



Teletandem within the Context of closely-related languages: a Portuguese-Spanish interinstitutional experience

*Teletandem no contexto de línguas próximas: Uma
experiência interinstitucional com Português-Espanhol*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is part of an ongoing research project aimed at observing the ways that Brazilian undergraduate students who are majoring in Portuguese and Spanish as part of a Foreign Languages and Literatures (FLL) degree program organize and implement the teaching of Portuguese for Spanish speakers within a teletandem context. We sought to evaluate the organization of the content of Portuguese language that they are teaching and the impact made by teletandem practices on the professional development of these student-teachers in both languages. Methodologically, the study is grounded on critical qualitative research. Data analysis suggests that, because Portuguese and Spanish are closely related languages with a high level of inter-comprehension, the virtual learning context of teletandem requires the presence of a teacher-mediator to conduct the mediation sessions with focused attention to contrasting linguistic and cultural aspects between both languages.

Key-words: *Teletandem; Teaching-learning of Portuguese/Spanish; teacher development.*

RESUMO

Este trabalho é parte de um projeto de investigação em curso que visa observar como alunos brasileiros de graduação em Letras (Português e Espanhol) organizam e implementam o ensino de Português para hispanofalantes no contexto de teletandem. Buscou-se avaliar a organização do conteúdo da língua portuguesa que os futuros professores estavam ensinando e o impacto da prática de teletandem sobre o desenvolvimento profissional em ambas as línguas. A metodologia está fundamentada na pesquisa qualitativa crítica. A análise dos dados aponta para o fato de que, devido à estreita relação entre as línguas, o contexto de aprendizagem virtual em teletandem requer a presença de um mediador com forte atenção para estabelecer contrastes linguísticos e culturais entre ambas as línguas.

Palavras-chave: *Teletandem; ensino de português língua-estrangeira, ensino de espanhol; formação do professor.*

1. Introduction

Due to the advance of globalization and internationalization, knowledge of and fluency in foreign languages becomes more and more necessary. We analyzed such demand within varied sectors of society. Within this widespread context, we discovered that the field of study related to the teaching/learning of foreign languages has become a special niche activity, and has acquired new configurations. This fact requires a review of pedagogical practices, the methodological and theoretical deepening of the language teaching/learning issue and, consequently, the utilization of “new” technological resources, which are now widely available.

The propagation of communication and Information Technology (IT) widened the horizon for educational practices that make the relevance of the insertion of such resources into educational contexts unquestionable. Such being the case, “we should not exclude considering and reflecting on pedagogical actions which aim to include our students within a social reality, whose practices have become more and more technologically oriented.” (Garcia; Norte; Messias, 2012).

This paper presents a brief consideration of a teaching/learning experience of Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) and Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL), developed within the Teletandem context. Teletandem is defined as a virtual and cooperative context for learning foreign languages in which native speakers and/or proficient speakers of different languages work cooperatively in order to learn one another's language, by using a conversation and/or instantaneous message resource (*Skype*). Within such a context, each of them becomes, therefore, a foreign language learner and an advisor (teacher) of his/her own native language (www.teletandembrasil.org).

Within the project context to which this practice refers (*Teletandem: Transculturalidade na Comunicação On-line em Línguas Estrangeiras por Webcam*¹), a partnership was implemented between two universities, UNESP-Assis in São Paulo, Brazil, and at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, where the authors work as foreign language instructors, with the intent of providing interactive conditions (Portuguese - Spanish) for our students attending a Foreign Language & Literature major course (majors: PFL/SFL). This partnership is considered an interinstitutional Teletandem model when there is an agreement between mediators from each of the institutions to schedule specific timetables for the interaction between their students. Such interactions are generally supervised by the universities where they take place, usually at their respective Information Technology Labs.

