Artigos

"Going down the Tower of Babel" through telecollaboration in the context of Internationalization at Home

"Descendo a Torre de Babel" por meio da telecolaboração no contexto da Internacionalização em Casa

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ABSTRACT: Belli *et al.* (2018) explain that the myth of the Tower of Babel, described in the Holy Bible, alludes to the intercultural relations in today's world, because the Tower was located in a major economic and cultural center of the ancient world. Telecollaboration, defined as the use of online technologies in the area of language teaching and learning between students who are geographically distant (O'DOWD, 2013a), plays an important role in promoting intercultural interactions in the Internationalization at Home (O'DOWD, 2019) context. The latter stands for a more inclusive internationalization, achieved by domestic activities, and not only by international academic mobility (CROWTHER *et al.*, 2000). For Luna (2018b), the process of Internationalization of the Curriculum occurs in the light of the intercultural approach (KRAMSCH, 2014), whereas Gil (2016) argues that such approach should be conceptualized based on the

RESUMO: Belli *et al*. (2018) explicam que o mito da Torre de Babel, descrito na Bíblia Sagrada, alude às relações interculturais do mundo atual, pois a Torre estava localizada em um importante centro econômico e cultural do mundo antigo. A telecolaboração, definida como o uso de tecnologias *online* na área de ensino e aprendizagem de línguas entre alunos geograficamente distantes (O'DOWD, 2013a), cumpre um papel relevante na promoção de interações interculturais no contexto da Internacionalização em Casa (O'DOWD, 2019). Esta última representa uma internacionalização mais inclusiva, materializada por atividades domésticas, e não apenas pela mobilidade acadêmica internacional (CROWTHER *et al.,* 2000). Para Luna (2018b), o processo de Internacionalização do Currículo ocorre à luz da abordagem intercultural (KRAMSCH, 2014), ao passo que Gil (2016) defende que tal abordagem deve ser conceituada a partir da interação entre

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interaction between language and culture. This study aims at discussing how the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach can lead students "to go down the Tower of Babel" through telecollaborative activities in the context of Internationalization at Home. With respect to the results, two telecollaborative domestic actions, under the author's coordination, appear to indicate that there have been opportunities towards the process of "going down the tower", since many concerns related to the current world, e.g. cultural differences, stereotypes and the environment, where students can take both an insider and an outsider's perspective (KRAMSCH, 2011), are at the heart of the discussions.

língua e cultura. O presente estudo tem como objetivo discutir como a interação entre língua e cultura relacionada à abordagem intercultural pode levar os estudantes a "descerem a Torre de Babel" por meio de atividades telecolaborativas no contexto da Internacionalização em Casa. No que se refere aos resultados, duas ações telecolaborativas domésticas, sob a coordenação do autor, parecem indicar que têm havido oportunidades para o processo de "descida da torre", uma vez que muitas preocupações relacionadas com o mundo atual, por exemplo, diferenças culturais, estereótipos e o meio ambiente, em que os alunos podem assumir uma perspectiva tanto interna quanto externa (KRAMSCH, 2011), estão no centro das discussões.

KEYWORDS: Internationalization of the Curriculum. Internationalization at Home. Telecollaboration. Online teaching and learning of foreign language. Intercultural Competence.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Internacionalização do Currículo. Internacionalização em Casa. Telecolaboração. Ensino e aprendizagem de língua estrangeira *online*. Competência intercultural.

1 Initial considerations

According to Belli *et al.* (2018, p. 47), the internationalization of educational institutions "occurs through the internationalization of their curricula"[1] [2]. For Leask (2015, p. 9), "Internationalization of the curriculum is the process of incorporating international, intercultural and/ or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes", whereas for Knight (2004, p. 11), similar

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[1] All translations are mine.

[2] Original: "se dá pela internacionalização de seus currículos".

to Leask, it refers to "The process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery" of educational institutions.

Luna (2018a) explains that the number of students, including European and Nordic countries in general, who have the opportunity to participate in mobility programs, one of the strategies for the internationalization of an institution (BARANZELI; MOROSINI; WOICOLESCO, 2020), is rather unexpressive. As a way of covering more students, and assuming that the curriculum is the basis for internationalization, Luna (2018a, p. 7) argues that internationalization at home implies "the internationalization for all, not only for the students who left or would leave their school, their campus for a foreign institution"[3].

