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Teletandem between French and Brazilian students: Some preliminary remarks

Teletandem entre alunos franceses e brasileiros: Algumas observações preliminares

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ABSTRACT

In its French-Brazilian version, the Teletandem Brazil project enables students from the University of Lille 3 (France) and from the State University of São Paulo (Unesp, Brazil), to take part in online exchanges, based on the principles of autonomy and reciprocity. In this work, we will present some preliminary remarks on the construction of cultural identity representations by the students who took part in the project, from 2006 to 2012, the specificity of the exchanges we analyze being that most of the French students involved in them are third generation Portuguese. We will examine the consequences of the introduction of a third culture within exchanges which, linguistically speaking, are bilateral. The French students are often experiencing conflicting feelings toward Brazil and, similarly, the Brazilian students may have conflicting feelings towards Portugal and France. Our preliminary results show that the most successful linguistic exchanges occur when students face their own cultural identity with no feeling of superiority or inferiority.

Key-words: *Portuguese for Foreigners; Language Learning in Tandem; Cultural and Identity Representations.*

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RESUMO

Em sua versão franco-brasileira, o projeto Teletandem Brasil reúne alunos da Universidade de Lille 3 (França) e da Unesp-Assis para uma aprendizagem online de suas línguas e culturas respectivas, com base nos princípios de autonomia e reciprocidade. Neste trabalho, apresentaremos algumas observações preliminares sobre a construção de representações culturais pelos alunos que participaram do projeto entre 2006 e 2012, atentando para que a especificidade das discussões que analisamos reside no fato de que a maioria dos alunos franceses envolvidos são luso-descendentes de terceira geração. Analisaremos as consequências da introdução de uma terceira cultura em discussões que, do ponto de vista estritamente linguístico, são bilaterais. Os alunos franceses frequentemente vivem sentimentos conflituosos com relação ao Brasil e, de maneira similar, os alunos brasileiros podem se encontrar diante de sentimentos conflituosos com relação à França e a Portugal. Nossos resultados preliminares mostram que as trocas mais proveitosas ocorrem quando os alunos não desenvolvem sentimentos de superioridade ou de inferioridade com relação à sua própria identidade cultural.

Palavras-chave: *Português Língua Estrangeira; Aprendizagem de Línguas in Tandem; Representações Culturais e Identitárias.*

1. Introduction

As it is very well known now, *teletandem* is “a distance tandem that uses the spoken and written modalities of language (hearing and speaking, and writing and reading, respectively), via real time audio/video conferences” (Telles, 2005: 7)¹. This innovative way of using *in tandem* devices to learn foreign languages was first introduced by Telles (2005, 2006, 2009) and by Telles & Vasallo (2006). In its more recent version (see Telles, 2015: 2)², *teletandem* is defined as

a virtual, autonomous, and collaborative context that uses online teleconferencing tools (text, voice, and webcam images of VoIP technology, such as Skype) to promote intercontinental and intercultural

1. We translate all quotes of originals in French and in Portuguese.

2. For a brief presentation of the developpement of the Teletandem Brazil Project by its creator, see Telles (in this issue). See also Biondo Salomão (in this issue).

interactions between students who are learning a foreign language. During teletandem sessions, two foreign language students collaborate online to help the partner learn each other's native language (or language of proficiency) by following principles of foreign language learning in tandem (BRAMMERTS, 2003).

Since the beginning of the 2006-2007 academic year, the department of Portuguese at the University of Lille 3 (France), with the support of the University's Language Resource Center, has enabled students of Portuguese to take part in the *Teletandem Brasil* Project - TTB (Telles, 2005, 2006, 2009) with the State University of São Paulo (Unesp-Assis, Brazil). These students are engaged in the collaborative learning of their respective languages and cultures, based on autonomy and reciprocity. This environment provided them with the possibility of using the foreign language in authentic interactions, in a socio-constructivist way (Kolb, 1984; Salomon & Perkins, 1988; Vygotsky, 1992; Williams & Perkins, 1977). The students exchanged via Skype, once or twice a week, at a rhythm of one hour per language³.