The interactions, which were scheduled once a week during the 2012 academic year, were comprised of thirty partnerships. These partnerships were divided into two groups with fifteen students each and sessions consisted of two one-hour periods, for a total of ten weeks. The participants on the Brazilian side were undergraduate students attending a Foreign Languages & Literature course in the college and, on the Mexican side students yielded from various undergraduate and graduate courses at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

1. An Up-to-date version of *Projeto Teletandem Brasil: linguas estrangeiras para todos* – a cooperative thematic project set up between the Foreign Language & Literature Program of the Faculdade de Ciências e Letras at UNESP-Assis and Instituto de Biociências, Letras e Ciências Exatas at UNESP-São José do Rio Preto, was developed thanks to the support provided by FAPESP - Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo - Processo 2006/03204-2. <http://www.teletandembrasil.org>

After each interaction, mediation sessions were scheduled, in which the researchers followed the development of the sessions and tried to develop intervention procedures to help achieve the potential of the teaching/learning process within the synchronous on-line context via Skype. It should be emphasized that during the entire study, observation *in loco* took place by means of journals, note-taking during sessions, and recordings of the mediations carried out soon after each of the Teletandem sessions, as well as by recordings of audio and video interactions made with a free application (*IMCapture for Skype*).

Given the above, we wish to emphasize that this study was designed to observe how students from the FLL course (in this case, Brazilians, and more specifically, students of SFL and Portuguese), organize and implement the teaching of Portuguese meant for their foreign partners. The intention is to understand (a) how the content of Portuguese meant for teaching is planned and (b) what the impact of such a practice may be on their development, as teachers of Portuguese and SFL.

2. The approach to the study at issue

The approach used in this study was based on critical qualitative research, since the focus is on the process in which Teletandem actions take place as well as considerations of language teaching/learning practice. Although mediators are present during interactions, they do not interfere. They encourage reflection on individual actions. Due to the fact that they do not dismiss underlying power and asymmetry relationships between mediators and interactants, we believe that critical qualitative research according to models described by Carspecken (2011) is coherent with our aims.

The objective of this study is to support action which aims at reducing differences between researchers and collaborators and, mainly, to create favorable conditions for self-understanding, seeking actions which have an impact on the development of foreign language teachers in Portuguese and Spanish and on the development of teacher/educators. This attitude has resonance in the fact that “critical qualitative research is informed by an epistemological and social theory which explains the

relationship between knowledge production, action, human identity, power, freedom and social change” (Carspecken, 2011:398).

In this respect, the research at issue comprises several stages that begin with the interaction agreement reached between representatives of both institutions, namely, the Mexican instructor of PFL and the Brazilian instructors of SFL and Approaches to Foreign Language Learning. In principle, the aim was to further authentic learning experiences for Brazilian and Mexican students, once the opportunities provided for Spanish practice are lesser than those for English, and since that was the only effective partnership with a Spanish-speaking university. Research based on experience has been projected over the years in the course of such interactions. The wish to understand this phenomenon more fully and to stimulate learning is what put in motion the research that derives from it.

Therefore, audio and video recordings of some interactions have been made by using the application *IMCapture*, which allows the recording of conversation carried out in Skype, as well as audio recordings of subsequent mediation sessions. The considerations outlined in this study focus on the latter. In addition, the follow-up of the whole process raises the possibility of articulating points of view and comparing them to different ones. That kind of dialogue, as we see it, improves the quality of the debate on issues observed by the researchers. An essential feature of critical qualitative research is that of being rethought, reconsidered. Carspecken (2011) calls our attention to the fact that a research modality implies basic concepts that “every social research should, at least, implicitly use”. According to the author,

Critical methodological theory is a continued and fallible project to propitiate a clearer and more precise articulation of those basic concepts in a more precise theory which connects them. It is not suitable for a methodological theory among the many researchers may choose from, for example, concerning their research questions. Instead of it, it is suitable for grasping and theorizing well the epistemological and sociotheoretical bases for all kinds of human research: qualitative and quantitative; sociological, anthropological and psychological. In its own terms it should be understood as fallible and continuously subject to reviews by means of what is apprehended from its use in real research. (Carspecken, 2011:398-399).

Viewed in this way, the approach meets the procedure we employ in carrying out the research on language education and teacher background development. The approach should not be viewed as a strait jacket, but as a way that allows us to rethink the subject as well as its own development. The study we are now presenting may, consequently, be reviewed and rethought in the light of other experiences.

