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**ROMANCE CROSS-COMPREHENSION AND LANGUAGE TEACHING:
a new trend towards linguistic integration of Europe. The Galanet project solution¹.**

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Abstract: Since the nineties, a number of European teams explore the cross-comprehension modality for the teaching of Romance languages, giving a priority to the comprehension competence, based on the proximity of the different languages of the Romance family. This contribution aims to present and explain the Galanet project (European programme Socrates, www.galanet.eu), launched in 2001. It gathers seven teams with the aim of providing speakers of Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and French with a learning internet platform that allows practising cross-comprehension. First outcomes of the use of the platform in a session test, called “protosession”, will be considered.

As international communication is increasingly intense and complex, and as Europe tends to adopt English as a common tool for linguistic exchanges, it is crucial to promote other means of linguistic integration, in particular through cross-comprehension in various families of languages.

Cross-comprehension constitutes a fairly recent modality for the teaching of the languages in a given linguistic family, with a priority given to the comprehension competence, based on the proximity of the different languages of the Romance family. The principle of the approach is the use, between the speakers of these languages, of a multilingual communication mode where everyone can express him/herself in his/her own reference language (either as their mother tongue or as an advanced second language), and understand the others. Some European projects have been led in the last ten years on this approach. Since the nineties, in the framework of the European programmes *Socrates*, a number of European teams explore the cross-comprehension modality for the teaching of Romance languages (Eurom4, EuroComRom², Galatea)³ or others indo-european family languages as Germanic or Slavonic (IGLO project⁴, EuroComGer and EuroComSla) giving a priority to the comprehension competence (known as a “dissociated approach”, Degache and Masperi, 1995), based on the proximity of the different languages of the Romance family (see Kischel 2002 and in particular Klein 2002).

This contribution aims to present and explain the Galanet project (Socrates Lingua 2) and to pose some questions about this new approach.

¹ Acknowledgment to James Nhlane for his help in correcting this paper.

² For further information see <http://www.eurocomcenter.com> ou <http://eurocom-frankfurt.de> ou <http://www.eurocomresearch.net>

³ See references in bibliography at the end of this paper.

⁴ Intercomprehension in Germanic Languages Online, <http://tea.fernuni-hagen.de/Iglo/Install/kurs/Ressourcen/start.htm>

1. WHAT IS www.galanet.eu ?

The aim of this project, launched in 2001 for three years, is to allow speakers of Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and French to practice and develop romance cross-comprehension. It brings together seven teams with the aim of providing an Internet learning platform that allows users to communicate and develop cross-comprehension using their reference Romance language – or even possibly other participants’ languages–, thence increasing their ability to understand all the other languages used on the site. This project is in some aspects the continuation of another European project called Galatea which was realised from 1996 to 1999 (see Dabène and Degache 1996, Dabène and *al.* 2001, 2003, Degache 2002) and whose products were CD-Roms for comprehension training of Romance languages by speakers of these languages. Otherwise, the expected result of Galanet is an internet platform designed as a virtual language learning centre with different “rooms” and many tools to communicate with each other and train receptive and interactive skills.

2. WHO IS CARRYING OUT GALANET ?

Galanet is the product of a collaborative network gathered eleven years ago by Louise Dabène and extended to this date to others members. It’s now an official European partnership in Socrates program of seven universities⁵ : Université Stendhal Grenoble 3 (as coordinator) ; Université Lumière Lyon 2 ; Universidade de Aveiro ; Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona ; Universidad Complutense de Madrid ; Università degli Studi di Cassino ; Université Mons-Hainaut.

3. HOW DOES GALANET WORK ?

3.1. An action-oriented approach :

The main pedagogic principle of Galanet is actional as meant in the Common European Framework of References for Languages (see <http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/documents/cadrecommun.pdf>). The elaboration of a common project motivates the communication, which is facilitated by the availability on the site of linguistic tools and resources aimed at developing the users’ competences. It’s a matter of allowing students of different countries and romance languages to do and publish together a web page about an intercultural subject in a plurilingual form. Acting together must lead to interaction, and interaction must bring about necessity of improving receptive and interactive skills in the four languages. It’s thus a communicative and also cognitive⁶ approach, but above all a “co-cultural and co-actional approach (Puren 2002: 62) in the sense that we look forward to « *allowing the learner to act with others during his training, giving scopes of “co-action” defined as common action with collective finality* ».

