

Embodiment and a sense of belonging in online language learning contexts

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Abstract. This paper studies how embodiment is realised in distance and online language learning. Eleven students from the University of Helsinki Language Centre participated in the study. The interviews conducted were thematic, and the research question was as follows: How is embodiment evident in students' narratives about online language learning? I apply nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon 2004, 2007, 2009) as the analytical method of this study. Focusing on the connections between narratives of historical bodies and language learning in online contexts, four distinct discourses emerged in the data: 1) the lack of embodiment; 2) embodiment as a matter of power; 3) private, safety-giving embodiment; and 4) embodiment in relation to the material and social world.

Keywords: *embodiment, language learning, online learning, sense of belonging*

Įkūnijimas ir bendrystės jausmas kalbų mokymosi nuotoliniu būdu kontekstuose

Santrauka. Šiame darbe nagrinėjama, kaip įkūnijimas ir bendrystės jausmas realizuojami mokantis kalbų nuotoliniu būdu. Tyrime dalyvavo vienuolika studentų iš Helsinkio universiteto Kalbų centro. Duomenys buvo surinkti teminių interviu būdu, o analizėje buvo keliami šie tyrimo klausimai: 1) kaip įkūnijimas pasireiškia mokinių pasakojimuose apie kalbų mokymąsi internetu?, 2) kaip įkūnijimas ir bendrystės jausmas yra susiję nuotoliniame mokyme? Šio tyrimo analitinė prieiga paremta ryšių analize (angl. nexus analysis) (Scollon & Scollon 2004, 2007, 2009). Išanalizavus sąsajas tarp istorinių kūnų naratyvų ir kalbos mokymosi nuotoliu būdu kontekstų, tyrimo duomenyse išryškėjo keturi vytraujantys diskursai: 1) įkūnijimo poreikis; 2) įkūnijimo sąsajos su kalbotojo galia; 3) privatus, saugumą suteikiantis įkūnijimas ir 4) įsikūnijimas materialaus bei socialinio pasaulio atžvilgiu.

Raktiniai žodžiai: *bendrystės jausmas, kalbos mokymasis, įkūnijimas, nuotolinis mokymas*

1. Intro

I am attending a language lesson as a student. The course is being implemented as online learning, and we are participating in the lesson via Zoom. The group is small, and most of the participants already have their cameras on. The teacher starts the lesson by asking in the target language how we are doing and telling us something about his last week. When he addresses the students, he calls them by name, even those who have their cameras off, and the students answer him. One apologises that she cannot keep the microphone on for long because her neighbour is doing some renovations and there might be

some noise. Another student mentions that he is a little tired and, while mentioning it, as he says this, he gets up to make himself a coffee and shows us his favourite mug. Inspired by this casual display, a few others also show the rest of us what they drink or eat during the class. One of the students has a dog beside her, and when the teacher sees it, he asks for the dog's name, which leads to a lively discussion: a couple of students ask how old the dog is and what breed it is. Some screens are dark, but one of these 'camera-less' students joins the conversation by opening her microphone, while another one shows that he is following the conversation by using emojis. The conversation is further animated when the teacher asks about the pros and cons of pet ownership.

The scene described above illustrates how embodiment and the social and material environment are present and function as components of interaction in online education. The social and physical environment came into play during the conversation when a student complained about the noise caused by her neighbour's renovation or when another student introduced her dog. The material world and its artefacts were also present and visible as students displayed their cups, food and drinks. The different displays and levels of engagement are also related to embodiment, i.e. where the 'student bodies' are, what they are doing, how they are feeling, and whether and how they are talking about it. In the scene above, a student described his emotional and physical state by mentioning that he was tired and that he was going to make coffee to recharge his batteries.

The extract shows how interactions and conversations emerge from and are related to each person's immediate environment. Although not sharing the same physical space, the material environment and embodiment of each student was involved in this teaching moment. As a student, I experienced a strong sense of belonging in such a situation, while at the same time, as an ethnographer, I observed the students' agency as language users and their willingness to share their morning moment with others. It is also worth noting that a person can participate and be present in different ways: one can be seen and make one's surroundings visible to others, but one can also be heard only as a voice or interact through other means, such as using the chat function or emojis.

My ethnographic approach explores the manifestation of embodiment in online language learning. Despite the common belief that embodiment is not a factor in, or even absent from, online education, I argue that embodiment is actually pervasive in this context. Rather than comparing or contrasting face-to-face and online education, my aim is to explore the phenomenon of embodiment in the context of online courses. The specific research question that guides my study is as follows: How is embodiment evident in students' narratives of online and distance language learning? By addressing this research question, I aim to shed light on the role of embodiment in the context of online language learning.

2. Context

The context of my research is the Language Centre of the University of Helsinki, where I work as a Spanish teacher. It is a multilingual and multicultural working community with about 70 teachers. The Language Centre is the largest language training institute in Finland and is responsible for communication and language studies, including courses in 16 languages.

In early 2020, the coronavirus pandemic led to the closure of schools and many public institutions in Finland, as elsewhere, and the Language Centre switched to distance learning almost overnight. The pandemic forced teachers to find new ways of teaching and students to learn new ways of studying and participating. Despite the challenging circumstances, these changes led to the development of many effective pedagogical practices that are still an integral part of everyday teaching (Niinivaara & Lehtonen 2023).

The teaching and learning context at the Language Centre has gradually become more diverse, which means that classroom-based courses do not always reach all students, and other alternatives are needed. For some students, online learning may be the most appropriate option due to reasons such as work, family or geographical location. For successful language learning, a connection to other individuals and communities of speakers is essential, as underscored by Intke-Hernandez (2020). Therefore, online and distance learning must adopt a communal approach to enhance the effectiveness of language acquisition. Language is a social and embodied action (e.g. van Lier 2002; Dufva 2020); it is not just words but what we create together through our material and social environment.

3. Theory

Drawing on the dialogical theory of the Bakhtin Circle, Dufva et al. (2014) propose a reconceptualization of language learning as the appropriation of shared linguistic resources, emphasizing the social nature of learning (see also Bernárdez 2004, 2005, 2008). Dufva et al. (2014) argue that language learning is not just an individual cognitive process, but a collaborative endeavour involving the sharing and use of communal resources. Their perspective sees language as a situated resource that is multimodal. As learners participate in linguistic practices, they engage in the recycling of community resources (see also Suni 2008), which can take the form of speech, conversation, texts, media and signs. Learning in this context can be understood as the process of appropriating these resources to enable learners to participate effectively in linguistic activities. These linguistic resources are distributed across different environments, artifacts and human agents.

The socio-cognitive nature of Dufva et al.'s (2014) argument emphasizes the inseparable connection between the social environment and learners' cognitive resources during the learning process. Dufva et al. (2014) propose a dialogic perspective, rooted in the theory of human consciousness, to transcend the traditional dichotomy of the 'social' and the 'cognitive.' This perspective acknowledges that the creation of meaning involves the dynamic interaction of both social and cognitive elements.

