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30 anos de pesquisas em Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) no Brasil

Technology-mediated task-based learning: creating affordances for English language development in digital intercultural encounters

Aprendizagem baseada em tarefas mediada por tecnologias: criando propiciamentos para o desenvolvimento da língua Inglesa em encontros interculturais digitais

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Abstract: This study investigates affordances provided by Technology-Mediated Task-Based Learning (TBL) for language development in an online English as a Second Language class with multinational students in a US university context. From a complexity perspective, this study analyzes whether Technology-Mediated TBL helps build trust and confidence among learners enhancing intercultural and symbolic awareness. We used a netnographic methodology, adapting ethnography to include the influence of the internet in technology-mediated environments. Findings showed that Technology-Mediated TBL provides conditions for intercultural encounters. The task cycle allows the emergence of affordances for learners to build confidence and trust while engaged in language development practices.
Keywords: Technology-Mediated Task-Based Learning; Intercultural encounters; Affordances; Complexity ESL

Resumo: Este estudo investiga os propiciamentos fornecidos pela Aprendizagem Baseada em Tarefas mediada por tecnologias (ABT) para o desenvolvimento da língua Inglesa como segunda língua em uma sala de aula online com estudantes multinacionais no contexto universitário norte-americano. A partir de uma perspectiva complexa, analisamos se o ABT mediada por tecnologias ajuda a construir confiança entre os alunos, melhorando a consciência intercultural e simbólica. Usamos uma metodologia netnográfica, a qual adapta a etnografia para incluir a influência da internet em ambientes mediados por tecnologias. Os resultados sugerem que a ABT mediada por tecnologias oferece condições para encontros interculturais. O ciclo da tarefa permite que emerjam oportunidades para que os alunos construam confiança enquanto se envolvem em práticas de desenvolvimento linguístico.
Palavras-chave: Aprendizagem baseada em tarefas mediada por tecnologias; Encontros interculturais; Propiciamentos; Complexidade; Inglês como segunda língua

Introduction

Intercultural Communication competence (ICC) is an increasingly relevant area of research due to the digital multicultural communities we now participate in. We feel it is necessary to distinguish between ICC and Intercultural Competence (IC). For Byram (1997), the latter refers to people's ability to interact in their own language with people from another country and culture. Meanwhile, ICC considers language learning and focuses on the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language (BYRAM, 1997). Most international encounters in English take place in the absence of a native speaker (GRADDOL, 2006).

As a consequence, non-native speakers of English should become aware of intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural exposures and interactions were a reality in our globalized society before Covid-19. These encounters, however, most commonly took place face-to-face. The pandemic has catapulted the world into a new order, and the isolation period propelled synchronous communication tools, such as Zoom and Google Meet. These tools were rarely used in the education area before, more specifically in learning a second language (L2), as people generally preferred face-to-face classes (LOPES Jr., 2021). Intercultural communication has also raised some questions since the 90s: are students ready to participate in intercultural exchanges using English as an L2? Is communicative competence, as envisaged by Canale & Swain (1980), Canale (1983), and Breen & Candlin (1980), enough? Or should students also be able to use semiotic practices to make and convey meaning and position themselves in the symbolic power game established by and through language (KRAMSCH, 2006)? Such questions are somehow revived in a new online context we intend to call digital intercultural encounters.

The context of this study is an online English as a Second Language (ESL) course using Technology-Mediated Task-Based Learning (Technology-Mediated TBL) as a teaching approach via Zoom using English as an L2 as it is the number one language of intercultural communication. The class comprises multinational students (China, Japan, Israel, Morocco) and is taught by a Brazilian teacher in a university context in the United States of America (USA). Students were pursuing different education levels, and the teacher offered these classes to create affordances for students to practice speaking more often. Reflecting on data collected in this cultural melting pot emerges as a relevant contribution of our study to the area of CALL. We use the following questions to guide our reflection:

a) Does Technology-Mediated TBL facilitate the development of intercultural communication?

b) Can Technology-Mediated TBL create affordances for digital intercultural encounters?

c) Can Technology-Mediated TBL help to build trust and confidence among multinational students when learning English as L2?

After introducing the context and guiding questions, we organized this paper as follows. In the next section, we approach aspects from our theoretical perspective on teaching and learning, presenting and discussing (yet briefly) questions related to complexity, interculturality, and symbolic power. Afterwards, the methodology is outlined, and we detail not only the design of the study but also the tools and procedures employed. Findings are presented and related to the

complex perspective supporting this study. We then discuss our findings and address each of the guiding questions. The final section offers some final remarks.