The partners are autonomous or partially autonomous, and are in some cases helped by a tutor. At Lille 3, this tutor was the coordinator of the project, while at Unesp the tutors were experienced students that have already participated in face-to-face or long-distance tandem.

The students of Lille 3 kept a learning logbook (LLB), where they could record the main elements of each session (e.g., phonetic, lexical and grammatical issues, themes discussed, comments and evaluations about the session and the partnership). At the end of the experience, they wrote a report presenting an evaluation of the partnership and of the learning process. Mostly written in Portuguese, these LLB and these reports constitute our corpus basis, which also includes emails exchanged with the students and notes taken during informal discussions with them about the project and the partnership.

3. Given some local particularities and difficulties (such as the opposition of some teachers), we were unable to follow the *Teletandem Brasil* Project full protocol and recommendations. For some observations on the diversity of contexts of tandem settings and teletandem environments in Lille 3, see Rivens Mompean & Cappellini (in this issue).

Focused on the analysis of the Lille 3 students' LLB and reports, our work – that resumes and deepens the reflection begun in Santos (2009), and extended in Santos (2010, 2012 and 2013) –, is divided in two parts. First, we briefly present the data collection and analysis methodologie. These elements are presented in depth in Santos (2009, 2010 and 2012). Secondly, we analyze our corpus, focusing on the relationship between the partners, via the analysis of the students' comments on the themes they have treated. More precisely, we will build our analysis based on the comments on Brazil, the topic most often addressed in the studied interactions. We will also see some examples of conflict situations and their possible solutions. Having a small corpus (see below), we emphasize the fact that our observations are, so far, intuitions that could be deepened with the growth of our corpus.

At the end of our analysis – which includes some considerations on the construction of the identity representations of the subjects of the interaction – we will be able to present the necessary conditions to a successful partnership, from the cultural point of view and from the perspective of partners' relationship. In our final remarks, we will see that, when the individual conditions meet, teletandem may be the opportunity of a true encounter, between individuals and cultures.

2. Theoretical framework

Before going further, though, we would like to say a word about the concept of *cultural identity representations*, which underlies our exposition. Being polysemous and unsteady, the concepts of *culture* and *identity* are not easy to define, and their combination, in *cultural identity*, give birth to a new fallacious concept. In this sense, Godelier (2009) asks if concepts such as *culture*, *identity*, *community* and *society* are still fruitful for the production of scientific knowledge, in so far as “[their] meanings and usages are more and more complex” (Dervin, 2011: 181). In their review of the literature about *identity*, Cohen-Scali & Mouliner (2008: 465) have identified four approaches that “generally distinguish between personal and social identity, in one hand, and personal and social representations on the other:

- “Derived from the seminal works by Tajfel (1970), the first one considers that the social identity is based on the individuals knowledge or beliefs about the social categories which they belong to or to which they are assigned;
- “By reference to the social representations theory (Moscovici, 1961), to the second one, the social representations are simultaneously social identity markers and modulators;
- “Mostly focused on personal identity (Markus, 1977), the third one advances that the social representations should be the source where the individuals would draw to construct their specific self;
- “Represented by different authors (for exemple, Breakwell, Guichard, Zavalloni), the fourth one postulates the existence of a social representations personalization process that contributes to the personal identity construction”.

According to Moscovici (1961: xiii), “social representations are systems of values, ideas and practices which enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history”. Dervin (2011: 185) refers to Jodelet (1991), saying that to the latter “meanings are condensed in social representations and help people to construe their experiences”.

So, we can say, with Jovchelovitch (2007: 11, *apud* Dervin, 2011: 185), that “the reality of the human world is in its entirety made of representation: in fact there is no sense of reality for our human world without the work of representation”. In Brubaker’s (2006: 79, *apud* Dervin, 2011: 185), representations are “perspectives on the world, not ontological but epistemological realities”, as well as “representations and other phenomena such as perceptions, interpretations, etc.” (Dervin, 2011: 185).