According to Dufva et al. (2014), language learners are inherently embedded in social practices that coexist with their cognitive activities. In essence, the act of learning a language is a simultaneous engagement in both social and cognitive processes. Language learners are inherently immersed in social practices that are intertwined with their cognitive activity. Thus, when discussing language learning in everyday situations, the learning space is often defined as a common, physically shared space, such as a classroom, or everyday spaces and contexts where people use the target language. Therefore, the notion that one of the most effective and straightforward methods to learn and use a language is through physical co-presence, where individuals can see, hear, and feel others in close proximity, is deeply ingrained in general and everyday thinking. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this is not the sole existing truth. The concept of a shared linguistic or learning space may not always necessitate physical co-presence; instead, it can also be socially constructed and virtually shared. In our increasingly interconnected world, the advent of virtual spaces has expanded the possibilities of language learning beyond traditional physical boundaries, highlighting the diverse and evolving nature of language acquisition.

According to the socio-cognitive approach, language is a dynamic activity that involves the embodiment of words and their meanings within a specific material and social context. While language flourishes through active use, this perspective underscores the dual nature of language as both a social and cognitive endeavor, with each aspect intricately linked to the other (Atkinson 2002: 534, 537). Cognition, as viewed in this context, extends beyond the individual and encompasses the broader community and its diverse artifacts (Atkinson 2002: 531; 2011: 143–144; Cowley 2009, 2011; Dufva & Aro 2015:

37–38; Dufva 2019: 79). In essence, cognition is a shared phenomenon, implying that, in addition to utilizing one's individual cognitive resources, language users can tap into the affordances provided by their physical environment. Moreover, they can leverage the linguistic knowledge of fellow speakers and the support they offer (Atkinson 2002: 531; Suni 2008: 189–192). In simpler terms, this perspective emphasizes that language is not solely an individual mental process but a collaborative effort, allowing language users to draw upon both their personal cognitive abilities and the communal linguistic resources available in their surroundings.

This paper explores the idea of 'embodiment' through a phenomenological lens. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962/1995), thinking and expression are tightly intertwined, forming a unified process and a specific point of creation. This expressive activity goes beyond mere perception; it is also lived in a shared manner, emerging in the present moment through interpersonal connections. These connections, termed *intercorporeal*, signify the collective experience of individuals interacting with each other (Streeck & Cuffari 2017: 177–178; Merleau-Ponty 1962/1995). While actions are undoubtedly shaped by cultural and situational factors, they retain a distinctiveness tied to the individual. This distinctiveness arises from the body's unique perspective, needs, and intentions, emphasizing the personal nature of acts (Streeck & Cuffari 2017: 177–178; Merleau-Ponty 1962/1995). To put it another way, our thoughts and expressions are not standalone occurrences; instead, they are intertwined with shared experiences, molded by both cultural influences and individual perspectives.

Within the phenomenological framework, learning is a dynamic process that involves assimilating new skills, thereby shaping and transforming the body's self-image, known as "*la schéma corporel*." This occurs as the learner engages in varied activities and pays attention to their sensations (Merleau-Ponty 1962/1995; Rouhiainen 2011). Importantly, Thompson (2017) emphasizes that the inseparability of mind and body is integral to this transformative process. In other words, as individuals acquire and integrate new skills, they not only modify their physical self-representation but also engage in a holistic process where the mind and body are intricately linked. Thompson's insight underscores the inherent connection between the cognitive and physical dimensions of learning within the phenomenological framework.

The concept of embodied knowledge, as articulated by Aromaa and Tiili (2014: 265) drawing from Parviainen's insights (2002), extends beyond mere instinctive understanding. It encompasses the body's ability for reflective and intelligent communication with the environment (Parviainen 2002). This form of knowledge emerges from the intricate interplay of mind, thought, body, and the surrounding environment (Gieser 2008: 303). Barsalou (2019: 1–2) further adds that cognition is not an isolated process but intricately linked to various sensory experiences, including seeing, hearing, acting, feeling, and the functioning of other bodies. This interconnectedness underscores the holistic nature of cognitive processes.

Embodiment involves recognizing how our personal bodily experiences significantly shape language, thought, and understanding. It delves into the study of cognition by exploring the dynamic interplay between the body and the environment, highlighting the inseparable connection between language, thought, and bodily interactions with the world (Gibbs 2006; Johnson 2015). Acknowledging the significance of the body in cognition, scholars (Merleau-Ponty 1962/1995; Streeck & Cuffari 2017; Rouhiainen 2011; Aromaa & Tiili 2014; Parviainen 2002; Gieser 2008; Thompson 2017; Barsalou 2019) have contributed to this framework. They emphasize how the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and social environment shapes our experiences, illustrating that our understanding of the world is intricately woven into our embodied interactions with it. This perspective underscores the pivotal role of the body in cognitive processes, emphasizing the necessity of acknowledging its influence on our understanding.

In recent years, the field of embodied learning has witnessed significant growth (Jusslin et al., 2022). Scholars have increasingly focused on understanding the embodied foundations of language use, as highlighted by Atkinson (2010) and Macedonia (2019). Jusslin et al. (2022) assert that embodied engagement goes beyond mere physical activity, encompassing a broader concept referred to as embodied learning. This form of learning, as elucidated by Anttila (2018), Anttila & Svendler Nielsen (2019), and Nathan (2022), involves the full immersion and connection of the human body with its social and material environment. Bodily engagement in this context transcends simple physical activity; instead, it signifies the active involvement of the entire body in the learning process. This extends beyond traditional cognitive activities, incorporating the body's movements, sensations, and physical interactions. Therefore, bodily engagement and embodied learning underscore the importance of the body's active participation in the learning process, emphasizing that learning is not just a mental endeavor but an immersive experience that encompasses the whole individual in relation to their surroundings (Anttila 2018; Anttila & Svendler Nielsen 2019; Nathan 2022).

According to Barsalou (2020: 2), embodied learning is related to the 4E approach, where 'cognition, affect and behaviour emerge from the body embedded in environments that extend cognition, as agents enact situated actions that reflect their current cognitive and affective states'. Jusslin et al. (2022: 2–3) argue that Barsalou's view emphasises that embodied activity is much more than just visible, bodily activity; it also includes internal bodily sensations, emotions and experiences. In essence, embodied learning challenges the conventional notions of education, moving beyond the confines of traditional classroom settings or knowledge acquisition through reading and listening alone. It emphasizes that genuine learning occurs when the body is comprehensively engaged and seamlessly integrated with the social and material dimensions of the environment. Therefore, embodied learning transforms the educational experience into a holistic journey, intertwining physical, sensory, and social interactions in the process.

Having explored the intricacies of 'embodiment' and its implications for the learning process, we will now turn our attention to another pivotal aspect of contemporary education – 'online learning.' In the evolving landscape of education, 'distance learning' and 'online learning' are terms frequently encountered, each denoting distinct modalities of educational delivery with some inherent overlap. Distance learning refers to a mode of education where students and teachers are physically separated. It involves the use of various technologies and methods to deliver educational content to learners, who are not present in a traditional classroom setting. Distance learning can involve both synchronous (real-time interaction) and asynchronous (self-paced) learning activities. Online learning specifically refers to the use of internet-based technologies and platforms for delivering educational content. It relies on digital tools and resources to facilitate instruction and communication between instructors and learners.