3. Snippets of interactions and mediations: A close look at the data

The data observed in this paper, according to what has been mentioned, come from an experiment carried out in the course of the second semester of 2012, in a partnership proposal which, in spite of being institutionalized (see Aranha & Cavalari, in this issue), presents features which distinguishes it from others. Thus, Spanish-speaking interactants, learning PFL, are not regular students of FLL courses. They belong to various undergraduate and graduate courses, and seek the support of a *Mediateca*, a favorable environment for autonomous learning.

The Mediateca of the Centro de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras - Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México is a resource center meant for studying and practicing foreign languages taking into account the student's own rhythm, according to his/her own needs, aims and possibilities. Learners may focus on any of their linguistic skills, such as writing, listening, reading or oral. For the practice of oral production, one of the activities at their disposal is the Teletandem session held once a week, ten sessions in the course of a semester. The students who are enrolled in Mediateca are motivated by their own interest in studying the foreign language. No certification is issued, and no institutional assessment is made.

The goals that motivate such students are varied. Among them we point out the fact that they wish to learn Portuguese to accomplish training, enter an exchange program or take part in graduate courses held in Brazil. Many of them wish to complete their study of Portuguese in the regular courses of the Center of Foreign Language Teaching pursuing strategies to improve some specific issue in the study of language, items such as vocabulary, orthography, oral expression, or,

because they wish to pass a certification assessment of Portuguese such as CAPLE (Center for the Evaluation of Portuguese as a Foreign Language for European Portuguese) and CELPE-Bras (Certificate of Proficiency in Portuguese for Foreigners for Brazilian Portuguese). Within this context, they are guided by a mediator who advises them concerning the Portuguese material which best suits their needs and personal learning features.

In this way, our Mexican partner, a professor of Portuguese at the Center of Foreign Languages at UNAM, acts as a mediator for learning Portuguese within a context in which the student learns autonomously. Teletandem practices were thus proposed as a resource meant for facilitating and optimizing the learning of Portuguese on the part of Mexican students.

In Brazil, most of the interactants are undergraduate students in FLL courses - majoring in Portuguese and SFL. We may define them as eventual teachers of Portuguese and Spanish developing their own teaching background. In these specific circumstances, the interactions were followed up by two instructors, one of them an instructor of Spanish and the other an instructor of Teaching SFL. We added to that issue that Teletandem activities for those students allow for the possibility of speaking to a native or proficient speaker, within an interactive context which could hardly happen out of it, keeping in mind the geographical location of Assis (southwestern São Paulo State) and the unlikely possibility of traveling abroad, even to nearby South American countries.

With regard to Teletandem practices, two features should be taken into account. Two juxtaposed people interact with one another and, at the same time, play a double role: as a “teacher” and as a learner. According to the nature of the aims of the research, analysis within the teaching/learning language context may, therefore, be developed keeping in mind various points of view. In our case, we have: (a) a Brazilian student learning SFL; (b) a Brazilian student teaching PFL; (c) a Mexican student learning PFL; and (d) a Mexican student teaching SFL. Taking into account the conditions we are working in, we will focus here, on just one of those possibilities: how a Brazilian student plays the role of teacher of Portuguese to a Spanish-speaking learner, within the context of the Teletandem interactions specified above.

Another decidedly relevant issue is the specific character of that context of contact between two closely-related languages, as far as language family and typology are concerned, but which, at the same time, are defined by specific sociocultural, stylistic, and dialectal features. As a natural result of that contact and of perhaps a misleading sensation of spontaneous competence between Portuguese and Spanish speakers, both use what in linguistics is classified as *interlanguage*, the so-called “*Portunhol/Portuñol*”². That being the case, it is important to observe such interactions aiming at considering the implications which Teletandem practice may have in such contact between Portuguese and Spanish and the necessary actions resulting from it.

As an authentic context of language use, in which an effective interaction takes place, Teletandem allows their users to make contact with other “real” speakers besides their FL professor. Thus, the professor ceases to act as the only reference voice in the FL and the only person with whom interactants may communicate. In general, we observed that, in that relationship (more competent vs. less competent partner), the conventional model of teaching/learning languages is dissolved (regulated by the teacher-student relationship in the classroom), providing a context in which interactants venture more easily into the FL and feel more comfortable to ask and/or to resolve any doubts that may arise in the process. They also notice that, due to the lack of an advanced FL/knowledge, they are able to communicate in that language, although they communicate with one another in a rather substandard way.