We are not going deeper in this discussion, whose goal was just to shed some light on these concepts that, as we had already said, underlie our exposition. It worth noticing that, in spite of our statement that we consider the notion of *culture* in its anthropological sense (see below),

the way cultural references are presented by the respondents, they could as well be identified as a *nation-state* notion that acknowledges the triangular relationship territory-language-identity, posed by authors such as Pennycook (1998), among many others.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection methodology

The corpus of this work comes from multiple sources:

- 32 reports and LLB written by the Lille 3 students during the five academic years considered in this work (from 2006 to 2012), corresponding to 263 TTB sessions;
- 111 emails exchanged with the students during this same interval;
- 47 notes taken from informal conversations with the students, about the project and the partnership, also during the five years in question.

The LLB focuses on the activities in Portuguese, or rather, the learning of Portuguese. However, as the students' participation was irregular, the number of sessions per student is also irregular, varying from 2 to 48. Then, with 32 students and 263 sessions, we have an average of 8.2 sessions per student. Regarding our notes, it may be useful to know that, as we took them during discussions with the students, they allowed us to record everything that generally the students did not mention in their LLB and reports.

3.2. Corpus analysis methodology

To analyze our corpus, we use the tools and the perspective of the Content Analysis (CA) methodology, a discipline that defines itself as "a set of communications analysis techniques" (Bardin, 1977: 4), a method that "insists on its methodological rigour, in order not to lose itself in its object heterogeneity" (Rocha & Deusdará, 2005: 47).

That's the reason why, according to Bardin (1977: 47), the CA aims to obtain, "by means of systematic and objective procedures to describe the utterances contents, (...) quantitative or qualitative indicators which allow us to make inferences leading to the knowledge on the conditions of production and reception of these utterances (the inferred variables)".

The CA works, then, with *vestiges* and *indicators* (Franco, 2005), which allows us to study "what was not said", or of "what was said between the lines". In this sense, the CA is not limited to a quantitative approach of the elements that occur in the different categories: "it is also essential to go back to the nature of the traits classified in every category" (L'Écuyer, 1990: 11). It is also in this sense that Bardin (1977: 39) refers to *inference* as an "intermediate procedure" which allows "the passage from the description to the interpretation of the message contents" (L'Écuyer, 1990: 12). Being simultaneously a quantitative and a qualitative approach, the CA uses "the frequency of occurrence of elements as much as their absence indicators, for the *presence* or the *absence* of an item (a word, a sentence, an expression) may constitute an indicator at least as significant as its frequency of occurrence" (Bardin, 1977: 146, the author emphasizes).

To choose the best data analysis technique, initially we have to make at least two distinctions. First, we have to determine what we want to know (the information and/or its producer). Secondly, we have to distinguish between what is uttered (and the way it is uttered), and the quantitative or qualitative nature of the data treatment.

Without describing the different phases of the analysis⁴ in detail, it may be useful to observe that, when dealing with the results and their interpretation, the analyst makes a descriptive statistical analysis, with different degrees of complexity (for example, frequency comparative tables, correspondence or factorial analysis), in order to test his/her initial hypothesis and illustrate the results. According to Robert & Bouillaguet (1997: 31), to analyze the results means "to lean on the elements revealed by the categorization to motivate an interpretation of the corpus that is simultaneously original and objective".

4. See Santos (2012).

We then work from a double perspective. On the one hand, we wish to outline the more general tendencies and orientations that reveal the point of view of the French students participating in the TTB. On the other hand, we do not want to make excessive generalizations — but, instead, our aim is to contribute to the reflection on this foreign languages teaching-learning alternative approach. So, we proceeded to a data analysis that is quantitatively simple (based on the percentages of occurrence) and qualitative at the same time. Given that we work with a small corpus, this approach allows us to find the predominant themes on the students' works.