Online learning can also include synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. These terms are often used interchangeably, and the specific usage and interpretation may vary in different contexts. The rapid development of technology has led to a significant increase in online learning opportunities, and distance learning has increasingly included online components. In this article, when writing about my research, I use the term 'online learning' because the students described in their narratives were specifically engaged in technology-mediated study and learning.

4. Data and Methods

The interview data for my study was collected in 2022 and consisted of interviews with 11 university students from diverse disciplines at the University of Helsinki, including medicine, natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences. They represented various stages of their academic careers, with three

having completed their bachelor's degree, seven enrolled in master's programmes, and one conducting doctoral research. Despite their differing academic backgrounds, all participants shared a commonality: they were studying languages at the University of Helsinki Language Centre in conjunction with their primary fields of study.

In addition to the initial interviews, I conducted a follow-up interview with one of the participants after completing the preliminary data analysis. This supplementary interview allowed me to deepen emerging observations and engage in a comparative discussion of their experiences and my interpretations based on the collected material. In total, the study involved 12 interviews, each lasting between 40 and 90 minutes.

I used a semi-structured thematic interview, which focuses on specific topics and questions (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008). I prepared main questions and sub-questions in order to obtain comprehensive answers. I also prepared probing questions in advance in case the interviewee did not give comprehensive answers and needed support in his or her narrative. The themes structured, guided and concretised the interview. I developed them based on the research questions and key theoretical concepts. The themes were partly condensed words that I transformed into questions during the interview.

The themes and questions of the interviews were related to the meaning of language proficiency and students' experiences of language learning and their sense of belonging in online courses. The theme of embodiment did not appear explicitly in the questions, but it emerged from the students' narratives, and more specific research questions took shape as I read and analysed the data. The framework of my thematic interview included the following themes and questions:

- 1) Language proficiency: What does language proficiency mean? What does it mean to know a language? How do you learn a language? (Goals in relation to languages?) Could you give an example of a successful experience of language proficiency?
- 2) Experiences of language learning in online courses at the Language Centre: How do you feel about studying and learning in online courses? What kind of experiences have you had?
- 3) Sense of belonging: Do you feel a sense of belonging in the (online) courses? When did you feel like you belonged? What aspects make you feel a sense of belonging? (e.g. small groups, the course as a whole, the language community, other communities?) What makes you feel part of the group (in the context of the Language Centre/course)? Can teachers support the development of a sense of belonging?

In order to develop a coding system, I first familiarised myself with the concept of belonging and, realising that one of the main themes emerging from the data was embodiment, I reviewed relevant literature and theoretical frameworks to define and conceptualise these constructs.

I then began an initial coding of my interview transcripts. Inductively, I identified and labelled segments of the data that were relevant to the themes of embodiment and sense of belonging. I used descriptive codes that captured the essence of the data. I categorized the initial codes, analyzing them to identify patterns and similarities. I grouped similar codes together and created categories representing different aspects of embodiment and sense of belonging. I defined code definitions and provided examples to ensure consistent coding across interviews. This helped to maintain reliability.

To identify patterns and recurring themes across interviews, I compared codes and data segments both within and across interviews. I looked for similarities, differences and patterns that emerged and tried to pay attention to variations in participants' experiences, perspectives and contexts.

It is essential to recognize the contextual boundaries inherent in this study. The research was conducted within the specific confines of the Language Centre at the University of Helsinki, focusing on a modest sample of university students concurrently studying languages alongside their primary fields. Consequently, the applicability of the findings to broader educational settings and diverse student populations may be constrained. Moreover, the study primarily relied on qualitative interviews, offering nuanced insights but potentially limiting the scope of experiences and perspectives captured. My research approach has been ethnographic, with the primary goal not being the generation of universally applicable information. Instead, the aim of ethnographic research is to delve deeply into the understanding of a specific phenomenon. I have aimed to discover new perspectives on my research topic, considering the cultural dependence and contextual nature of the phenomenon (see Lappalainen 2007; Knuuttila 2010). This acknowledgment of the specific research approach adds a layer of depth to the understanding of the study's scope and objectives.

Due to the word limit of this paper, I had to carefully select the data examples to include, and I focused on selecting data examples that best represented the analytical categories and addressed my research questions. I made this choice consciously to ensure the clarity of the paper and to make the most of the limited space available. Although I could not include all the data in the article due to space limitations, it's important to emphasize that the analysis covers the entirety of the dataset. Every interview conducted has contributed to my overall understanding and contextual insight. In selecting specific examples for this article, I have chosen excerpts that best and most illustratively represent the emerging results from the entire dataset. Liisa, one of the interviewed students, has been quoted multiple times because her experiences and narratives vividly encapsulate the central themes and phenomena under investigation. By featuring excerpts from Liisa's interview, I aim to provide the reader with a focused and nuanced representation of the key findings of the study.

I use nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon 2004, 2007, 2009) as the analytical method of this study. Nexus analysis is a participatory research strategy that promotes a multi-method approach. It is underpinned by several theoretical and methodological traditions, such as ethnography, linguistic anthropology, critical discourse analysis, interactional linguistics and a cultural-historical view of social activity (Kuure 2018: 436). The focus of the current study lies within the socio-cognitive tradition, which sees the individual as an integral part of a community. In this perspective, learning occurs through interaction with others and with an emphasis on collaboration. The interconnectedness of individuals' everyday encounters and activities influences the implementation of social norms, practices and laws, with macro and micro levels constantly shaping and influencing each other.

According to Scollon and Scollon (2004: 159), a nexus is defined as a point where the trajectories of people, places, discourses, thoughts, practices, experiences and objects converge, allowing for situated action that influences and shapes these trajectories. The intersecting trajectories are intertwined with social action, and nexus analysis aims to examine their interrelationship. In the context of this study, the nexus or intersection relates to language studies in online contexts. The social action under investigation involves the intersection of three basic components of nexus analysis: 1) historical bodies, 2) interaction order, and 3) discourses in place.

Each participant in the activity possessed their own historical body, which refers to past memories, experiences, actions, and events, all of which influence who and what a person is and how they relate to other people. It is important to note that the concept of a "historical body" extends beyond the past alone; it encapsulates not only previous experiences but also encompasses present-day emotions, perceptions, and beliefs, as well as future aspirations and plans. This holistic understanding acknowledges

the dynamic interplay between one's past, present, and future, shaping their identity and interactions within the given context. The historical body can be metaphorically described as a suitcase (Aarnikoi-vu 2020: 37) that a person carries with them and in which life experiences accumulate. Scollon and Scollon (2004: 13) have compared the concept of the historical body to Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus, but they prefer the concept of the historical body because it locates bodily memories more precisely within the physical individual.