The transaction of meanings, mutual correction (at different levels: phonetic, morphological, and so on) furthering learning is disclosed, mainly, when there is a certain involvement on the part of interactants, aiming at Teletandem, whose activities are accomplished based on the common principles of reciprocity and autonomy, shared in a partnership. It is not just a simple conversation between two bilingual speakers;

2. *Portunhol/Portuñol*: a misleading feeling of spontaneous competence, resulted from the natural contact and consequently mixing Portuguese with Spanish, which in linguistics is called *interlanguage*: “linguistic-communicative competence shown by the FL learner in his/her speech, marked by variability in his/her performance, sometimes advancing, sometimes receding, lack of stability and probable fossilizations up to the final stage” (CRUZ, 2004, p. 27).

those taking part in Teletandem are people interested in learning one another's language from afar and to a certain extent autonomously (Telles, 2009:47), as one can notice in the following excerpt:

(1)

B: ah:: eu pesquisei lembra que você tinha perguntado como que era *campesinos*?

M: Aha

B: então olha só... eu perguntei pra um monte de gente porque eu não sabia como era a palavra na minha língua ((risadas)) mas...

M: o que você:: encontrou?

B: Então...latifundiário são mesmo os grandes pro/ os grandes é:: detentores de terra né?

M: Aha

B: Agora aqui no Brasil os pequenos produtores os pequenos é:: como que eu vou dizer aqueles que não tem muitas terras... a gente chama de é:: de pequenos é: ai como é que eu vou explicar... porque eu não consegui uma definição sabe? É porque as pessoas normalmente chamam de sitiante que são aquelas pessoas que vivem daquilo que elas produzem na terra... aí a gente chama de sitiante que mora no sítio... é um sítio mesmo não é uma fazenda porque fazenda é algo maior né é um sítio

M: Fa[s]enda? Fa[s]enda que é uma fa[s]enda?

B: Fazenda é vários alqueires de terra

M: Eu acho que é como *español hacienda*

B: Isso isso

M: Fa[s]enda vocês dizem ((tenta corrigir a pronúncia))

B: Isso... então... a gente chama de sitiante ou mesmo de pequenos produtores rurais que são aquelas pessoas que produzem é mas produzem mais pra subsistência ou não....produzem alguma coisa mas é mais é:: pouco não é muito entendeu?

M: Sim eu *comprendo*, eu entendo mas não usam a palavra campone[s] es?

B: Não usamos camponeses

M: Pequenos produtores rurais

B: Isso pequenos produtores rurais... agora pode ser que alguém que saiba mais da sua área saiba achar

M: É especialidade

B: É::: saiba achar é::: mas eu acho que é isso mesmo porque camponeses a gente não usa mesmo

M: Aha /é bom conhecer saber isso...

B: Que bom!

M: Obrigada! Muito obrigada

B: Magina!

(1)

B: Ah..I did some research do you remember that you had asked me what *campesinos* was?**M:** Humhum**B:** Then pay attention to this...I asked a lot of people because I didn't know what the word was in my language (laughter) but...**M:** What did you:: find out?**B:** Then... *Latifundiarios* are the owners of large agricultural estates, aren't they?**M:**Humhum**B:** Nowadays in Brazil the small farmers the small hum::how shall I define those who don't have large estates... they are called:: small farmers: how shall I explain it to you...because I didn't find a definition for it, you know? It is because they are usually called *peasants* who are the farmers who manage to live on their crops...then you call the ones who live on their small farms... it is indeed a small farm it isn't a plantation because a plantation is much larger than a farm, isn't it?**M:** Fa(s)enda (plantation)? Fa(s)enda what is a fa(s)enda?**B:** A plantation comprises many acres of land**M:** I think that it is like the Spanish word *hacienda***B:** That's it**M:**Fa(s)enda that's how you say it (he tries to correct his pronunciation)**B:**That's it...then...peasants or even the small farm growers who are the ones who grow enough crop for their own maintenance or who don't... grow anything but it is not enough for them did you understand?**M:** Yes I do, I understand but don't you use the word *campone(s)es* (peasants)?**B:** We don't use peasants**M:** Small farmers**B:** That's it. Small farmers... now maybe someone who knows more about that subject can manage to find out**M:** It is a specialty**B:** It is:: try to find it:: but I think that's just it because *camponeses* (peasants) we don't use it at all**M:** Humhum / it is good to know about that...**B:**That's nice!**M:** Thank you! Many thanks, indeed**B:** Don't mention it!