Technology-Mediated TBL: enhancing intercultural and symbolic awareness

Integrating Technology with Task-Based Learning under the perspective of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS)

This article uses Willis' task cycle (WILLIS, 1996) as a CAS (LOPES Jr., 2015) as there are many similarities between complexity and second language development.[1]

According to Larsen-Freeman (1997), these similarities are:

a) Complexity scientists study complex nonlinear systems;

b) They are interested in how disorder leads to order;

c) How complexity arises in nature;

d) For some scientists, "chaos is a science of process rather than state, of becoming rather than being" (GLEICK, 1987, p.5).

For Larsen-Freeman (1997), learning a language is a process rather than a state; it is the act of becoming a better communicator/interlocutor rather than being one. It is a process without a goalpost, and for this reason, the term language development illustrates this phenomenon more appropriately, under a CAS perspective, than either language acquisition or language learning. By using "development" rather than "acquisition," de Bot & Larsen-Freeman (2011) want to make it clear that linguistic skills can grow and decline. It is implicit that there is no one point at which it can be said that a language is completely acquired. Its development is ongoing (De BOT & LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2011).

There is a vast amount of literature on Task-Based Learning. However, few studies have investigated the task cycle as a CAS. Lopes Jr. (2015) demonstrated that the task cycle – task/planning/report – can be characterized as a Complex Adaptive System as it exhibits the main characteristics of these systems. According to Larsen-Freeman (1997), a CAS is dynamic, complex, nonlinear, chaotic, unpredictable, sensitive to initial conditions, open, self-organizing, feedback sensitive, and adaptive. In addition to these characteristics, such systems possess strange attractors (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 1997).

According to Kenning (2007), although technological progress has affected how languages are learned and taught, it has not initiated a paradigm shift. There is a growing yet modest number of studies about Technology-mediated Task-Based Learning and Teaching (TBLT). Nowadays, it seems imperative to integrate computer and information technologies in education. This proposed merge is motivated by the unavoidable realizations that new Internet-connected devices and digital technologies have become embedded in many new generations of students (BARON, 2004). According

1 The complexity theory in this article indicates the epistemological perspective of our research. We do not intend to use the characteristics of a complex adaptive system as analysis criteria. Our study focuses mainly on Task-Based Learning to mediate digital intercultural encounters.

to Chun *et al.* (2016), it is clear that it is not possible to "opt-out" of using technology, especially after the coronavirus pandemic hit the world.

Covid-19 forced students away from schools impairing learning English as an L2 due to the lack of interaction. Now, more than ever, it is indisputable that technology plays a vital role in our society. Technological learning affordances have attracted considerable interest due to social isolation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Many scholars have already embraced Technology-mediated TBL, but there is still a need for further studies regarding theoretical and pedagogical implications. According to González-Lloret & Ortega (2014), theoretical frameworks that take the potentially transformative nature of technology seriously must be employed. Lopes Jr. *et al.* (2021) followed González-Lloret & Ortega's recommendations. They demonstrated that the technology-mediated task cycle could also be characterized as a CAS as it displays the characteristics of such systems in this new learning environment.

Ziegler (2016a) states that during the last two decades, the body of research examining CALL has grown, with studies investigating a wide range of L2 areas of interest, including the development of linguistic, communicative, and intercultural competence. In her review article, Ziegler (2016b) states that although these studies provide promising results regarding the efficacy and practicality of integrating task-based principles into computer-mediated language learning contexts, more research is needed to understand better how TBL might best be used to maximize the available affordances of technology-mediated learning. As benefits may vary across technologies, there is a growing body of evidence showing that the use of technology in task-based learning environments positively impacts a wide range of learning outcomes (ZIEGLER, 2016a). This article takes a step further on integrating technology-mediated TBL with CAS in a multinational learning environment to understand how these digital encounters afford communication, trust, and confidence among students from different countries.