The interaction order, which is the interplay between the actors involved, is shaped by their historical bodies. It is about the relationships between individuals, where the nature of communication is influenced by factors such as friendship, casual acquaintance, professional colleague or classmate. The purpose for which they have come together also plays a role (Scollon & Scollon 2004: 13). When examining the order of interaction, researchers need to consider the hierarchical or egalitarian nature of the relationship and the extent to which it exists. It is also important to analyse the power dynamics present within the interaction (Scollon & Scollon 2004: 18–20).

The interaction order in this study refers to the mutual interaction among students, which can take various forms. Some interactions are “faceless” when participants choose not to activate their cameras, relying instead on auditory and verbal communication. Additionally, certain aspects of interaction become visual when cameras are turned on or presence is otherwise indicated visually (through the chat or emojis). The interaction order also encompasses the dynamics between teachers and students, inherently involving a certain degree of hierarchical interaction. In this context, the concept highlights the diverse ways in which individuals engage with each other, considering both the absence and presence of visual cues, as well as the use of auditory and verbal channels, and the inherent power dynamics within these interactions.

The nexus-analytical definition of discourse is rather fluid, which is why researchers need to define a more precise way of analysing the research object in their studies (Pietikäinen 2012: 435; Dlaske 2015: 248). According to Scollon and Scollon, discourse refers to the different ways in which people are connected to each other (2004: 4–5, 89–90), but the concept also refers to how objects are realised in material space, such as texts, signs and sounds (Scollon & Scollon 2004:163). Foucault (2005) states that discourses are not only the totality of what is said or how it is said, but discourse is also what is not said or what is manifested in gestures, ways of being and spatial arrangements. In this study, I define discourse according to Foucault: discourses are crystallised practices of meaningfulness constructed from a certain point of view, which participate in the construction and shaping of knowledge (Foucault 2005: 46–49). According to him, they are culturally shared ways of speaking and thinking that shape the object of speech (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019: 25–26). For example, language learning in online contexts can be talked about by focusing on learning, pedagogy, interaction, participation, educational policy or economics. When the topic is talked about in a certain way and from a certain point of view, a certain ‘truth’ is constructed from the ongoing discourses, which is often seen and heard in public debate and in mainstream voices. This is why it is important to listen to students’ voices and the sometimes contradictory discourses that emerge from their narratives.

In this study, the focal points of my nexus analysis are “historical bodies” and “interaction orders,” along with the discourses that emerge as interviewees narrate their experiences of language learning in online learning contexts. I aim to unravel the connections between personal histories, social interactions, and the broader discursive landscape to gain deeper insights into the complex phenomenon of language learning within the digital realm.

5. Discourses of embodiment

Next, I examine the answers to the first research question about how embodiment is evident in students' narratives of online language learning. I support the findings with excerpts from the data. Focusing on the links between narratives of historical bodies and language learning in online contexts, four distinct discourses emerged in the data: 1) lack of embodiment; 2) embodiment as a matter of power; 3) private, safety-giving embodiment; and 4) embodiment in relation to the material and social world.

5.1. Lack of embodiment

In both public and everyday conversations, the idea that it is not possible to make much use of embodiment in online education, or that something essential is missing from the interaction when one is not in the same physical space, often emerges. This voice is heard in the students' narratives as a longing for physicality:

- (1) *Yes, now we have all [language courses] remotely, but somehow it occurred to me that in social interaction and communication, that it is not only about understanding speech or understanding the language, but there is a lot more that you have to see the gestures and facial expressions of those people, then you learn to interpret them.* (Elina, Language Centre student)

As Elina says, interaction is much more than words and understanding speech. She longs to be able to get support in how she interprets the message by observing the body language of the other students. The idea that language is embodied remains in the background, a feeling that something is missing when there is no physical and immediate presence of the other.

Her desire to see gestures and facial expressions of others for interpreting messages aligns with her historical body: Elina's statement highlights the influence of her past experiences and perceptions on her current educational experience. The historical body metaphorically represents the accumulation of life experiences, and Elina's desire for physical cues reflects the significance of embodied learning in her personal history.

Elina's perspective on the importance of physical presence in communication adds a layer to her understanding of the "good" interaction order. It emphasizes that the nature of communication is influenced not only by the immediate interaction but also by the historical bodies of the participants in the same, physically shared space. Her mention of interpreting messages through body language contributes to the analysis of the hierarchical or egalitarian nature of the interaction order. The preference for physical cues may influence the dynamics of relationships, indicating the importance of non-verbal communication in shaping the interaction order.

Elina's narrative, which centers on the "lack of embodiment," provides a glimpse into how individual historical bodies shape perceptions of online interaction, influencing the dynamics and character of communication in this particular context. This theme is further echoed by Jenni, who articulates a similar perspective in her comments. She expresses a desire for support in interpreting messages by observing the body language of her peers. The notion that language is inherently embodied lingers in the background of her reflections, evoking a sense of absence when physical presence is lacking. This sentiment is reinforced by Jenni's shared viewpoint in another comment:

- (2) *In class, it's easier to get the support of others, for example when you notice that you don't understand, you can whisper to somebody or you smile at somebody, like saying that 'yes, we're in the same boat here'. That's not possible on Zoom. In class, if you turn a little towards the other person, the other person can respond to it and be ready to help, or not, but that's an easier interpretation.* (Jenni, Language Centre student)

The analysis of Jenni’s perspective builds upon her expressed yearning for embodied support in the physical classroom setting, providing insight into how her historical body influences her preferences for specific types of interactions. Jenni desires the opportunity to seek support from other participants through embodiment, facilitated by their immediate presence and a physically shared space.

Her wish for immediate cognitive, social, and emotional support through physical gestures and body language exemplifies the embodiment of language learning experiences. Notably, Jenni’s mention of seeking support through a smile or body language, along with her expressed desire to be ‘in the same boat,’ aligns with the present-day emotions and perceptions encapsulated in the concept of the historical body. She seeks to receive social and emotional support, as well as cognitive support, where cognitive support involves the acquisition and sharing of information (Moos & Mitchell, 1982). Social support encompasses non-verbal and verbal interaction that aids the other party, fostering mutual acceptance and cohesion between participants (Albrect & Goldsmith, 2003). Emotional support, on the other hand, contributes to an individual’s sense of being needed, important, and accepted (Cobb, 1976).

Jenni’s articulated longing for distinct types of support in a physical classroom setting further provides insights into the dynamics of the interaction order. The nature of communication and the ease of seeking support are depicted as being influenced by the historical bodies of the participants. This influence is exemplified in her description of turning towards others for support, where the egalitarian nature of relationships becomes apparent. Jenni’s differentiation between faceless interactions and visual interactions resonates with the dynamics of the interaction order, emphasizing the role of visual cues, such as turning towards someone or activating cameras, in shaping multifaceted interactions that involve both auditory and visual communication.

The analysis provides insights into how individuals navigate online learning, emphasizing the impact of historical bodies and interaction order on these dynamics. It stresses the importance of considering visual cues, in addition to auditory and verbal communication, to comprehend online interaction fully. This analysis unveils the prevalent discourse of “lack of embodiment,” a commonly reiterated notion in everyday discourse when discussing embodiment in online learning contexts.