Our analysis unity is the *comment*: a set of utterances about the same theme and of variable extension. This definition is close to Reinhart's (1982: 24) *discourse topic*: "local entries corresponding to sentence topics can be further organized under more global entries, thus constructing the discourse topics".

4. Analysis

4.1. Brazil as the prominent theme

As we have indicated in earlier works (cf. Santos, 2009, 2012), the comments about the themes treated by the TTB partners represent the majority (54%) of the data we have collected⁵. And, as indicated above, among these, Brazil has a predominant presence, for the themes related to this country represent a little more than the third (32.9%) of the total of students' comments on the themes they treated in teletandem sessions. Given that a large part of our corpus (98.3% of the documents) only deals with the sessions in Portuguese, we can hypothesize that there is a narrow relationship between the language choice and the theme choice, as emphasized by the following comment:

- (1) During the sessions, I realized that when we started to speak in Portuguese, we automatically treated themes about Brazil. (SR)

5. The other 46% describe and analyze the project and the partnership.

Even if we cannot be sure of it, we think that the same situation happened to all the pairs because of the prominence of Brazil among the themes discussed by the partners. Nevertheless, besides the language choice, other factors may explain this predominance of themes related to Brazil (and mainly the themes “culture” and “society”). First, the French students’ interest in Brazil and in the Brazilian culture:

- (2) The [teletandem] sessions correspond to what I wanted to learn, because as I already have a good level in Portuguese, I wanted to know more about Brazilian culture. (AR)
- (3) I don’t know very much about Brazil, and having some information about this country by someone who lives there is very interesting. (SB)

These two extracts are representative of the wish to have a better knowledge of Brazil and Brazilian culture that most of our students expressed. However, if we have, in these cases, very general statements (“knowing more about Brazilian culture”, “having information about the country”), this becomes more obvious when we examine examples that present more precise elements:

- (4) In January, there is another [party], to celebrate the three wise men’s arrival after Christmas. Not only do people dance, but they walk in front of every house with a flag (with a holy picture), we say that this flag protects the house. (VB)
- (5) We both like music a lot, so we talked about music. I know a Brazilian band called Tribalistas, and R. knows it too. So we talked about their songs. And after, she made me discover a band that was well known at the hippie times, it’s a band that was born in the 1970s. It’s the band that she likes most, and now I like it too. It’s name is “Os Mutantes” (LR).

The two examples above show that French students are not only interested in their partners’ language, but also in their country and their culture. In this sense, (4), which refers to the *Folia de Reis*⁶, shows its

6. “The *Folia de Reis* is a popular Brazilian tradition of folk Catholicism that involves a group of participants who, between Christmas and Epiphany, go on a journey asking for alms for social-religious purposes. The tradition refers to musical ensembles comprising predominantly low-income rural workers from various regions of Brazil. Instrumentalists, singers, and other participants travel from house to house and farm to farm, singing and praising the birth of Christ. The *Folia de Reis* celebrates and reenacts the Biblical journey of the Three Kings to Bethlehem and back to their homeland guided by the Star of Bethlehem” (Tremura, 2010: 3).

author's interest in the "exotic" aspects of his/her partner's country. In (5), we can see the conjunction of cultural areas of interest (music) between young people of the same age.

Besides, the fact that the French students present very detailed descriptions (as from their partners' indications) shows the Brazilian students' interest in their own culture, which seems to be an additional factor to explain the preponderance of themes related to Brazil. Another element increases this tendency in treating themes related to Brazil during the sessions in Portuguese: the comparisons between Brazil and France are in the fourth place among the topics of discussion, representing 11.7% of the comments we analyzed. From our point of view, that means that the Lille 3 students, as well as the Unesp's, are interested in their respective cultures and want their partners to know them:

- (6) B. told me about Raul Pompeia, her favorite author. (...) I told her about Molière, my favorite author. (MC)

This example shows us how the members of a pair can communicate about their respective cultures: showing to the partner the aspects that they consider as positive ("her favorite author, my favorite author").