In other words, Galanet platform is both a temporal and a spatial concept : a chronologic scenario –the session– on one hand, which must allow users to elaborate the common and negotiated web publication in four languages, and a virtual learning space on the other hand, with “rooms” and tools to train skills : profile and personalise tools (my profile, profile of my

⁵ A few others collaborations are maintained too with Università di Pisa, Université de Chambéry and Universidad de Río Cuarto (Argentina)

⁶ Being aware of various process of comprehension and interaction.

team, my preferences), communication tools (forum, e-mail, chats), statistic tools (who's who, connexion track, chat archiver) and self-learning "rooms" for modules and resources. The whole platform is available in the four official languages of the project, modifiable at any time (up on the right hand). Figure 1 (see at the end of the text) details and points out the functionalities of the platform.

3.2. The chronological scenario: example of the "protosession"

Practically, the project is designed to bring together groups of students from different countries. In the experiment described below, called "protosession" (for prototype session, in fact a test session), ten teams of students from the partner organisations (and two of their immediate associates), follow the scenario from the 15th of February to the end of april 2003. Although the main objective of this session is testing the platform and the scenario, it also has pedagogic objectives for the users and they were told about it in a general way :

- improve the understanding of romance language(s) they already know ;
- discover other(s) romance language(s) and culture(s)
- become familiarised with on-line technologies.

The work follows a gradual process that unfolds along a series of stages which introduce participants to progressively more complex tasks: the chronological scenario (see Table 1, the "protosession" calendar). In the "protosession", the scenario has 5 stages but the system allows us to add or rest stages regarding the use (as it has be done with a complementary sub-forum, independent of the unfolding process and called "intercomprehension help"). Each stage is both a time period and a forum.

Stage 1 : breaking the ice.

In this stage, students can fill in their personal and team profiles writing a message and adding snapshot, sound and short video as well, directly on the web (see Figure 2). These profiles can be changed at any moment during the session. Users can have a look at these profiles whenever they want: each message on the forum has a link with it. Interactions begin in a free way in the chats and forums. This last tool constitutes the heart of the session (see Figure 3). In this forum, 8 subjects have been proposed. The number points out how many messages have been sent to each subject. Of course, exchanges can be quadrilingual or not. Here is a sample of quadrilingual asynchrouous interaction (writing unmodified) :

Protosession, stage 1, subject "HABLANDO DE CINE...": « Cada uno de nosotros tiene sus "amores cinematográficos", una peli que ha significado mucho en nuestras vida. ¿Cuál es la tuya? »

Marco : - Non vado molto spesso al cinema, però penso che sia una forma d'arte innovativa e non ancora sfruttata a pieno: al suo interno musica, danza, recitazione, canto e tutte le altre arti umane si combinano creando effetti (in film ben architettati) che raggiungono pregevoli livelli artistici. In questo senso adoro il cinema ed è per questo che ho cominciato a seguire alcuni festival [...]

FrederiqueB : - Je ne vais pas souvent au cinéma parce que quelques fois déçue...mais le dernier de Chabrol me tente ("La fleur du mal")peut-être cette semaine! mais il est vrai que les grands et surtout bons films manquent en ce moment. Je crois que celui que je pourrais voir et revoir c'est "Midnight Express" , il est de loin (pour moi) le film culte !

Patty23 : - Deviam inventar um nome para este vício insuportável de ir ao cinema ;)!! Vou todas as semanas e vejo todos os filmes que estreiam, por isso fica difícil escolher um que goste mais do que qualquer outro...

Um que marcou a minha era teenager :))) foi o Dirty Dancing, por incrível que pareça... lol!!!! Dos filmes que mais gostei e que mais me tocaram foram Habla com ella, Life as a House e talvez Green Mile, por motivos muito diferentes, claro! Os que mais detestei foram, definitivamente, There's something about Mary, Boogie Nights, etc. MUITO MUITO MAU... Bjs;)

CristinaC : - Sí, FrédériqueB, Expreso de medianoche... alucinante!!!