5.2. Embodiment as a matter of power

When discussing online education, a lot of attention is paid to the use of cameras. The discussion about camera use is largely about the rules of online interaction and views on whether everyone should be expected to behave in the same way in real-time online teaching, whether everyone should participate equally in shared conversations, and whether the individual situation of the student can shape the requirements (Niinivaara & Lehtonen 2023). By activating their camera, individuals not only make themselves visible, but also reveal their own embodiment to others. According to Liisa, one of the Language Centre students I interviewed, using the camera is perceived as a way of occupying space:

- (3) *In a way, the question of using or not using cameras is perhaps also related to the norms of owning space, like turning on the camera in a way takes up space. I mean, people pay attention if there is a new face that seems to ‘float into sight’, but somehow, it’s not so dramatic if ten other people do it at the same time. But if you are the only one, then somehow you get the feeling that now I somehow stole the attention.* (Liisa, Language Centre student)

Liisa’s observation regarding the use of cameras is linked to norms of claiming space and perceiving it as drawing attention. She notes that when she uses her camera alone, it feels like she is taking attention away. This implies that she evaluates her actions from the perspective of others, considering how her behaviour shapes others’ perceptions. Liisa’s comment indicates that using the camera has emotional

significance for her, particularly with the fear of attracting attention, resulting in a potentially negative emotional impact.

In a traditional classroom setting, students enter the physical space once and proceed to their assigned seats, typically remaining there for the duration of the class unless directed otherwise by the teacher. In online learning, however, the act of occupying space becomes voluntary and abrupt, happening when the camera is turned on. As Liisa described, individuals ‘float into view’ in virtual space. According to Liisa, such an act is a dramatic way of occupying space when many others remain invisible. It involves social norms related to occupying space and determining who has the social right or duty to be seen. Interestingly, the student holds more power than the teacher; the student can press a button to enter or leave the room, regardless of the teacher’s wishes. This power is also used in relation to other participants, when everyone can define when they are to be seen:

- (4) *It’s also curious, that when on Zoom there is an option to turn off the camera and microphone, but then if you’re in a live situation with someone, then someone can’t put him- or herself under the invisibility cloak. [...] On Zoom, then, it also means that a person has quite a lot of power in terms of how much they give of themselves, how much others can see [them] in that situation.* (Liisa, Language Centre student)

Liisa discusses power dynamics in her example: on Zoom, individuals can manage their visibility by turning off the camera and microphone. Controlling visibility is framed as a form of power, indicating that those who remain visible – or invisible – exercise control over how much they reveal in the given situation. The link to power dynamics becomes more apparent when considering the interplay between historical bodies and the interaction order. The ability to control visibility in online interaction reflects the hierarchical nature of relationships, granting individuals agency in shaping perceptions and influencing communication dynamics within the interaction order.

Could the experiences embedded in the “historical body” be related to shyness or shame? If so, the association of timidity with wielding power in Zoom interactions raises intriguing questions about visibility and power dynamics. Exploring why timidity is linked to power may involve delving into cultural nuances and societal norms. The control of visibility might be seen as an expression of power in cultures, such as Finland, that emphasize personal space, privacy, and social distance – a characteristic trait in Finnish culture. Therefore, the perception of this control as power could be influenced by cultural factors that shape attitudes toward visibility and self-disclosure.

The matter of power is not only related to the use of the camera and becoming visible, but also to the fact that it is easier for the student to choose and decide, without any explanation, which activities he or she will participate in and which not. The following extract from Liisa’s interview also shows how the issue of power extends socially beyond the teacher-student relationship:

- (5) *When something is done on Zoom, whether it’s an assignment or a conversation exercise or anything, it’s the student’s responsibility – talking about this matter of power – I mean that the teacher no longer has that control in the same way. It’s more about you; you can make that decision whether you [want to] participate or not. You don’t get socially punished if you don’t do it. Other students don’t need to see you, and they cannot punish you if you don’t join; or, on the other hand, if you are the only one who goes along and you are too eager, then in a face-to-face situation you might get punished by the other participants.* (Liisa, Language Centre student)

Liisa’s narrative illuminates the dynamics of power and control within the realm of online interactions, exerting influence over participants’ behaviours and decisions. Her observation regarding the diminished control of teachers on Zoom suggests a shift in the power dynamic, wherein students, in her view, wield more agency and autonomy. The concept of the historical body becomes relevant as individuals

carry their past experiences, actions, and perceptions. Elements such as the perceived social pressure and the choice of words, such as “punish,” underscore the impact of past experiences and societal norms on Liisa’s historical body. Her language choices and the perception of social punishment offer valuable insights into her worldview, highlighting the significant role individual perspectives and interpretations play in shaping the dynamics of online interactions.

Liisa finds it easier to participate—or refrain from doing so—in online class activities. Apparently, the fear of losing face due to either excessive eagerness or unwillingness to participate diminishes in online contexts, according to her. This inevitably affects the interaction order, making it more hierarchical because individuals who abstain from participation often assume the role of observers, creating a distinction between active participants and passive observers. If some participants choose to remain invisible and abstain from collective activities, they assume the role of observers. They have the opportunity to watch and observe others’ actions while granting themselves the right to refrain from participation if they wish. Although, on one hand, this can elevate the hierarchy as some decide to be mere observers, it’s also crucial to acknowledge that, as per Liisa, the decrease in the fear of social punishment allows for eager participation if desired.

Maija suggests that being visible through the use of cameras helps to increase student engagement and creates a sense of intimacy among participants. While there is general recognition of the impact of visibility on feelings of intimacy, most people still value the autonomy to choose whether or not to reveal their embodiment. Once students have experienced the power to decide whether to be visible or remain invisible, they are reluctant to give up this control:

- (6) *Yes, if the cameras are on, there will be more of some kind of commitment. You see the others, and the others see you, and in a way the others become closer. But what I don’t like is if the teacher suddenly says, without prior notice, that everyone should turn on the cameras. I don’t like that. There should be a warning in advance. It should be announced before the course starts, if it’s hoped that the cameras will be turned on. If you haven’t prepared mentally to turn the camera on, it’s not really fair to suddenly ask us to do it. Or the teacher could say that the first time it’s okay if you don’t have a camera, but in the future, it would be good to turn on the cameras if possible.* (Maija, Language Centre student)

Another issue of power is the question of becoming visible, which has emerged in the previous examples. In the context of educational institutions, Saari (2006) highlights a transformation in disciplinary power dynamics. The traditional, overt disciplinary power of educational institutions has become less apparent, giving way to a form of minimalist learning management. In this evolving landscape, individuals are progressively tasked with self-management, setting autonomous goals, and recognizing their own learning requirements. This shift places a heightened emphasis on online and distance learning, demanding that individuals cultivate self-directedness, goal orientation, and a sense of responsibility for their own learning journey. The power dynamics associated with visibility, as discussed earlier, further intertwine with this shift, as individuals navigate the complexities of self-presentation and participation in online learning environments. The ability to control one’s visibility and engagement adds an additional layer to the evolving power dynamics within the educational landscape.