4.2. Possible conflicts

Analyzing the students' comments about the project and the partnership, we perceive that the category that we identified as "the partners' behavior" (cf. Santos, 2009) is presented as the main explanation to the problems faced by the students (31.6% of the comments about the difficulties). As we can see below, the students invoke multiple late arrivals and absences, as well as the non-respect of the reciprocity principle:

- (7) The [first] partner that I had didn't respect any appointment, I forgave him many times, but when I saw that my friends made progress with their Brazilian partners, I decided to change my partner. (RA)
- (8) I wasn't happy because my partner made me wait and she never turned up. (GN)

- (9) Since our first session I've asked what her goals were, but she didn't answer, no matter my insistence. I talked about my difficulties in learning Portuguese, but she didn't pay much attention. During the second session, I tried to talk about our goals once more, but, again, she changed the subject and didn't answer. (SR)

Contrary to RA, who asked a new partner, GN and SR do not mention the consequences of the situation they describe, but show their dissatisfaction, SR having an obvious feeling of not being heard by her partner⁷. This kind of incident may originate misunderstandings and disagreements whose consequences will vary depending on the time and on every individual's temperament. GN, for example, did not ask for a new partner, but decided to quit the project. RA, on the other hand, asked for a new partner and took part in the project until the end of the semester.

When read between the lines, examples like these provoke questionings about the role played by the person on their own and the other's representations in the evolution of the interaction. So, (7), (8) and (9) show the construction of a partner's representation as someone who shows little respect, who is irresponsible and even someone who does not care about his/her partner's needs". At the same time, in (9) SR builds an image of herself as a respectful, responsible and rigorous person.

Even though it is offbeat in our corpus (3.4% of the comments about the difficulties), it is interesting to analyze the category "TTB structure", because it concerns a difficulty that is inherent in the teletandem practice. The excerpt below illustrates this:

- (10) One of the fundamental teletandem principles was not respected: the reciprocity (...) it seemed to me that my partner did not put as much effort as I did. (...) Time negotiation, that is, the fact of indicating that we have to change languages, was always my responsibility, as well as the fact of finishing the sessions. My partner did not seem much concerned about time (and so she was always late) (...) each time, it was difficult for me to know if we were going to work on what I had prepared, during the hour in French, and during the hour in Portuguese too. (SR)

7. Reading between the lines, we can see that RB attributes her partner's behavior to the fact that she is Brazilian.

By saying that her partner did not respect the reciprocity principle, SR implies that some of her expectations were not met – namely, those related to the sessions management, a management that would have to be shared necessarily (from what we can deduce from her text). Moreover, (10) illustrates a point that the majority of the LLB (30 over 32 documents) did not explicitly treat: the negotiation on the partnership modalities – that, in most cases, the partners do implicitly, by progressive adjustments. From our point of view, it is exactly because SR and her partner did not make their expectations explicit that SR turned out to be in a position where she had the impression of having to assume all alone the responsibility for the sessions, whereas it was not what she wanted to do.

More generally, this kind of example brings the question of autonomous learning in a situation of reciprocity. Knowing that in informal conversations SR always referred to her partner as “my Brazilian partner” (avoiding to call her by her name or by any other way), we can also say that this kind of example shows the weight of the cultural representations on interaction negotiation. To illustrate more precisely this last point, let us see how SR continues:

(11) I had the impression that she thought I was too orderly and as a consequence too strict. (SR)

Given that none of the partners did not make their expectations explicit (that were extremely different), and given that they did not explicitly agree on the partnership and the sessions management⁸, a hidden conflict was then created (SR never mentions an overt conflict). In this situation, SR believed her partner had an image of her as “too orderly” or “too strict” – in other words, too rigorous. However, by a kind of “mirror effect”, we can say that SR created an image of her partner as a chaotic and/or negligent person.