According to González-Lloret & Ortega (2014), there are five characteristics to follow when designing technology-mediated tasks: i) primary focus on meaning, ii) goal-oriented, iii) learner-centered, iv) promote reflective learning, and v) tasks must be holistic. We observed these five characteristics when creating the tasks for this study. In our view, however, the most relevant feature is that tasks should focus primarily on meaning, allowing the emergence of a need to convey meaning and, as a result, the emergence of a complex adaptive system. If learners are not spoon-fed what they are supposed to say, unpredictability emerges during meaning negotiation, which is one of the main characteristics of a CAS. Making and conveying meaning helps students position themselves in the symbolic power game (KRAMSCH, 2006), a competence we further detail in the following sections.

Creating affordances for the emergence of intercultural communication online

According to Kramsch (1993), 'every time we speak, we perform a cultural act'. Most international encounters when English is used take place in the absence of a native speaker

(GRADDOL, 2006). As a consequence, non-native speakers should become aware of intercultural communicative competence. English is the number one language of intercultural communication, and it seems to have created the conditions for considering the cultural dimension in the form of internationalization and globalization (BYRAM *et al.*, 2001). The concept of 'intercultural speaker' (BYRAM, 1997) defines someone who can interact with others, accept perspectives and perceptions of the world, mediate between different perspectives, and be conscious of their evaluations of differences. One typical and recent growing kind of intercultural encounter involves higher education internationalization. In daily decision-making and on-campus activities, it is not unusual to have a group interacting and, through a language that is not their own, exchanging positions, perspectives, and culture. Bearing this in mind, governments - e.g., Brazil's Ministry of Education Languages without Borders program (BRASIL, 2017) - have demanded that universities develop language policies, embracing not only language development initiatives towards higher proficiency levels in their community but also cultural awareness-raising, so more integration with/for international students could be achieved.

In addition to communicative competence, English speakers should also be aware of the components of intercultural competence. According to Byram (1997), these components are attitude, knowledge, skills, and cultural awareness. Attitude refers to people's openness, curiosity, and readiness to accept other cultures. Knowledge is about people's mastery of their own cultural and social knowledge as well as other countries' knowledge; skills refer to people's ability to acquire new knowledge of a new culture and use it appropriately during communication, and lastly, cultural awareness approaches people's ability to evaluate critically based on different cultural practices and products in their own countries and from other countries.

Another aspect directly related to a more holistic view of language development or language education - as opposed to language instruction (VETROMILLE-CASTRO, 2017) - and, thus, considering the implications of cultural encounters is Symbolic Competence, envisaged by Kramsch (2006; 2021).

Although in line with the idea of intercultural competence, intercultural and symbolic competence go beyond "communicative competence" when they bring to the center of language learning aspects considered somehow complementary or peripheral, symbolic competence moves forward and deeper in the power relations that determine and are determined by language. In other words, it is not enough to perceive and understand the intricacies between culture and language. However, as one realizes those intricacies, one should be able to "engage in the symbolic power game of challenging established meanings and redefining the real" (KRAMSCH, 2011, p. 359). Kramsch presented Symbolic Competence based on a symbolic system - constituted by *symbolic representation, symbolic action,* and *symbolic power* (KRAMSCH, 2011) - and three components - *production of complexity, tolerance to ambiguity,* and *form as meaning* (KRAMSCH, 2006).

By this brief but necessary reference to intercultural and symbolic aspects of language use - and, therefore, of language learning - we aimed at highlighting that there is more than learning a code and anecdotal knowledge, a fact that is potentialized when we look at cultural encounters provided through digital technology. In other words: this new context provides challenges and affordances for language learning.

Methods

This section provides details about the design of the study, participants, materials (tasks employed), a description of the synchronous tool used to create communication affordances, and procedures.

Design

This study used a netnographic research method to collect and analyze data. We decided to use this method as it seems more appropriate to explore technology-mediated learning environments. According to Kozinets (2010), netnography follows five steps: i) defining research questions; ii) locating and selecting the community; iii) observing the community and collecting data; iv) analyzing data and carrying out iterative interpretation of the findings; and v) presenting results.

Participants

Participants were 10 nonnative English-speaking students at a US university within the 20 – 31-year range. Their first language included Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew and French. Their length of residence in the USA at the time of the classes ranged from six months to two years. Based on the initial interview, we could describe their proficiency level intermediate to high intermediate. They were pursuing different levels of education. There were under-graduate, and graduate students in addition to visiting scholars/researchers. They were allocated in the Departments of Neuroscience, Law, Economics, Environmental Science, and Bioengineering. They all needed English not only for their classes but also for their everyday lives. They had been previously enrolled in free English classes (face-to-face instruction) to help train future ESL teachers as part of an Extension program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). However, the program was canceled due to few participants, and the course coordinator was kind enough to send a flyer to students now offering free ESL classes but online. The classes we offered had no connection with the Extension program of the university. As students' expectations were frustrated, they contacted the teacher (first author) offering the course to get further information. Students then signed up and promised to do their best to come to classes for six weeks and perform the proposed tasks. They would practice conversation in a technology-mediated environment developing their communication skills and digital literacy. At the time of the classes, now commonplace, synchronous communication tools were becoming reliable and commonly used tools to exchange knowledge with foreign universities.