Dos películas más que hay que ver: la iraní "A través de los olivos" de Abbas Kiarostami, y la serbia "Gato blanco, gato negro" de Emir Kusturica ... Absolutamente geniales

El cine norteamericano no lo aguanto mucho, aunque hay alguna excepción (Expreso..), pero en general lo políticamente correcto me suena a engaño y anestesia. Quizás es que no lo entiendo..
Aprovecho para plantear un problema muy, muy serio: EL CINE ES CARÍSIMO. Os envidio a todos aquellos que podéis gastaros 6 euros a la semana en ir al cine!!! Saludos a todos

And this is a sample of quadrilingual synchronuous interaction in a public chat (see in this conference, Sà and Melo, 2003, about the use and analysis of Galanet's chat) :

@Salon de discussion bleu@ Début du chat le Tue Feb 18 14:41:35 GMT+0:00 2003

[...]

[14:51][FrédériqueB] non so come fare per parlare in privato?
[14:52][FrédériqueB] vorrei parlare con la beba
[14:52][MylèneV] Frederique, ecris ton message, puis double clique sur le prénom
[14:52][FrédériqueB] grazie Mylène
[14:52][colombia] tu pulsas sobre el nombre de beba sigues escribiendo normalmente
[14:52][beba] non ci capisco più di tanto per cui non so darti istruzioni
[14:53][FrédériqueB] quindi beba sei di Pisa e sei animatrice o studentessa?
[14:53][colombia] frederique pudiste ?
[14:53][FrédériqueB] cos'è "pudiste"?
[14:53][colombia] pouvoir
[14:54][colombia] pudiste comunicarte con beba ?
[14:54][MylèneV] y que estudian?
[14:55][FrédériqueB] io studio italiano
[14:56][beba] io sto cominciando a studiare spagnolo
[14:56][MylèneV] yo Español y portugues
[14:56][colombia] las dejo un momento y vuelvo enseguida
[14:56][MylèneV] ok ola Ana
[14:57][FrédériqueB] io ho provato d'imparare spagnolo, quando ero in Italia a Genova...strano, no!
[14:57][beba] per ora non penso di continuare con la specializzazione perchè ho tremila impegni
[14:57][AnaC] Ola a todos, acabei de chegar estive 1 hora no médico e demorei quase 1/4 de hora para me conseguir liga [...]

Stage 2 : choosing a theme .

Every team prepares one or more proposals which it puts on this forum. Every user can give their opinion about it. The aim of this stage is to choose a theme that will be developed in the following stages until the press dossier. Next, a vote tool will be implemented to allow choosing easily. In the protosession however, it's not available yet. So, the only way to choose is organizing a debate in a special subject. As in stage 1, there are as many forums as there are subjects. The team which proposes the chosen theme is appointed as "editorial team" and a "chief editor" is named within (see Figure 4).

Stage 3 : brainstorming .

The aim of this stage is to bring out some sub-themes in order to prepare the "press dossier". The "chief editor" creates these sub-themes according to the interactions of stage 2. Students can exchange ideas there. Animators (or instructors) contribute to bring about the "dialogues".

Stage 4 : collecting documents and debate.

In order to feed the reflection, participants are called to look for and to set documents and web references in each sub-theme. As this stage is always organized as a forum, it remains possible to write a message about any document. Instructors go on helping, animating and moderating. For example, they provide students with direct access to the many resources available on the web, which allows them to research topics in greater depth.

Stage 5 : elaborating and publishing the press dossier.

Finally, the editorial team organizes the different parts of the press dossier dispatching the work between the participants. Every team prepares its column as a synthesis of anterior interactions in the forums but also in chats and e-mails. Document extracts can be used as

well or any kind of resources free of copyright to illustrate the syntheses. Afterwards, the editorial team takes these columns to make the press dossier and sets it on the platform.