Besides, the analysis of this kind of comments allows us to highlight a part of the comments about the “partner’s behavior” and the cultural conflicts that they can allow to appear, mostly in an implicit

8. According to SR, because her partner did not respond to her requests; see the example (8).

way. Let's remember that examples such as (7) and (8), on the one hand, and (9), on the other hand, reveal a negative representation of the partner by the Lille 3 students, who assign attitudes and behaviors to their partners such as "grudge", "disrespect" or "disinterest".

4.3. *Overcoming the difficulties*

Contrasting with the examples above, we can find some situations that allow us to notice that, if the "partner's behavior" may be presented as the element that is responsible for the partnership failure, this same element may also be responsible for its success – provided that the two members of the pair maintain a good relationship:

- (12) I got to know a very nice person I will continue to talk to even if our teletandem is finished. (ACD)
- (13) I appreciate my partner's advice because she doesn't judge me when I don't know something, and she helps me. (JMA)
- (14) Our conversation was based on a real exchange. (VB)
- (15) My partner was patient; she didn't hesitate to repeat or to write full sentences that I didn't understand when I heard her. (MR)
- (16) My partner was very nice, we spoke together and we always had something to say. We always had questions to ask and answers to give; I appreciated this experience very much. (HT)

The comparison between this series of examples and (10) and (11) shows us that the explicit negotiation of the partnership modalities is not a necessary condition for a successful partnership, since this explicit negotiation did not happen in any of the five cases above.

Nonetheless, it is even more interesting to observe that the difficulties may function as a trigger for a reflection about the teaching and learning process and about the means necessary to satisfy the tandem principles:

- (17) I learned a lot. In fact, [my difficulty] was double: being able to construct my own learning path (my role as an apprentice) asking my partner's advice, and being able to advise her about her learning path (my role as a tutor). (NP)

It is not the case, here, of the same kind of difficulty illustrated in the further examples. As we can see, the pointed obstacle neither hampers nor stops the running of the project or of the partnership. On the contrary, as an element that induces the reflection, what would be an obstacle for some students, allows NP to progress.

Another element that deserves to be underlined is the fact that, in the same way as a difficulty may induce a reflection about the autonomous learning process, some (other) difficulties may function as a trampoline to a more profitable learning and, as a consequence, a trampoline to the student's autonomy, given that they lead him/her to overcome the difficulties.

- (18) We began [our partnership] during the Brazilian [summer] holidays; my partner did not have access to the University equipment, mainly the webcam. So, we had to contact each other only via text chat until the beginning of term in Brazil, for my partner did not have a webcam in her place either. I think, though, that this allowed us to become acquainted with each other little by little, without being in direct visual contact. It also allowed us to work on the written language, moreover on spelling. (NP)

In this case, too, what was seen as an insurmountable obstacle by certain students (equipment and logistic problems⁹), revealed itself as an advantage for the partners, who knew how to overcome it and, mainly, how to use it in their favor.

This fragment also refers to another kind of difficulty, often mentioned by the students: the use of the webcam. It is not the case of a technical difficulty, but of the discomfort or the shyness caused by the fact of "seeing and being seen", as NP indicates¹⁰. We can then see how NP and her partner knew how to turn in their favor the fact of not seeing each other. They got acquainted in a softer way and put the bases of a more peaceful and respectful relationship, without mentioning the fact that they seize the opportunity to "work on written language" – one of the project and the partners' goals.

9. See Santos (2009).

10. Note that we talk about a time when the webcams were not as common as they are today.

Another kind of difficulty often mentioned by the students is the fact that one of the partners is a beginner in the foreign language. However, in these cases too, it is possible to observe that the partners may overcome this kind of obstacle:

- (19) [She] began to learn French this year. That's why she never spoke French. But the last time we talked, she spoke French. It was simple but interesting questions. I helped her the same way she helped me with Portuguese (What is your name? When is your birthday?). (HT)

Contrary to what one might imagine, the fact that both the partners were beginners did not generate the failure of the partnership, for they both knew how to build a relationship that allowed each one to do her first steps in the other's language.

