardless of the learning scenario. Besides indicating they have to go – either because the class is over or the teacher is telling them to disconnect –, participants tend to emphasize that it has been a pleasure to meet (iTOS-2, 3, 4, 8, 9):

##### Excerpt 4. Saying goodbye (iTOS-8)

- 1 E: cool so we have to go but it was it was a pleasure meeting you I9M4
- 2 B: yeah
- 3 E: thank you again for ah all your correction in my texts
- 4 B: oh not at all aham so next week I'll have to send my composition
- 5 E: yep
- 6 B: I think I'll try to send it until Friday or Thursday
- 7 E: ok
- 8 B: I don't know the the sooner I can correct it
- 9 E: yeah whenever you get a chance
- 10 B: ok
- 11 E: cool
- 12 B: cool
- 13 E: tchau
- 14 B: tchau até mais
- 15 E: take care [[risos]]

Excerpt 4 also illustrates the malleability of iTOS as the action of saying goodbye intersects with negotiating a task they need to complete the upcoming week (lines 4-12).

Figure 1 represents iTOS in its total length and its recurrent rhetorical actions, that is, the actions that tend to be present in iTOS in all learning scenarios.

The arrows have dotted boundaries to indicate that the rhetorical actions may intersect and connect in different forms, despite always finishing with the action of saying goodbye.



Figure 1. Recurrent rhetorical actions in iTOS

Source: Rampazzo (2021)

Nevertheless, an additional rhetorical action appears in learning scenarios B and C, when learners had previously exchanged texts written in the target language.

#### 4.5 Text Discussion

Text discussion is present in learning scenarios B and C only because learners had contacted each other before iTOS. In scenario B, learners from the American university had sent a text written in Portuguese to the Brazilian partner. During iTOS, dyads talk about the text. The rhetorical action is very brief and comments tend to concentrate on language form rather than genre characteristics, or topic. Despite being short, the presence of the rhetorical action suggests that learners are attentive to the tasks.

Text discussion in learning scenario C, on the contrary, is not brief. This action does not occur in the session with a substitute participant. While only one sample does not allow for the identification

of organizational patterns, the occurrence of this action is consistent with the argument of iROS malleability. In learning scenario C, learners also tend to focus on language use when commenting on the texts (Excerpt 5).

**Excerpt 5.** Text discussion (iROS-9)

- 1 B: and on the next paragraph [E: uhum] can we move? yeah so in the next paragraph you said “mais sobre eu” I can understand what you mean but grammatically correct would be “mais sobre mim”
- 2 E: oh ok yeah I was confused in that too I didn't know what pronoun to put
- 3 B: yeah

Apart from suggesting a more adequate form to convey the intended meaning (lines 1-2), however, in learning scenario C, the rhetorical action of text discussion is more intertwined with the information exchange. In this scenario, both learners had sent each other introductory emails in the target language. The recommendation for both the email exchange and iROS was that participants got to know each other better. The conversation in iROS about the emails motivates them to continue the exchange that started asynchronously, making additional comments. The previously exchanged text ends up functioning as an input to the conversation as predicted by Aranha and Cavalari (2014). Such a result not only points to the flexibility in iROS rhetorical organization and to the amalgamation of rhetorical actions but also illustrates an occurrence that is typical to this virtual exchange context. The combination of the rhetorical actions of text discussion and information exchange is a result of (a) a previous exchange via email, and (b) the fact that both telecollaborative tasks required learners to introduce themselves to their partners.

## 5. Final Remarks

Following the still-emerging discussion on virtual exchange genres, this paper aimed to describe the rhetorical organization of iROS, the first synchronous encounter between participants of a virtual exchange project intended for language and cultural learning.

Results indicate that different dyads organize iROS through similar rhetorical patterns as learners complete the tasks that are suggested/required of them. The option for the term *rhetorical actions* instead of *rhetorical moves* has been motivated by the fact that the latter has often been associated with more formulaic genre structures. The use of the former is a movement towards this virtual exchange genre, iROS, as it displays a more fluid and malleable structure co-constructed by dyads in their virtual synchronous communication.

Corroborating previous results of analysis of the initial minutes of the genre, learning scenario characteristics influenced iROS materialization in full. The results suggest the main factor that leads to genre distinctions is the tasks that are proposed and, then, completed by learners.

Regarding this study's limitations, the methodological procedures intrinsic to genre analysis may be a drawback, considering that it is done manually. In light of that, future studies could concentrate on using language processing software tools to analyze a larger sample. Considering that MulTeC is a corpus of considerable size and that a group of researchers is working to transcribe all sessions, the study of telecollaborative genres could benefit from such an analysis, which may, in turn, contribute to the understanding of virtual exchange contexts and tasks.

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