On the other hand, corrections inherent to Teletandem principles and aims, demand a certain degree of knowledge and reflection on language itself and reality. At times, we find out, on the part of Brazilians, within this specific context, various explanations and / or misinformation, showing clearly their own difficulties and, consequently, the need to better prepare interactants to act in the sense of playing the role of “teaching Portuguese to Spanish speakers”. In

general, they notice discrepancies in the production of their Mexican partners, but they do not manage to identify them precisely and/or explain them clearly. Such problems become evident both at the level of linguistic knowledge, strictly speaking, as one can notice in excerpt (2), below, and at the level of “knowledge of the world”. The Brazilian interactant, in face of the difficulty made explicit by his Mexican partner concerning the pronunciation of open and closed vowels, mixes up the phonetic-phonological criteria with the ones of orthography (marking with accents), trying to relate them inadequately; he also introduces a reductive impertinent comment: “the open vowels are marked with accents”. The fact that they are undergraduates in FLL, as we see it, leads them to overestimate metalanguage as well as the phonological rules, which complicates the search for more simple explanations, directed to the practical use of language. This is also a way to substantiate the ideal of what a good language teacher should be like.

(2)

M: Isso é sons... sonidos

B: SONS ((a interagente corrige sua pronúncia nasal)) a vogal fechada essa

M: Eu não *logro* aprender quando a gente usa as vogais fechadas e abertas

B: Só um minutinho... você não consegue distinguir quando tem que usar as vogais fechadas e abertas?

M: i/ i/ isso... primeiramente eu não sei quais são as vogais fechadas... quais são as abertas... eu somente consigo escutar os falantes nativos que fazem diferenças mas não sei quando tem

B: as vogais/ as vogais... as vogais abertas normalmente levam acentuação sabe que é acentuação?

M: *Sí* os circunflexos... grave

B: Isso

M: *Sí*

B: Normalmente levam acento agudo

M: Ah... as palavras com acento agudo

B: Como está ó... perai... ((anota no chat))

M: ParaBÉNS ((esforça-se para realizar a nasal))

B: ParaBÉNS é::

M: Não é parabéns... é parabéns ((tenta realizar igual a sua parceira))

B: Sabe o que é parabéns?

M: É felicitações ((mistura palavra do espanhol com pronúncia do português))

(2)

M: These are sounds... *sonidos* (the interactant uses Spanish)**B:** SOUNDS (the interactant corrects the nasal vowel) that is a nasal vowel**M:** I don't manage to learn when one uses the closed and open vowels**B:** Just a minute...you don't manage to distinguish between the use of closed and open vowels?**M:** That's it!...first, I don't know which are the closed vowels... and which are the open ones... I only manage to listen to native speakers who distinguish them but I don't know when there is one**B:** the vowels/ the vowels... the open vowels are usually stressed. Do you know what stress pattern is?**M:** Yes the circumflex stress...the grave one**B:** That's it!**M:** Yes!**B:** They usually have acute stress**M:** Oh...the words which have acute stress**B:** How is the ó...Wait a minute...(he writes it down while he is chatting)**M:** Parabéns (congratulations!) (he emphasizes the nasal vowel)**B:** *ParaBÉNS* is...**M:** It isn't *parabéns*...it is *parabéns* (he tries to imitate his partner's foreign pronunciation)**B:** Do you know what *parabéns* is?**M:** It means congratulations (*felicitações*: he mixes a Spanish word with a Portuguese pronunciation)

In the Teletandem context, due to the differentiated relationship proposed, interactants venture more easily into the FL. In these circumstances, a relative interlanguage intercommunication still in an elementary phase is possible, causing the use of "Portunhol/Portuñol". Thus, concerning the Spanish-Portuguese interaction, the occurrence of linguistic (interlingual) transfer or misunderstandings due to inadequate uses of idioms and their respective utilizations becomes evident in various circumstances. In the event of misunderstandings, if such conflicts are resolved, they may, in a sense, propitiate a more effective learning, once their users are challenged to explain or negotiate such meanings to carry on with the dialogue. In the following account, chosen from mediation sessions which occur soon after interactions, when the group of mediators and interactants talk about the experiences they had gone through during the interaction), we find concerns about false cognates:

(3)

Mediador brasileiro: Y sobre la interacción en portugués... has conseguido aclararle algo?