Materials

Participants performed six tasks over six weeks (one each week). This study, however, focused on two tasks that created more evident affordances for digital intercultural encounters

in a technology-mediated environment: the initial interview and giving tips on how to behave in your country. These tasks were at the B1 level of The Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFRL). This level means that students can engage in real-time online exchanges with more than one participant, recognizing each contributor's communicative intentions but may not understand details or implications without further explanation.

The synchronous communication tool

Zoom was the synchronous communication tool used for the online classes. People use it to connect for meetings, and it presents the following advantages for ESL research, especially when using TBL:

a) It presents a recording feature that is extremely valuable for future data analysis;

b) Zoom displays a feature called "break out rooms" where students work in pairs or small groups. This feature is essential when using TBL, mainly during the task phase when students perform the task in pairs or small groups away from the teacher's and peers' scrutiny. We can also record these rooms for later analysis;

c) The teacher controls all the features of his/her online classroom, such as sharing the screen with the students making the correction of exercises more practical;

d) There is also a chat box the teacher can use to communicate with all students or just one.

Procedures

We followed the five steps of a netnography investigation previously mentioned. The teacher (first author) was engaged in the classes and collected data by recording the lessons for later analysis.

In the first task, students were supposed to interview each other about their experiences learning English. We provided some guiding questions and told students they could come up with their questions. We placed students in the Zoom's break-out rooms and instructed them to carry out the task. At the end of 20 minutes, the teacher closed the break-out rooms, and all students returned to the main room. Students then had to report their findings of their colleagues' learning experiences to the group. We used the same procedure for the second task - giving tips on how to behave in your country. In both tasks, the teacher authorized one of the students in each pair to record the break-out room. This student would send the recording to the teacher at the end of the class making iterative analysis possible. By using this online format, we aimed to expand students' communicative language skills, explore the local culture, and share their own. Students seemed motivated to engage in performing learning tasks as they had never experienced this approach before.

Results

Students' previous experience learning English as an L2

The first data segment consisted of a group interview where students would have to talk about their experiences learning English. The teacher provided some guiding questions and told students they could come up with their own questions. After performing the task for almost 20 minutes in the break-out rooms, students returned to the main meeting room, and after a short planning stage, students started reporting their findings.

The first participant to report findings was the Israeli student, and unpredictability emerged at this moment as instead of talking about their language experiences, they talked about their lives in the US city and only introduced themselves. Regarding the task, he reported that his partner, a lady from China, said that they should learn grammar, but he thinks differently. Then it was the Chinese lady's turn to tell the group about her partner, the Israeli student. She also deviated from the goal of the task and told the group about the area of expertise of her partner, which was studying the brain. From all the suggested topics of the task, she only said they agree that they should practice as often as possible to improve fluency. This account shows how the system is unpredictable and may take a different path from what the teacher expects, and it also shows that the system is also sensitive to the initial conditions. The teacher should be prepared for both situations and prompt students to perform, not disregarding the students' findings which were also very interesting.

A strange attractor came up during the first task. One of the Japanese students, who was following the class attentively, was also eating, and his microphone captured some munching sounds. The strange attractor basin disturbed the teacher, but he realized it was a new learning environment. Instead of asking the student to stop eating, he concentrated on following the report, and eventually, the Japanese student finished his dinner, and the attraction lost force.

The second pair, the French-Moroccan lady and a Chinese student, concentrated on the guiding questions proposed in the task. She told the group at what age her partner started learning English and where. She reported that he thinks he does not have many opportunities to practice the language, and his English is not as good as it should be. She also said he is working on his skills to improve his English and that he would prefer to learn more about grammar and then finished by saying they did not have enough time for the other questions. It was then his turn to tell the group about the French-Moroccan lady. He started by telling the group about his partner's background. She studied management science and would like to improve her English to get a job in the US. When referring to his partner, he used the "he" instead of "she." The teacher did not interfere, and then the student's system self-organized, and he started using the correct pronoun - "she."