3.3. Resources to foster cross-comprehension :

Currently still under development, the Galanet platform is being continuously upgraded. During the protosession, we hope to lay down some of the modules and resources of the self-learning room. By the way, the Galatea CD-Roms, are already available and can be used in such a manner. At the end of the project, the on-line modules table of contents will be as indicated in Table 2. They are all designed to train receptive (writing and oral) and interactive skills. By the way, the resources “room” will include two categories : expositive resources and interactive resources. In the first category it will be possible to find explanations about how to use comprehension and interaction strategies and also three synthesis about grammar, phonetics, and phonological and morphological cross-linguistic aspects. Piloted by the Barcelone team, most of these resources are already written. They take in consideration a double level of information: a quadrilingual level comparing the four target languages and also a one-to-three level where specificities of one language are explained to speakers of the three other languages in relation to their respective languages. In the second category, students will find a series of interactive exercises on different aspects of each language that they have to take into account to enhance their comprehension performance, in grammar, phonetics, prosody and lexical. Most of these exercises will be related to the modules but they’ll be accessible directly as well.

Obviously, students can question for clarification wherever they are on the platform, eliciting from a teacher or from a peer, an additional explanation, rephrasing, or examples. But they can also try to solve their difficulties on their own using the resourcing strategy (O’Malley & Chamot 1990: 138). And finally, both strategies –and many others– can be joined together, for instance when an instructor, after being asked, advises a student to use reference sources of information available on the platform or outside. It’s exactly what we intend to foster and also, to study. As can be inferred from the above description, this methodology requires a new pedagogy, one in which learning is not contained within the limits of one target language and in which comparing languages and cultures is natural and spontaneous. It is rather an interactive process where multiple partners meet: learners, instructors, coordinators, session masters, and eventually visitors and experts ; and some of them change their role during the session scenario (i.e. the chief editor). This multiplicity of voices is meant to lead learners, under the skillful guidance of the pedagogical staff, to gradually construct and refine their quadrilingual cross-comprehension skill and other competencies if they want.

4. WHO IS GOING TO BENEFIT FROM GALANET ?

The only condition to participate in a Galanet session is to master at least one of the four languages. In that way, all students (universities, high schools, language resource centres) and adults (lifelong learning) can participate, in spite of the diversity of their Romance language competences :

- having no skills of any 3 other languages
- beginning to learn one of the 3 other languages
- mastering in some way one or more of the 3 other languages.

About dissemination, what will remain at the end of the contractual period (30/09/2004) is a training platform as a session generator allowing to organise on internet cross-comprehension and cross-cultural sessions between distant groups of users in Europe and beyond⁷. According to a partnership agreement, the mode of dissemination is a total free access after request to a web-administrator. However, it will be always possible without request, to access to self-learning room and archives as a « visitor ». This is a non profit making project.

Thus, Galanet is designed to enhance receptive and interactive Romance language skills, but it can also be used as a tool for content and language integrated learning. For example, to build an international curriculum in one field as we contemplate doing it in applied linguistics on language acquisition (a European master project), or as we could do it in relation with CNED (French distant learning) in the field of spectacle professionals' training. In these cases, the platform will be transferred to the asking consortium, after a written agreement in order to give them the keys of web-administrating. Actually, the adaptability of the scenario in the forum (the different stages), allows us to envisage a large set of uses which are still to be designed.

5. WHY SUCH A PROJECT ?

The final objective is obviously to enhance cross-cultural comprehension between speakers of romance languages but the main challenge is to integrate this approach in language courses and trainings.

Otherwise, the social objective is to give users an evidence of how it's possible to use foreign languages to build something together, struggling against one of the main negative representation pointed out by the Eurobarometer Survey: *"when asked what things discourage [Europeans] from learning a foreign language, 22% of all respondents [ndr : 16000] give as a reason that they do not consider themselves good at languages"* (Grosser 2002: 21).

6. WHICH SKILLS CAN IMPROVE THE PARTICIPANTS ?

According to the CEF (Common European Framework –CEF– of Reference for Languages), the skills a learner can develop in a training must be situated in a domain. Here in the protosession it is a personal domain because it's likely the first domain where cross-comprehension can fit. But it could be public, professional or educational as well, in other situations of use, as we mentioned it above. Furthermore, the skills descriptors of the CEF must be adapted to the specificities of the cross-comprehension as multilingual communication.

The general objective is to understand speakers of the three other romance languages using a set of main strategies as:

- knowing how to use skills and knowledge acquired in one or more language(s) of the same family (by transfer) ;
- knowing how to reformulate in their own language to assess their understanding and request the partner help ;

⁷ Contacts are already maintained with University of Rio Cuarto (Argentina) and University of Iasi (Rumania) for example.