Aluno brasileiro: Algunos falsos cognados... yo esclarecí muchas cosas... él no sabía muchas cosas... entonces pimenta para ellos es nuestro *pimentão*... entonces... *e pimenta mesmo é o chile* entonces yo hablaba *pimenta arde, pimenta queima e ele não mas pimenta não arde... como que não... perai... e eu falou não não arde... eu falei assim nossa será que eles são tão resistentes?... que no arde un poco no quema pero despues nos entendemos...*

(3)

Brazilian mediator: *And what about the interaction in Portuguese... have you managed to clear things up for him?*

Brazilian student: *Some false cognates...I explained a lot of things...he didn't know many things.. pimenta (pepper) for them corresponds to our pimentão (bell pepper)... then... and pimenta is indeed chili then I said pimenta arde, pimenta queima (pepper stings, pepper burns) and he said but pepper doesn't sting... of course it does... wait a minute... and he said it doesn't sting... I said then, wow, could they be more tolerant to it?... that it doesn't sting a little it doesn't burn but afterwards we managed to reach an agreement.*

When such negotiations do not occur, the discursive action is damaged and the FL learning may not take place. The following example illustrates a moment in which the Brazilian interactant was not able to explain a question about a vocabulary item presented by his Mexican counterpart: *alberca* (Mexican Spanish) = *piscina* “swimming pool” in Portuguese. His lack of skills with available internet tools (i.e., Google Translator or *on-line* dictionaries) which would have undoubtedly helped him at that moment made matters worse. Once again, the need to link the conversation to metalinguistic issues is raised. The importance of the mediator in the supervision of such interactions, taking into account the need for instructions concerning the use of information technology to improve his/her own development in Teletandem, also stands out. The interaction excerpt at issue is the following:

(4)

M: Bom eu gosto de ir ao cinema de universidade /ir também ao *alberca*, não sei como se diz

B: Como?

M: Alberca onde as pessoas nadam/ nadar?

B: Ah eu não sei / é/ como que é a palavra? Você pode escrever ela pra mim?

M: Aha ((escreve no chat)) Não sabe?

B: Não / eu nunca ouvi falar essa palavra? É como se fosse um clube né?

M: É clube/ mas é um *deporti* / as pessoas estão na água

B: Água

M: Água

B: Só que aqui é / que pra gente é uma palavra feminina / a água / pra vocês é diferente né?

M: É masculina *el agua* / então eu estava falando porque eu gosto de morar no meu bairro...

(4)

M: Well I like going to the university cinema/ and also going to the *alberca* (swimming pool), I don't know how you say it

B: What did you say?

M: Alberca where people swim/ to swim?

B: Ah I don't know/ it is/ how is the word pronounced? Would you write it for me?

M: Uhum Uhum (he writes it down while he is chatting) Don't you know it?

B: No/ I have never heard that word? It's like a club, isn't it?

M: It is a club/ but it is a *deporti* (sport)/ people are in the water

B: Water

M: Water

B: The point is that here/ for us it is a feminine gender word/ the water / for you it is different, isn't it?

M: *El agua* is masculine/ anyway I was explaining why I like living in my neighborhood...

The next excerpt illustrates how languages get easily mixed: the Mexican interactant uses, inadequately, the word *aborrecido* (“upset” in Portuguese), as the closest translation of *aburrido* (“bored” in Spanish). The most adequate word would have been *chato* (dull, boring). Her Brazilian partner, however, did not correct her, since she probably did not notice such a use would be uncommon in Portuguese. It is a matter of subtle semantic differences between the two close languages:

(5)

M: Eu estava lendo o vocabulário sobre coisas que estão na rua... posso falar sobre minha rua coisas que estão na minha rua. Não sei se é aborrecido?