At this point, it should be noted that this ability to overcome the obstacles is more frequent among students who are more mature, a maturity that may be the fruit of the level of studies or of the age:

- (20) Second-year student in a professional Master's degree program, I am not a schoolchild anymore, but a worker in continuing education. (...) This position allowed me to help my partner and to be more confident (...) in any case, I tried to encourage her the best I could. (NP)

Likewise, some students may be more mature due to their international or intercultural experience:

- (21) I (...) was born in France and (...) I spent most of my childhood and my adolescence in Portugal. (...) Having lived in both countries, I knew the difficulties that we can have to face when learning another culture. (AD)

Nevertheless, this maturity can also be a consequence of the partner's professional experience:

- (22) She knew exactly how to help me, because, being a teacher, she knew the methods to show a foreign language. (JA)

In these last three examples, the partner's biographies are presented from a very positive perspective, which shows the good relationship

between them. These positive biographical elements allow the students not only to understand their own difficulties, but also – and mainly – the other’s difficulties: that is what allows them to overcome their obstacles.

However, this ability to overcome the problems may also come from the establishment of a close and trustful relationship between the partners:

(23) Me and M., we have a very good relationship. He is a very nice fellow, and he respects me. (...) He does everything to send me documentation and it is reciprocal. (...) I also help him to construct his sentences. (...) M. is a good partner, mature and patient. (FD)

This positive appreciation of her partner by FD, added to the mention about the reciprocal characteristic of the interaction explains why, from her point of view, they understand each other well: not only they help each other, but FD also sees her partner as a “mature and patient” person.

Of course, we should not overlook the possibility that two or more of these factors (level of studies, age, professional, intercultural or international background, a trustful and respectful relationship) may act in concert to help the partners to overcome the difficulties that they may encounter.

Besides, it is worth noting that our examples highlight a trap that the most experienced (or the most understanding, or the most flexible) individuals know how to avoid: the difficulty raised by the fact of assuming a position according to which the origin of all our problems lays in the others¹¹.

The analysis of the TTB functioning along the five years we have studied in this work allows us to perceive that the negative impact of the “partner’s behavior” on the decision of going on with the partnership or not have diminished over the years. If it is an important factor in the first year of the project, the same does not happen in the following

11. Regarding the individual factors that may influence the evolution of teletandem partnerships, see Vaz da Silva & Quaresma Figueiredo (in this issue) and their references.

years. In the first year, 37.3% of the evaluations were negative – 8 over 14 students having abandoned the project. On the other hand, during the four following years not one student abandoned the project, what undoubtedly explains the fact that, when we globally consider the set of the project and the partnership evaluations, the negative ones represent 14.5%, whereas the positive ones represent 76.9%.

4.4. *Identity, language and culture*

The set of elements analyzed so far has to be linked with the fact that the theme “Portugal” only occurs marginally (3.4% of the themes treated), contrary to what one might imagine, given that an important part (nearly a third) of the Lille 3 students are of Portuguese origin. However, we cannot forget that these students found themselves in front of Brazilian students they interacted with, as Brazilian, about Brazil, and who interacted with them, *as French*, about France – what obviously leaves little room to conversation about Portugal and Portuguese people.

These French students of Portuguese origin (generally third generation) present a relationship to Portugal and to the Portuguese culture that one could consider tenuous from the outside. However, their claimed Portuguese origin often makes them face a conflict: as French, they feel attracted by the Brazilian culture (cf. Lima-Pereira, 2010), while, as Portuguese descendants, they have a more ambiguous relationship with it (see Gomes, 1998 and Lisboa, 2008). However, these students’ relationships with their parents and grand-parents’ country is precisely the axis around which the relationship between the three cultures is built. So, for the French students, practicing Portuguese may have a double function: (i) to be a marker of individual identity, when France is considered; and (ii) to be a collective and affective marker, when Portugal is considered. The following statement, that we heard more than once, illustrates this point: “I was born in France, I don’t speak Portuguese, but I *am* Portuguese” – whether pronounced in Portuguese or in French. As indicated by Rey & Van den Avenne (1998: 123), “the language may be lived as a marker of identity, but the affirmation of identity does not necessarily go along with the practice of this language. So we must make a clear distinction between the

practice of a language and the relationship to this same language, which coincides with the connection with the country of origin”.