- knowing how to use strategies aimed to get round comprehension difficulties, including using the foreign language if available and necessary.

In reading comprehension, the B1 level is aimed at. According to the CEF, it means that the user can read direct factual texts about subjects relative to his domain and interests with an acceptable level of comprehension in order to: maintain a regular cross-correspondence with a peer understanding of texts about description of events, feelings, opinions and wishes; find out some relevant information in a shorter text; put together information from different texts to achieve a specific task; identify the main conclusions of an argumentative text.

In listening comprehension, the A2 level is expected. It means that the user can catch the main point in announces, brief messages, clear instructions, short radio and TV documents about current subjects and, in conversation, personal messages when the delivery is relatively slow and clear on a familiar topic, with the possibility of asking for repetition, reformulation or clarification in his own language.

7. WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF FAILURE OF THIS APPROACH AND THE WAY TO AVOID IT?

In a research led on needs analysis, expectations and pre-representations of the target public (Degache 2002), we point up some general difficulties. One of them, that motivation is not a given fact. For instance, two groups of students, after a short verbal presentation of the project and its principle, were asked about their interest in using the platform and participating at a session. The first group was mainly composed of students from language studies, the second, on the contrary, was basically made of future engineers. As we can see in Figure 5, they show a moderated interest, above all among the non-linguist public. Furthermore, it appears that students who already know two Romance languages (the reference language and another one), seem to be more enthusiastic. In both cases, however, a quarter puts conditions to their use of the platform.

These conditions were, from the most indicated to the less:

- to access easily to the platform and to understand quickly how it works ;
- to master another Romance language other than the reference language, or at least one competence;
- to be motivated by the theme chosen;
- to have free time to participate;
- to find a learning interest and not only to chat;
- to belong to a group with a common objective;
- to be included the experience into a plan of studies.

On the other hand, the reasons for not being attracted were :

- Lack of interest in these languages, has other priorities
- Lack of time
- Lack of interest in learning language with internet and new technologies
- Doubt about the pedagogical effectiveness of the system, in particular because of risk of confusion⁸
- Lack of romance linguistic knowledge, or low level

⁸ One of them write : « Congratulations to the persons who make this project possible but, will our brains be able to achieve this exercise ? »

- Preference to other ways of communicating
- Will think about it later

Basically, the main points of the appraisal of this preliminary inquiry are that representations and attitudes are anyway very careful about Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for language learning, and about Galanet and its dissociated approach as well. It also enhances the sheer necessity of further research and of working out a full strategy of integration of ICT in order to, in the case of Galanet,

- differentiate the bid according to the target publics ;
- not bother participants ;
- inform them in the best way before a session on objectives and methods ;
- experiment, in particular on the different manners of advising during a session.

Of course, it will be necessary to find the balance between acceptable quadrilingual exposure with good use of this exposure in the learning of one Romance foreign language and mislearning by confusion.

The ways we could point out to adjust the approach are :

- to improve the resourcing and the indications to access to the resources
- a more classroom integrated scenario
- a shorter scenario with a stronger guidance with special tasks as in Cultura (cross-definitions, comment situations...) (Furstenberg and alii. 2001)
- to improve the pedagogical assistance
- a bilingual distribution of learners
- a best selection of the public in order to lead the debate in the forum on a specific purpose, for example bringing together students of a same field, economy, linguistics, applied linguistics to language teaching... or sharing the same project (i.g. preparing a next "stage" in one foreign country)

8. PERSPECTIVES ...

As we have said before, further research is necessary. We don't know yet :

- how to regulate in the best way the participation ;
- how students learn and what exactly they learn in such a context ;
- how to integrate this system in current courses and training to bring about its best ;
- how to put together in the most effective way self-learning, communication and collaborative work.