The third pair to report was a Japanese student and a Chinese one. The Japanese female started by saying that her partner started learning English at nine years old at elementary school. The classes were mainly focused on grammar and writing, so she did not have much experience speaking English. Then there was a glitch in the system, and the rest of the group could not

hear the Japanese student. When she returned, the teacher decided to ask the Chinese student to tell the group about her partner. She said that her partner started learning English at the age of 6 at Elementary school. She had a native speaker as a teacher, so she was more exposed to conversations at that time. She was learning English to see the world. She also reported that learning English is a long process, and she needed to keep on practicing. When reporting how her colleague feels speaking English, she said she feels "freedom" instead of "free." The teacher did not interfere and waited for the student's system to self-organize by saying, 'she likes this feeling of freedom.' Had it not been self-organized, the teacher could have made a note to deal with it later. She finalized by saying that her partner sometimes feels frustrated as she cannot convey her ideas clearly to what her partner agreed with by saying she felt the same.

The last pair was a Chinese national and a Japanese one. The Chinese male said that his partner, a Chinese female, started learning English at 14 years old at High School. He went on to say that she needed English for her studies and future work, which is massage therapy. She needed to know the name of the methods in English and all the technical terms. He also mentioned that they both feel frustrated when speaking English, but she is happy when people understand her English. To finalize the report stage, the Japanese female reported that her Chinese partner started learning English when he was ten years old in primary school. She said he needs English for his classes as they are all in English at a US university. They agreed that their main problem is vocabulary, and she also mentioned that they talked about how they feel embarrassed when speaking English but did not give an example.

Giving tips on how to behave in your country

One fascinating fact about the second task was that one of the male Japanese students (Akio)[2] was visiting his family in Japan (he was alone in the US) for a couple of weeks, and he attended the class from there. We found out because he informed the group he would have to leave a few minutes earlier as he needed to take his son to school, who was also attending the class with him. The student said that he adjusted the time zone not to miss the class as it was the only time he practiced his English. We discuss this situation further in the next section.

We prepared five questions about expected behavior in one's country to introduce the task. Students were supposed to work individually first and choose an answer according to their countries' customs. After choosing the most appropriate answer, we discussed the questions in the big group.

We chose to highlight question five, asking students how they would greet friends if they met them on the streets. They had to choose from the following options: a) shake hands, b) kiss each other on both cheeks, c) bow to each other, and d) just say hello. We started with China, where they just say hello. Next, it was Japan, where they bow and say hello. Then the teacher asked the other Japanese girl about kissing each other, and both Japanese girls started laughing and giggling. One of them said no kissing in Japan in general and that she would maybe kiss her boyfriend if

2 All names mentioned in this article are fictive

she met him on the street. The other Japanese girl said she would have to be careful not to kiss anyone when she returned to Japan because she thought kissing was normal in the US. Students were amazed when the teacher told them that if you only said hello in Brazil, it would sound rude, and you would have to shake hands at least. Students exchanged cultural differences highlighting another example of a digital intercultural encounter.

After a short listening exercise in which students listened to eight people talking about a social custom in their country, students moved on to the task. Students in pairs had to make a list of tips about behaving in their countries. They should decide on tips for a foreign visitor to their country.

Ju (Chinese) paired with Akio (Japanese), and he started by giving her advice about restaurants in Japan. He said that one should be careful as the menus are only in Japanese and there are no English versions. Ju mentioned that if you visit a friend's house in China, you have to take your shoes off and put on the slippers the host provides. Akio says that it is the same in Japan, but both agree that it is not necessary to take off your shoes when you visit a friend in the USA. Ju mentions that you should never use your hands to grab food in China. You should always use chopsticks or forks but never your hands. She mentions that younger people have to wait for the older people to eat first at a dinner party. Akio adds that one of his Korean friends told him about the same custom in Korea, but people in Japan do not care about who eats first, and they eat at the same time, and compares to the US by saying that it is the same. Ju states that the boss should sit at the middle of the table at a business dinner party, and the lower your position is in the company, the further you should be from the boss. Akio says that the seating arrangement is not based on your importance to the company but people's age in Japan. Akio adds that the oldest person should sit the furthest from the front door in Japan. They both agree that it is not only a custom from Japan, but it is common in all oriental countries. Akio concludes that the older person should have this position to be safe if an enemy comes into the restaurant. They also mention that they had never seen this kind of seating arrangement in the USA.