In this sense, we can say that the more successful interactions take place between the ones who maintain an appeased relationship with their own identity, whether French, Portuguese or Brazilian. Being Portuguese may mean, to some, having ambiguous feelings towards Brazil – feelings that are provoked, for example, by Brazil being a former colony that has economically supplanted its metropolis. Concerning the Brazilian participants, it is possible to make the hypothesis that being Brazilian may mean to have mixed feelings toward Portugal and France. These feelings may be made of superiority (towards Portugal, for reasons similar to those just mentioned¹²), and of inferiority (towards France, giving its situation of a developed country, that reminds Brazilians that their country does not belong to the group of developed countries¹³ yet).

But these considerations have to be examined in the light of at least two other elements. First, the fact that we have a small corpus (15 comments in total about Portugal). Secondly, the fact that 72% of the positive comments were produced by the same student, AD, who was born in France, spent most of her childhood and adolescence in Portugal and returned to France to go to University.

However, we should not forget that the importance of these comments lays on the relationship the Lille 3 students maintain with Portuguese culture, regardless of their knowledge/ mastery of Portuguese language.

12. As shown by the impact, in both countries, of the article “Portugal and Brazil: role reversal”, published by the *Financial Times* in March 25th, 2011. Using economic indicators from both countries, Edward Hadas (a *FT*’s economic editorialist) suggest, not without irony, that Brazil annexes Portugal in order to solve the economic problems of the European country (see Hadas, 2011a). To an interview (on video) of Edward Hadas, titled “Brazil to annex Portugal?”, see Hadas (2011b).

13. See Schiltz (2007).

Final remarks

In prior work (Santos, 2009: 155), we noticed that “the pragmatic aspects of the interaction¹⁴ (and mainly those of the interaction at a distance) are those that may present the higher levels of difficulty to the learners”. In this respect, we can see that the interactions between two students that are not beginners may be very profitable, for these students can go far beyond the purely linguistic aspects of the interaction, and make it to be the place for a real cultural encounter¹⁵. In other words, this may be not only the opportunity to learn interactive strategies that are different from those of one’s own culture, but it may also be the occasion to confront different ways of acting and thinking. Besides, it may be the opportunity to know (or to deepen the knowledge on) cultural elements like the customs and traditions of their partner’s country – without forgetting the possibility that some of the knowledge may be shared in certain fields (music, for instance, as we saw in the example (5)).

Concerning the cultural and identity representations, we could see that, to the French students who claim a Portuguese origin, the use of their parents’ language may function not only as an identity marker, from an individual perspective (in their relationship with France), but also as a collective and affective marker, from a group point of view (in their relationship with Portugal). Nevertheless, this claim for a Portuguese origin often makes them face a conflict. Due to that double cultural belonging, these students may develop ambivalent feelings towards Brazil, made of attraction (because they are French) and rivalry (because they are Portuguese). It seems to us, then, that only those who face their own cultural identity without any feeling of superiority or inferiority are able to maintain successful linguistic and cultural exchanges.

To conclude, it is worth noting that since we only outlined the contours of these questions, it would be interesting to go further. Going

14. For example, the management of styles and conversational turns.

15. We understand the notion of culture in its anthropological sense, that is, a social group’s ways of feeling, acting and thinking, besides its relationship to the nature, the human being, the technique and the artistic creation. In short, we are talking about the ways of living of the group considered.

deeper into the question could lead us to study at least another point besides the management of the conversation and its difficulties: the construction of cultural and identity representations in the interactions, for instance by the negotiation of meaning¹⁶. This kind of study would allow us to define more precisely the essential elements in this kind of partnership and their place in it.

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16. For the negotiation of meaning between different cultures in a teletandem situation, see, for example, Cappellini & Zhang (2013).

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