All these issues need to be explored in the next years. Fortunately, we can inspire ourselves from other projects in this field for teaching languages using multimedia environment, as Cultura (Furstenberg and alii. 2001), Tandem (Helmling 2002, or <http://www.enst.fr/tandem/>) or Tutolangues (Demaizière & Achard-Bayle 2003). Cultura in particular, pointing out cross-understanding rather than cross-comprehension, i.e. in an intercultural view, has a lot of common points with Galanet. It's designed as « *a concrete and dynamic way in which the Web can be used to foster understanding between American and French students. It offers learners (and teachers alike) on both sides of the Atlantic a unique comparative, cross-cultural approach for gradually constructing knowledge of other values, attitudes and beliefs, in an ever-enlarging construction of the foreign culture* ». (Furstenberg, op. cit.)

Nevertheless, Cultura, as none of the other projects mentioned, doesn't present a multilingual bid. Although it's shown as a project providing « *a basic and broad methodology which can easily and effectively be applied to the cross-understanding of any two cultures* », the co-occurrence of four languages in a same forum or chat, and the extreme variation of linguistic competence of the participants (on Cultura, despite of being invited to communicate in their own language, all the participants are advanced learners of the other language) completely changes the problematic. Actually, because we hope to contribute to linguistic integration, multilingualism is both the aim and the medium on Galanet. However, as far as we can conceive the process of exchange and interaction, we can't anticipate its evolution. We don't especially know how cross-comprehension, being a situation of language contact, could lead to. Will the four languages remain completely separate during the process, because of the pedagogic framework? On the contrary, will the contact produce a specific language as a mixture of the four? In the history of language, we don't know any case of a social group whose exchanges were durably maintained in several languages without modifying them. Does this mode of contact with ICT create a new situation able to do it ?

Otherwise, we just begin describing the acquisition process in such a learning context. One partner team of the project, the University of Aveiro, began working on the description and analysis of multilingual chat (see Andrade and al., 2002, Araújo e Sá and Melo in this Conference) but we are already convinced that nothing similar is possible out of ICT.