In this analysis I take as my model Foucault’s (1977) interpretation of Bentham’s panopticon, the modern apparatus of pedagogical control over individuals and knowledge formation. I believe it is appropriate for analysing the ideology and practices of online education, particularly in relation to issues of power. Foucault used the notion of the panopticon as a metaphor for how institutions control us through knowledge. He who sees has the power to control others. In teaching situations, the teacher at the front of the class has traditionally been in a position of power, responsible for controlling the object bodies to be seen, the students who become visible. The teacher has stood in front of the podium in such a way that he or she has been able to control the embodiment of the students at a glance. Students sitting in a classroom can never be completely sure at what moment the teacher will look at them.

In the context of online education, the power dynamic shifts: the teacher becomes the one who is seen and the object of attention, while he can never really know who is watching from behind the dark screens, or if anyone is watching at all. The teacher is no longer in the central watchtower of the panopticon, but in the cells surrounding the tower, where visibility is constant. Individuals in these cells are aware that they may be under constant surveillance, but they remain uncertain as to when and by whom they are being observed (Foucault 1977: 200).

Embodiment is about the relationship that bodies have with their surroundings. When we turn off the camera, the relationship is private, and you can do whatever you want. But when the camera is turned on, one's surroundings become visible and shared. If the student turns the camera off or does not turn it on at all, he or she is claiming power over his or her embodiment. When the cameras are on, the participants step out of the panopticon into a more equal relationship.

5.3. Private, safety-giving embodiment

Some students find online communication and interactive situations, particularly in the context of online education, nerve-racking, while others find a sense of security in online contexts (Niinivaara & Lehtonen 2023). Liisa, on certain occasions, experiences heightened tension during Zoom sessions. Unlike in a traditional classroom setting where participants are scattered on different levels and rows, and the presenter can gauge the level of engagement, Liisa feels a distinct awareness of others' gazes when looking at the Zoom screen. This creates a unique sense of being the focal point of everyone's attention simultaneously:

- (7) *But in a way, if there are, let's say, more than 15 or twenty students, then the threshold for speaking and saying something also increases as the group becomes larger. It depends always on how many people are in the same situation, but if you're in classroom, you don't see everyone who's there at the same time. But then on Zoom, when you have that gallery view, you're somehow too aware of all those looks, you see them all looking at their own screen. But then in the classroom, you are talking and you can see that some look at you and listen, but some others look out the window and don't focus on you. On Zoom, you never know.* (Liisa, Language Centre student)

Instead, some students find a sense of security and relaxation in the context of online education. One of the interviewed students, Anna, stated that being 'behind the screen' reduces feelings of shyness because she doesn't feel so exposed. Although she often turns on the camera and shows her face to others, the fact that not all of her body language is visible and that she can be partially hidden contributes to her sense of safety. In online contexts, Anna feels that she is only revealing part of herself, whereas in a physical classroom setting, her bodily reactions would be more noticeable. The ability to be partially hidden behind the screen on platforms such as Zoom can reduce tension.

In the realm of online education, the experiences shared by students, particularly Anna, resonate profoundly with the phenomenological exploration of 'embodiment.' Anna's inclination toward online contexts, where she can remain 'behind the screen' and retain partial invisibility, aligns seamlessly with the notion that our expressions and actions are intricately linked to our bodily experiences (Streeck & Cuffari 2017; Merleau-Ponty 1962/1995). This alignment underscores the acknowledgment that the process of learning transcends mere cognitive engagement, involving a dynamic interplay between the mind, body, emotions, and the environment.

Building on Anna's experiences, the multifaceted interplay between online education and 'embodiment' becomes more apparent. Anna's comfort in selectively revealing herself online reflects a nuanced dance between the virtual and the physical self. Now, transitioning to Iris's perspective sheds further

light on these dynamics, specifically delving into the intricate connections between feelings of safety and the online learning environment:

- (8) *If you answer wrong on Zoom, maybe the possible embarrassment that comes from it is not as great because all those people are not really physically around, so you can turn off the camera and sit alone for a while [laughs].* (Iris, Language Centre student)

According to Iris, when people are not physically present in the same room, there is less embarrassment if something goes wrong. The ability to turn off the camera for a while and get away from prying eyes also works as a backup plan, which is harder to do in a classroom situation. With online education, the embodiment is private, people have the power and choice to reveal themselves or not, which gives them a sense of security:

- (10) *It is always somehow exciting to speak a different language, so it really eases the tension when you can sit at home wearing woollen socks. There's a kind of safety in that; you have a mug of tea in your hand and those woollen socks on your feet and you're safe on your sofa, or why not at the table, so you free up energy for other things when you can relax better and forget to be tense.* (Maija, Language Centre student)

Building on the analysis of embodiment in the online learning context, Maija's insights offer a compelling layer to our understanding. She emphasizes the excitement of speaking a different language online, finding ease in the relaxed setting of her home adorned with woollen socks, a mug of tea, and the safety of her sofa or table. This vivid description encapsulates the physical and psychological comfort that online learning environments can afford.

Maija's experience underscores the flexibility and personalization that online contexts offer. The ability to choose one's seating arrangement and attire contributes to a positive and relaxed state of mind. The mention of woollen socks becomes symbolic of warmth, safety, and relaxation within the online learning space. This highlights an important aspect of embodiment – the intertwining of physical sensations and emotional states. The choice of clothing, the comfort of a familiar space, and the freedom to relax all contribute to a positive and enriching learning experience. Maija's perspective aligns with the broader theme of embodiment, showcasing how the physical environment and personal preferences play a crucial role in shaping the overall online learning experience.

Expanding on Maija's experience deepens our understanding of embodiment in online learning by highlighting a crucial aspect – the perpetual presence of embodiment. Her narrative underscores that the essence of embodiment persists even when individuals are not sharing the same physical space. This insight reinforces the idea that we are continuously feeling, experiencing beings, irrespective of whether we are physically co-located.

Maija's account accentuates that the rich tapestry of embodied experiences extends beyond the boundaries of a shared physical classroom. Even in the virtual realm, where participants are geographically dispersed, the nuances of embodiment persist. The choice of clothing, the warmth of woollen socks, and the comfort of a familiar environment all contribute to a shared understanding of embodiment in the digital landscape. Therefore, Maija's reflection serves as a reminder that our lived experiences, shaped by the intricacies of our physical and emotional states, are an integral part of the online learning journey. The online space, far from diluting the concept of embodiment, allows for its diverse manifestations, affirming that our bodies and emotions remain an inherent aspect of our learning experiences, irrespective of physical proximity.

5.4. Embodiment in relation to the material and social world

In this paper, when referring to the concept of embodiment, I use it as a comprehensive term encompassing both the material and social dimensions. The social world pertains to the interactive relationships that surround us within our social interactions, while the material world encompasses our environment, comprising various sign systems and artifacts that shape our experiences and interactions. In essence, we are always situated within and engaged with both the material and social realms, experiencing and navigating the complexities of our lived reality through these interconnected worlds.