The other pair was two Japanese girls – Hina and Minato. They said that in Japan you have to be punctual. Suppose you arrange to meet someone at a particular time. You should be there on time or even five minutes before. Minato also mentions that you have to be silent on the train and compares it to the USA when people listen to music wearing headphones, but you can still hear their music. She prefers the American style, but this behavior would be unacceptable in Japan. Hina recommends bringing cash when visiting Japan. She compares their system to the US, where they accept credit cards everywhere. In Japan, small shops do not usually accept credit cards, only cash.

The two Japanese girls agreed with Ju in the report stage when she talked about the seating arrangement. One of them said it is true, but it has lost its meaning as there are no ninjas anymore. Ju agreed but said that we now have terrorists. They also agree with Ju regarding taking shoes off when visiting someone's home and putting on the slippers provided by the host. However, the Japanese girls said that you do not have to wait for the older person to eat first in Japan. At the end of the report stage, the teacher asked the students to compare smoking habits in their countries with the US. According to Ju, there is no specific rule for smoking in China and that you can even

smoke in a restaurant. The teacher compares Brazil and the US, saying that you cannot smoke in a restaurant in these countries. Regarding Japanese students, it depends on the restaurant as there are smoking areas in some restaurants and cafés. Minato states that smoking rules are becoming stricter as they cannot smoke on the street, just like Americans cannot drink on the streets. Ju remarks that there are many smokers in China, especially young people, as they think it is cool to smoke. The report stage finishes by discussing K-Pop in China and Japan. They all agree that Korean pop music is very popular in China and Japan, and they were astonished when the teacher told them that K-pop was also very famous in Brazil.

Discussion

This section discusses our findings, starting with task engagement and then providing theoretical and pedagogical answers to each guiding question in the light of the characteristics of a CAS.

Cultural encounters and task engagement

We were surprised when we found out that the Japanese student was attending the class from Japan. This fact shows how isolated international students may become while studying abroad. We take it for granted that if we study in an English-speaking country, we have plenty of opportunities to practice the language. It is not always the reality, especially for people from a cultural background with more introspective habits who do not attend regular classes and do not have contact with other students. Encouraged by this classroom situation, the teacher of the group decided to do an experiment: spend two days doing routine activities such as taking the bus, going to the library, buying groceries at the supermarket without exchanging a word with anyone. A few 'thank yous' and 'pleases' for the sake of politeness, but that was all. This non-scientific experiment revealed that we need minimal language to carry out simple and routine activities while living in an English-speaking country and that technology may play an essential role in this routine as we do not need to speak to anyone on the streets not even to get directions as we have this information in our smartphones. This experiment suggests an explanation for why the Japanese student attended the class from Japan while visiting his family: he did not want to miss the opportunity to practice his English.

From the perspective of symbolic competence, it is also worth remarking that when one decides to learn a language, or when language learning is offered to the public, it is not unusual to see "perfect pronunciation," "native-like accent," and "conversational skills" as the product searched, the evidence of accomplishment. There is no doubt that comprehensible pronunciation and knowing how to engage in conversation are desired, but saying so does not reveal how complex language learning can be, especially because it deals with non-quantifiable aspects one should be able to reckon and manage in a real foreign language interaction.

More than surviving, more than being a mere consumer (and being able to buy food, commute, sound minimally polite, and then socially accepted), learning a language should comprise the condition to critically intervene in social events, to have access to social justice, to make his/her voice heard. Referring to the context we approached in this paper, the educational field - here, international students in a university - speaking the language is not (or, at least, should not be) only a "tool" for having access to knowledge and, thus, get a diploma. Language is an affordance to question what is being delivered by the educational system, to fight xenophobia and stereotypes, to place oneself and one's desires and feelings as an independent individual who, in the end, might get a better job, occupy a leading position, feel accomplished as a human being.

As the classes described in the previous section illustrated, digital technology allowed students to perform the task and provided them with possibilities to share who they are, their circumstances of life, where they live, and what it means to be from where they are. In other words, we can say that digital technology allowed the teacher to use an approach to language teaching suitable for an international student context. The teaching experience we analyzed appears to be more than using an internet application or resource. It is a powerful means for language development when it provides conditions for students to realize (and practice) the importance of being inserted in real foreign language interactions, which are, in the end, the participation in the symbolic power game established through language. The following sections discuss each guiding question approaching theoretical and pedagogical implications.