Fig. 1: full platform functionalities

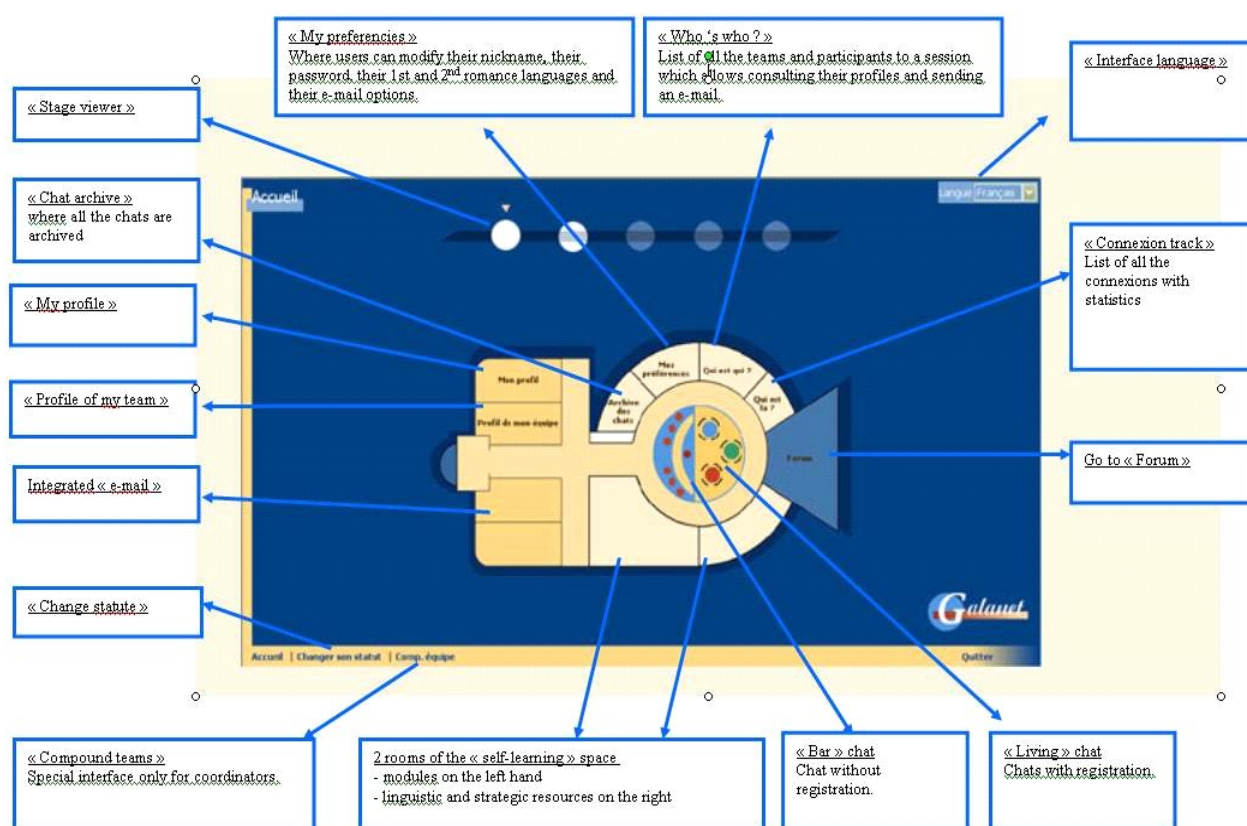


Table 1 : the “protosession” calendar

Protosession Calendar 2003

Preparation				Breaking the ice		Choosing a theme		Brainstorming	Collect & debate			Press dossier			
20/01		14/02		15/02	2/03	3/03	12/03	13/3 19/3	20/03 6/04			7/04	26/04		
Gr*															
Ly															
Av															
Ba															
Ma															
Ca															
Pi															
Mo															

In light grey : before protosession

In dark grey : holidays * idem Grenoble & Chambéry

Fig. 2: teams of the protosession and example of team's slip



Fig. 3 : forum “breaking the ice” in the protosession.