When discussing their learning experiences in online language courses, students often ground their narratives in the material world. Many students noted that certain aspects related to the artefacts and functionalities of the material world were easier and more convenient to incorporate in Zoom than in the physical classroom:

- (11) *There are certain things I like about online learning, for example the fact that I haven't had any problems with sound reproduction. In the classroom, it might be that if someone speaks quietly, and I just don't hear anything. For example, in the classroom I have to try to sit in the middle of the room so that I can hear the teacher, but also the students who are behind [me in] the class. [...] And then also the visibility, that if the teacher shows some material, it is right there on your screen and you will definitely see it. When in the classroom, it is not always easy to see the board. At least these are the good sides.* (Iris, Language Centre student)

In addition to the fact that many students find it easier to see and hear online, respondents also mentioned other technical aspects of learning. Aleksis's story shows that the technical environment makes certain transitions easier:

- (12) *Switching to small groups is easier with online education, because it only happens by pressing a button. That leaves out such big operations in the classroom, like who goes where and the chairs rattling and all the things that take time. And then you also get to know different people, when otherwise you go to the same table and with the same guys all the time.* (Aleksi, Language Centre student)

In online settings, the system or a teacher can effortlessly organize students into random groups with a simple click of a button. The virtual coexistence of bodies in this shared digital space simplifies such transitions, fostering the development of a sense of belonging among students. This is particularly evident when students, compelled by the online format, interact with a variety of course mates in different small groups, thus breaking the pattern of consistently working with the same individuals.

After examining the impact of the material world on online learning contexts, I will now explore various perspectives within the social world. In this context, it's worth highlighting that Zoom provides students with the opportunity to express themselves more freely than in a traditional classroom setting: Background images can be used to illustrate personal experiences or opinions, and the visible material environment always carries a message. During the interviews, I observed students displaying flags supporting causes such as Catalan independence or the LGBT community on their room walls. Would they have brought these flags into a physical classroom? In these cases, their opinions were conveyed through material artefacts without the need for verbal expression. In addition, students can easily display their preferred name and pronouns on the screen, making their individual identities visible and intimately shared with others. Liisa aptly described this phenomenon in her story:

- (13) *It's really interesting that somehow home comes closer and it is seen; still, it is a really intimate environment. It can come up on purpose in such a way that people can openly tell [about] themselves, but there are also unplanned things. In a way, home comes among us. For example, a child opens a door*

that has been closed, or someone enters, and then the physical environment of the home becomes the object of attention. Even if the background is blurred, if you don't want all the mess to be visible, there are often sounds of the home that you might comment on yourself. For example, one regrets it if a dog barks or a child cries. This brings a kind of humanity that we are used to keeping private and that has not been part of our working life. So these boundaries are as if broken between the private and the common. And that's good in my opinion, since you can also bring out that humanity more in work and studies, because we are human even when we are at work. And that home is there, that home is in us, you can't shut it out. (Liisa, Language Centre student)

In Liisa's story, the presence, visibility and audibility of a person's home affects their interactive relationships. The line between private and public is blurred, but everyone still has the power to decide what they want to show: their own surroundings, a specific background image, a blurred background, their face or nothing at all. These choices are sometimes commented on, as Liisa explains.

The background image can also spark conversation: when I was on a language course mentioned earlier in this paper, I had a photo of Cádiz, my second hometown in Spain, as my background. A student recognised the place and brought his observations into the discussion by writing about it in the target language during the chat, and the teacher then picked it up in the shared conversation. Online education can therefore offer new ways of being seen and encountered, even if the immediate physical presence is missing, because we do not cease to be historical bodies. These ways of being seen and encountered can lead to new ways of experiencing togetherness with others, as Liisa reflects in her interview:

- (14) *The challenge in online learning is that there is no physical interaction in the same way as in live situations, so when your home is seen and heard, it can serve as an ice breaker. And this makes us human beings, so I believe that it helps the sense of belonging.* (Liisa, Language Centre student)

To elaborate on Liisa's perspective, we can delve deeper into the transformative potential of online education in fostering a sense of connection and belonging. Liisa touches upon the unique challenge posed by the absence of traditional, face-to-face physical interaction in online learning. In this digital realm, our homes become more than mere backdrops; they become personal spaces that are seen and heard by others, offering an unconventional yet meaningful form of interaction.

Liisa highlights the role of this visibility as an "ice breaker" in the virtual space. By sharing glimpses of our personal environments, we create a bridge between the physical and digital realms. This act of revealing our homes, a personal extension of our historical bodies, becomes a humanizing element in the online learning experience. It transcends the limitations of traditional classrooms and introduces a novel dimension to the way we connect and relate to one another.

In essence, Liisa's insight suggests that the online learning environment, despite its differences from live situations, has the potential to cultivate a profound sense of belonging. The shared visibility of our living spaces serves as a catalyst for breaking down barriers, fostering empathy, and ultimately contributing to the construction of a virtual community. Through this lens, online education emerges not only as a platform for academic pursuits but also as a medium for forging genuine human connections in the absence of physical proximity.

The analysis underscores the concept of "sense of belonging," encompassing involvement, relatedness, affiliation, togetherness, participation, and inclusion, which can be delineated across various dimensions (Isola et al. 2017: 3). Defined through these multifaceted dimensions, a sense of belonging refers to the emotional connection and acceptance as a community member (Baumeister & Leary 1995;

Maslow 1943). The pursuit of a sense of belonging is rooted in the human need for social acceptance, valuing the care and support of others (OECD 2017: 118).

The interconnectedness of a sense of belonging with the experience of meaningfulness reinforces the notion of assuming responsibility. Individuals are more inclined to take responsibility when they perceive themselves as integral, connected, and dedicated to others (Salonen, Isola, & Foster 2022). Furthermore, the significance of a sense of belonging extends to the realm of learning and academic endeavors, playing a pivotal role in fostering students' motivation, effort, persistence, self-esteem, and enjoyment in their studies and learning activities (Pedler, Willis, & Nieuwoudt 2022; Ulmanen et al. 2016). In essence, a sense of belonging embodies the feeling of acceptance and entitlement to inclusion within a community of like-minded individuals. It signifies both the yearning and active effort to be part of a collective, emphasizing the essential role it plays in fostering meaningful connections, social responsibility, and enhancing the overall educational experience. This is encapsulated in the following data excerpt:

- (15) *Sometimes I wonder that, when you are in your own home environment, if you can feel [a sense of] belonging when you don't know with whom you feel it. Of course, in a broader sense, you can feel part of, for example, some national identity or something like that, where it is impossible for you to know everyone who belongs to that same group. But sometimes I've thought that it's pretty crazy when students or the teacher tell stories about their lives and share their own things, and you don't always know who's listening on the other side. That affects what things can be told. So I wonder, with whom can I feel a sense of belonging, if I don't know who is there?* (Liisa, Language Centre student)

Liisa raises an important question about with whom can we feel a sense of belonging if we cannot see each other and do not share the same physical space. The immediate presence of bodies would resolve this question to the extent that we could say with certainty who is in the same place, but as this study shows, online learning can also strengthen the sense of belonging by sometimes allowing us to get closer to each other than by being physically in the same place.