B: Não, não vamo lá

M: Como?

B: Não... tudo bem... pode ir

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- M:** Pode repetir?
B: Você me ouviu?
M: Sim
B: Então pode falar... é um livro de português que você estava estudando?
M: Sim
B: Ah sim
M: Eu acho que é aborrecido, mas...
B: Não vamos lá é bom pra gente aprender
M: Bom eu moro num bairro que tem muitas pessoas...

- (5)
M: I was reading the vocabulary about things found on the street... May I mention things found on my street? Things that are on my street I don't know whether it is aborrecido ("upset")?
B: No, no let's go
M: What did you say?
B: Nothing, everything is OK... let's go.
M: May you repeat it?
B: Can you hear me?
M: Yes
B: Then it is your turn to speak... Were you studying a Portuguese book?
M: Yes
B: Oh, yes
M: I think it is aborrecido, but
B: No, let's go. It is good for learning...
M: Well I live in a district which has many people...

One of the principles of Teletandem advises us not to mix the languages. Such a practical principle furthers the learner's commitment to the task s/he is undertaking (Telles, 2009: 24). However, in the case of the Portuguese-Spanish interaction, the borders between them, as we have mentioned before, are not always evident, especially to beginners. Thus, we once more emphasize that a mediating teacher's presence or supervision is important so that the participants may reach a better understanding through this process. The mediating teacher may, in the course of his/her advising activity, find out and assess such interactions and, in that way, by interfering help students to be attentive to such occurrences, as well as the signs of his/her interlingua, and that of his/her partners.

Although, in principle, we may accept the signs of that interlanguage (as a natural result of such a process), we should stress that it is one

thing to admit their existence; it is another very different one to induce students to take over the study of PFL and SFL so that they may overcome it and not be satisfied with the mere possibility of meeting the primary needs of communication, by means of “Portunhol/Portuñol” which, in general, is far from any usual manner of speaking the target language (Celada & Rodrigues, 2004, *apud* Brasil, 2006). In other words, it is fundamental in that process to try to avoid fossilization, according to Almeida Filho:

The undesirable trait of Portunhol is its fossilization at a certain level (in general low, although communicatively enough in the user’s perception), overloading the interaction with an extra burden for the other standard speaker who has to filter out the noises of the unchangeable interlanguage. (2001:18)

Final comments

According to the data observed in this brief analysis, we can point out that Teletandem practices, in which closely-related languages (Portuguese and Spanish, for example) are in close contact, work as long as there is compromise between the partners and the institutions involved in the interaction process. A certain mastery and knowledge of the FLs and monitoring on the part of mediating teachers, so that one may encourage awareness of the deficiencies and weaknesses concerning the use of language between the students involved in the interaction.

With regard to the mediator’s role, it is clear that some experience to observe the socio-cultural context into which the mediator and his/her students are inserted, is fundamental in order to make the mediator’s interventions really effective and productive. One needs to consider the role played by the FL instructor. His/her true action and what most people believe his/her function should be. What should be taught? Grammar? The culture related to the language? The use of language within various contexts? These and many other questions need to be addressed in mediating processes. The truth is that the facts observed in the collected data are very encouraging and, we think, they should be illustrated within other mediating contexts, since they also show the need for deeper reflection on the practice used by the creative teacher,

in this instance, and on our teaching practice as professors of foreign languages and the teaching of foreign languages.

Concerning the context of cultural exchanges propitiated by the interaction via *Skype*, in the same way we reaffirm that the issues presented by interactants are, many times, relegated to a trifling level. Thinking again of that relationship between partners from the point of view of interculturality which “refers to confrontation and interlacement, to what happens to people when groups come into contact and make exchanges” (Canclini, 207: 17), we may certainly, as mediators, potentialize the processes of teaching/learning language and culture.

Thus, starting from this preliminary observation of the data collected in interaction experiences within the virtual Teletandem context and assessments made with groups of interactants, we have come to the conclusion that such an environment is a context of discursive practices which contributes to increased autonomy, responsibility, and compromise on the part of both learners and teachers, encouraging critical reflection and awareness about his/her language, culture and the role which should be played by the teacher.

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