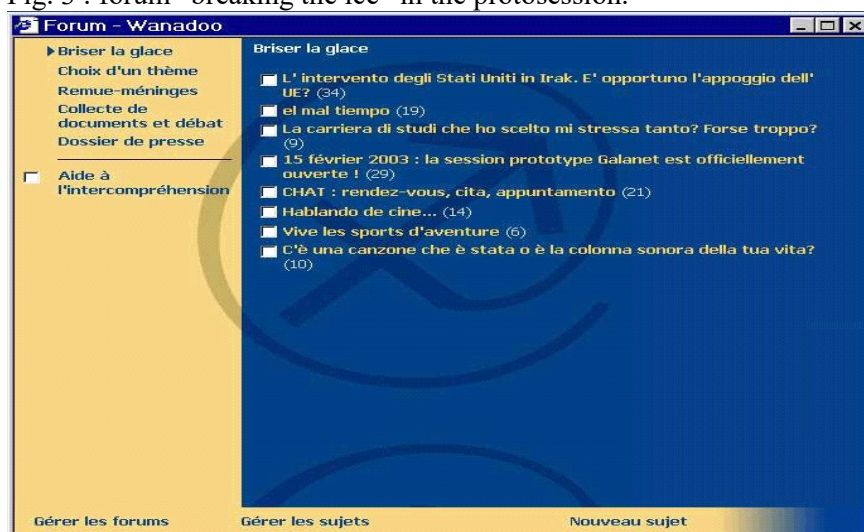


Fig. 4 : forum “choosing a theme” in protosession

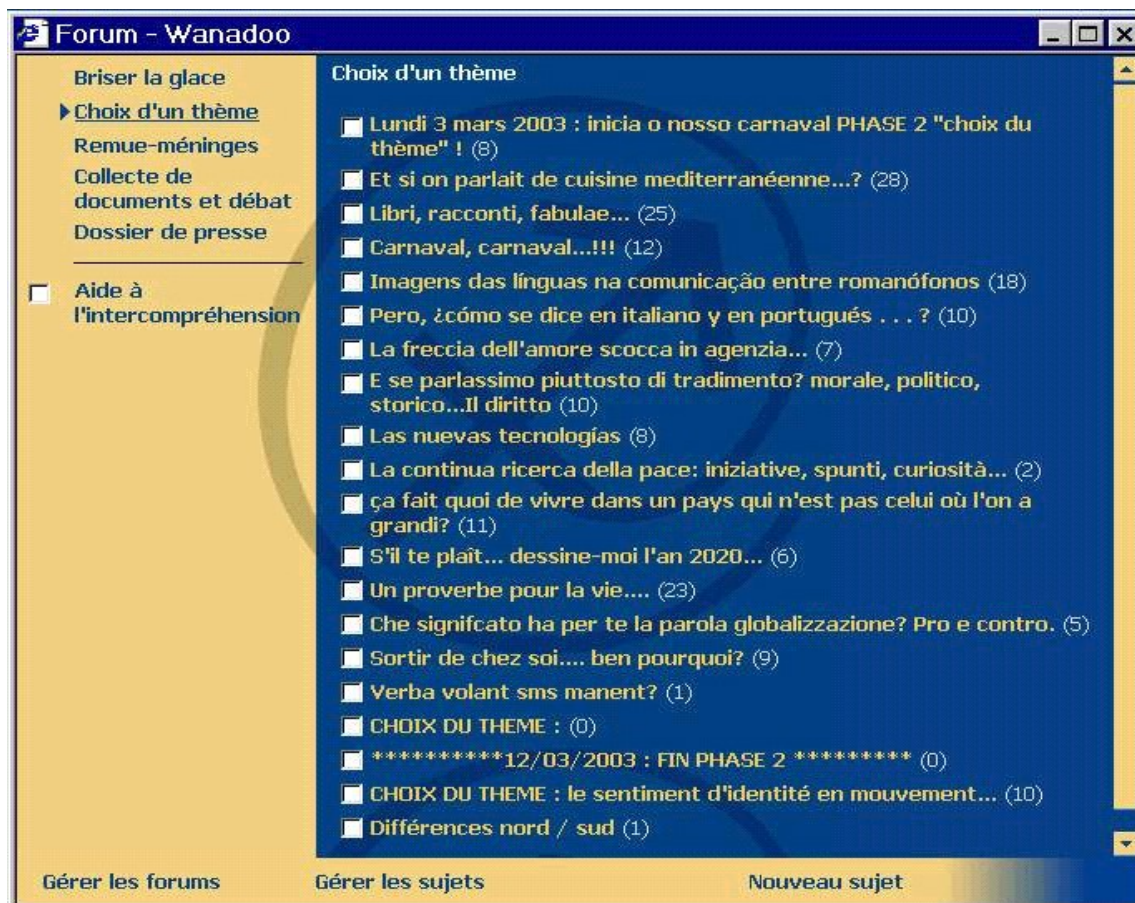
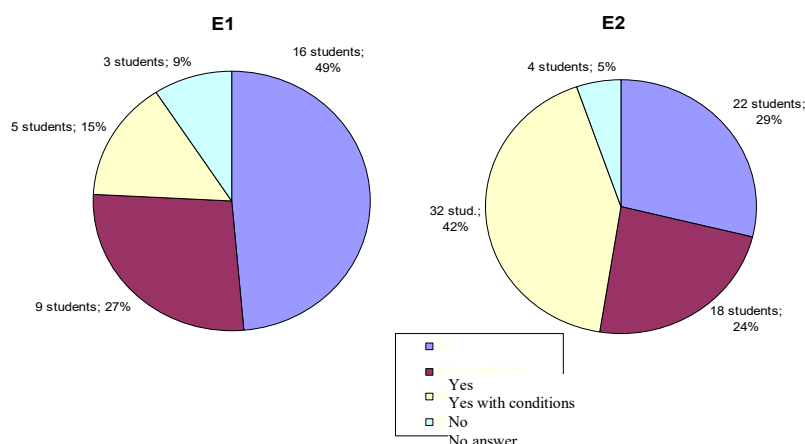


Table 2 : survey of modules

Modules of the self-learning room											
For hispanic speakers			For french speakers			For italian speakers			For portuguese speakers		
FR	IT	PO	ES	IT	PO	ES	FR	PO	ES	FR	IT
	1	1				1		1	1		1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Modules distribution regarding to skill :											
Reading comprehension						Listening comprehension					
Module 1 : (in 6 cases on 12) press paper						Module 5 : monolingual interactions					
Module 4 : e-mail						Module 2 : television report					
Module 7 : plurilingual chat						Module 3 : student interview					
						Module 6 : plurilingual interactions					

Figure 5: pie chart of interest in Galanet

Potential users of Galanet among 2 samples of students



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