Technology-mediated TBL as a facilitator for digital intercultural communication

Concerning whether Technology-mediated TBL facilitates the development of digital intercultural communication, results revealed that students showed interest and enjoyment in performing the task in this new learning environment and exchanging cultural details. Students practice the language and learn about each other's culture, enhancing their perceived interest. It stimulates them to participate more actively in the lesson, which is crucial for the success of technology-mediated TBL. As expected, the evidence we found is consistent with previous findings (LOPES Jr. *et al.*, 2021) that define the technology-mediated task cycle as a CAS displaying some of the features of such systems. In our view, teachers should be prepared to deal mainly with the unpredictability and self-organization of the task cycle. Teachers should allow complexity to emerge during the task cycle based on the affordances created for meaning-making. They should also take a step back and allow students to assess their performance and organize their meaning system.

Technology-Mediated TBL and affordances for digital intercultural encounters

The second guiding question attempted to determine whether Technology-mediated TBL affords situations for digital intercultural encounters. Based on the obtained results, students could exchange ideas, be creative, and complete the tasks without difficulty. They could also describe cultural aspects of their countries, showing that Technology-mediated TBL allows for such

affordances. Tasks should be carefully prepared to afford the emergence of conversations about culture, especially when teaching more reserved students. However, teachers should be aware and ready to use unpredictable situations that might emerge during these intercultural encounters to explore semiotic practices that could help students to position themselves in the symbolic power game (KRAMSCH, 2006). The digital technology allowed the emergence of a CAS using Technology-mediated TBL, exposing students to situations that afforded intercultural exchanges suitable to international students inserted in a context with little exposure to the local language.

Building trust and confidence in learning English as an L2 through Technology-mediated TBL

The third question aimed to determine whether Technology-mediated TBL can help build trust and confidence among multinational students when learning English as an L2. Evidence from this study suggests that the tasks performed in the break-out rooms seemed to have created a low-stress environment, and based on our qualitative observations, students developed trust and confidence in each other. Our findings also showed that students demonstrated the same confidence and trust developed in the break-out rooms, away from the teacher and colleagues' scrutiny, in the report stage when they were exposed to the whole group. One common problem raised by TBL critics is that learners will resort to their L1 when performing the task (ELLIS *et al.*, 2020). Our results did not show such evidence, not even in a pair with two Japanese students. The task seemed to be more relevant and meaningful to students, affording real-life communication and meaningful language use. These facts increased motivation, building trust and confidence to use English at all times.

Final remarks

Considerable progress has been made with regard to using synchronous communication tools, such as Zoom and Google Meet. Evidence from our study points towards the fact that technology supports the use of tasks in light of a complex perspective (LOPES Jr., 2015; LOPES Jr. *et al.*, 2021) in these recently explored learning environments. Our study corroborates with previous results found by GONZÁLEZ-LLORET (2017), who states that among all the existing approaches for language teaching, TBL presents an ideal platform for informing and fully realizing the potential of technological innovations for language learning.

After 30 years of CALL in Brazil, it is undisputed that digital technologies have afforded not only meaningful possibilities for learners to be exposed to English as an L2 but also professional possibilities for language teachers, who now can teach students from any part of the world. In our view, we should not separate technologies from reflections on intercultural exchanges between teachers and students and among students. We are aware that most undergraduate students of languages still lack teaching experience and knowledge to articulate technology-mediated learning environments as they are not prepared during their courses to face this

challenge (FEIJÓ-QUADRADO & VETROMILLE-CASTRO, 2022). Reflecting on possible implication on teaching English in an international context emerges as a relevant contribution of our study to the area of CALL.

Our findings suggest that Technology-mediated TBL lends itself to be a teaching and learning approach to develop digital intercultural communication, which is another contribution to the area. The task cycle creates affordances for the emergence of intercultural encounters due to its complex characteristics (LOPES Jr., 2015; LOPES Jr. *et al.*, 2021). By making these learning affordances possible to emerge, the task cycle also helps students build confidence and trust while practicing their English in this complex environment, helping students develop communicative competence and be more prepared to engage in the symbolic power game (KRAMSCH, 2011) established by and during real language use either in face-to-face situations or remote, digital communication.

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