As the analysis presented earlier in this paper shows, even in virtual contexts, embodiment is very much present and part of student interaction, and therefore part of learning, as we experience and think through our bodies. Even if others only hear our voices, or even if we say nothing at all, we are present as feeling, thinking and learning bodies. Some people find online education burdensome and stressful, but for others it creates a sense of security, especially through one's own body, when one feels safe and comfortable and can respond almost instantly to the sensations of one's body without asking permission from other participants.

6. Conclusion

The present study explored the concept of embodiment in the context of online language learning, shedding light on its unique characteristics and implications. Through the analysis of students' narratives, the research question was addressed, namely the manifestation of embodiment in students' perspectives on online language learning. The findings uncovered different discourses related to embodiment, revealing students' longing for physical presence, the negotiation of power dynamics through the use of the camera, and the sense of security and relaxation experienced in the online environment, as well as embodiment in relation to the material and social world.

This study illuminates students' expressions of yearning for physical presence in the context of online education. The importance of observing gestures and facial expressions for a nuanced understanding of communication was underscored, along with a desire for immediate cognitive, social, and emo-

tional support facilitated by physical presence. Interviewed students articulate a “lack of embodiment” in online education, expressing a longing for physical presence to enhance their language learning experiences. Their narratives shed light on how historical bodies influence communication dynamics, contributing to our understanding of hierarchical or egalitarian interaction orders in virtual classrooms.

The exploration of embodiment extends to its implications for power dynamics, with a focus on the use of cameras and associated visibility dynamics. Activating the camera is perceived as a means of claiming space, and the decision to be visible is intricately linked to social norms and power dynamics. The act of turning on the camera is discussed in terms of occupying space and managing attention, thereby emphasizing the emotional significance of visibility.

The analysis further extends to power dynamics beyond teacher-student relationships, highlighting a shift in control to students in online interactions. The ability to choose participation without social consequences and the reduced control of teachers signal a transformation in the hierarchical nature of online education. The concept of the historical body becomes pertinent in understanding how past experiences and societal norms shape individuals’ perceptions of power and control. While the idea that being visible through cameras can enhance student engagement and foster intimacy is acknowledged, the autonomy to choose whether or not to reveal embodiment is highly valued.

This study delves into the intricacies of power dynamics associated with visibility, autonomy, and control in online education. Drawing on Foucault’s panopticon metaphor, the analysis interprets the evolving power dynamics, where the teacher becomes the object of attention, and students gain control over their visibility. The shifting power dynamic is explored in relation to self-management, autonomy, and responsibility in online learning environments. The paper offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between embodiment, visibility, and power dynamics in online education, providing a nuanced understanding of the evolving nature of educational control and individual autonomy in the digital landscape.

Within the discourse of “private, safety-giving embodiment” in online education, a spectrum of student experiences emerges. Some individuals report heightened tension during Zoom sessions, attributing it to the awareness of others’ gazes in the gallery view. This unique sense of being the focal point prompts questions about the impact of visibility and attention dynamics in virtual spaces. Conversely, other students find a sense of security and relaxation in online contexts. The comfort of being ‘behind the screen’ and maintaining partial invisibility aligns with the idea that the learning process involves a dynamic interplay between the mind, body, emotions, and the environment. This nuanced dance between the virtual and physical self becomes a central theme in understanding embodiment in online education.

The insights shared by interviewees significantly contribute to this exploration, shedding light on broader themes of safety and flexibility in the online learning environment. One individual highlights the reduced embarrassment in virtual settings, emphasizing the option to temporarily disable the camera as a contingency. Another provides a detailed account, emphasizing the interplay between physical sensations and emotional states, underscoring the positive influence of personalized and comfortable environments on the overall learning experience.

This experiential lens enriches our comprehension of embodiment in online learning by illustrating its enduring presence even in virtual realms. The narrative reinforces the notion that the essence of embodiment perseveres, emphasizing the pivotal role of physical sensations and individual preferences in shaping the online learning experience. This perspective underscores that our bodies and emotions re-

main integral to the learning journey, irrespective of physical proximity. In summary, the paper delves into the intricate dynamics of embodiment in online education, encompassing heightened tension and feelings of security and flexibility. The varied experiences underscore the complex interplay between visibility, attention, and the personalization of virtual learning environments, contributing to a nuanced understanding of embodiment in the digital landscape.

Online education, particularly through platforms like Zoom, streamlines technical aspects, facilitating smoother transitions between activities and small group interactions. According to findings of this paper, the organizational ease fosters a sense of belonging and diversity in interactions. In the social sphere, Zoom offers students expanded avenues for self-expression: Incorporating background images, showcasing personal opinions through visible artifacts, and the ability to share preferred names and pronouns contribute to a more open and expressive learning environment. This fosters a heightened sense of shared social space and humanity, thereby supporting a sense of belonging.

The visibility of students' homes in the realm of online learning introduces a unique dynamic, blurring the boundaries between private and public spaces. This blending, viewed positively, infuses the learning environment with a sense of humanity, forging connections among participants. Personal spaces become more than just backdrops, actively contributing to a shared experience that transcends traditional physical classrooms. Notably, the visibility of personal spaces serves as an effective "ice breaker" in the virtual realm, facilitating a sense of belonging. Despite the absence of physical interaction, the act of sharing glimpses into personal environments becomes a powerful means of creating connections and dismantling barriers, fostering a distinctive and meaningful form of interaction.

The analysis also underscores the importance of the material and social world in relation to embodiment. In the context of online language courses, students found aspects of the material world, such as the artifacts and functionalities of online platforms, advantageous and convenient compared to traditional classrooms. The online environment facilitated smoother transitions, extended social relationships, and provided new means of self-expression, blurring the boundaries between private and public spheres. These elements contributed to an increased sense of togetherness and belonging, even in the absence of physical presence.

I argue that the physical, social and material environment plays a central role in fostering a sense of belonging, which is crucial for successful language socialisation. The sense of belonging holds fundamental significance in the language socialization process, given its inherent connection to social interactions. Actively participating in diverse communities offers individuals the opportunity to receive both emotional and linguistic support, thus fortifying their sense of belonging and active engagement (Intke-Hernandez 2020). Moreover, the physical environment, including elements like layout, infrastructure, and natural surroundings, along with the material environment, comprising resources such as books, teaching materials, and technological tools, also significantly contributes to the language socialization process. These environments provide essential resources and settings that facilitate language learning and communication. As a result, understanding and promoting the phenomenon of embodiment and its correlation with a sense of belonging is imperative in online learning environments, where participants are often physically situated in different spaces. Notably, a sense of belonging requires embodiment, although not necessarily in a physically shared space.

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