The term "Internationalization at Home" (henceforward IaH) was coined by Crowther *et al.* back in 2000 and also used by Nilsson in 2003. As students, after graduating, need to live and exert their profession in a globalized and intercultural world, the authors already stressed the need to work towards a more inclusive internationalization, that is, for everyone, and not only for international students. Converging with Luna (2018a), Crowther *et al.* (2000) assert that as internationalization can be achieved through activities in a domestic context – and not only through international academic mobility, therefore –, IaH contributes to the development of international, global and intercultural competence. A more recent definition of IaH is by Beelen and Jones (2015, p. 69), for whom it refers to "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments".

Belli *et al.* (2018) metaphorically relate Internationalization of the Curriculum (henceforward IoC) with the myth of the Tower of Babel. According to the Holy Bible, this tower was built by the descendants of Noah, tall enough to reach heaven, though

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[3] Original: "a internacionalização para todos, não apenas para os estudantes que saíram ou que sairiam da sua escola, do seu campus para uma instituição estrangeira".

such an enterprise had never been completed. The fact that there were different languages used by people at the time of the building prevented these people from understanding each other. The authors explain that this historical event alludes to the reality of today's intercultural relations, in the sense that the Tower of Babel was located in a major economic and cultural center of the ancient world, the Babylonian Empire, which provided the meeting of people from different parts of the globe. Considering that only one language was used for communication at the beginning of the Tower building, Belli *et al.* (2018, p. 46) claim that the myth in question "feeds a desire not that we all have a common language, which would be impossible, but to be autonomous subjects in the formation of our being, respecting and coexisting peacefully towards the common good"[4]. The authors go on to say that activities developed in the internationalization context can serve as a guidance for "going down the Tower of Babel"[5] (p. 51), where "an investigative stance that stems from nonconformity with universalizing knowledge and excluding monocultural practices"[6] (p. 51) can be facilitated.

Schaefer, Heemann and Belli (2017, p. 239) point out that telecollaboration, defined by O'Dowd (2013a) as the use of online technologies in the context of language teaching and learning between students who are geographically dispersed, is "an instrument of connection with the world, capable of fostering intercultural encounters between students participating in academic mobility programs"[7]. By the same token, O'Dowd (2019), Heemann, Schaefer and Sequeira (2020) claim that telecollaboration has a significant role in promoting IaH.

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[4] Original: "alimenta um desejo não de termos todos/as uma língua em comum, o que seria impossível, mas de sermos sujeitos autônomos na conformação de nosso ser, respeitando-nos e convivendo pacificamente em função do bem comum".

[5] Original: "a descida da Torre de Babel".

[6] Original: "uma postura investigativa que emerge do inconformismo com saberes universalizantes e práticas monoculturais excludentes".

[7] Original: "um instrumento de conexão com o mundo, capaz de promover encontros interculturais entre os estudantes participantes de programas de mobilidade acadêmica".

The process of IoC, according to Luna (2018b), takes place through the intercultural approach (KRAMSCH, 1993, 1998, 2005, 2006, 2011, 2013, 2014; BYRAM, 1997; BYRAM; GRIBKOVA; STARKEY, 2002; KRAMSCH; WHITESIDE, 2015; GIL, 2016; LUNA, 2018b). As stated by Gil (2016), such an approach can be conceptualized through the interaction between language and culture, which allows students to actively engage themselves in the process of meaning-makings. Having said that, this study aims at discussing how the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach can lead students "to go down the Tower of Babel" through telecollaborative activities in the context of Internationalization at Home.

This text is divided into five sections. The first focused on the objective as well as on a brief contextualization as regards this study. The second section, in turn, concentrates on telecollaborative activities, while the third section addresses some theoretical contributions on the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach. Next, the spotlight will fall on two actions that seem to have been facilitating the process of "going down the tower". The final section presents considerations and offers suggestions for further practice and research.

2 Telecollaborative activities

Kramsch (2014) feels that the context of language teaching and learning has drastically changed in recent years, and this as a result of the intercultural relations in the globalized world. To define the concept of globalization, the author draws on Blommaert (2010, p. 13), who defines it as a "shorthand for the intensified flows of capital, goods, people, images and discourses around the globe, driven by technological innovations mainly in the field of media and information and communication technology". In the wake of that change, telecollaborative activities "have increased students' access to real native speakers in real cultural environments" (KRAMSCH, 2014, p. 296).

The term telecollaboration was created by Mark Warschauer (1996) in his publication Telecollaboration and the Foreign Language Learner, and in 2003 a special edition of the journal Language Learning & Technology was dedicated to this then emerging area. Telecollaboration was seen by students, Warschauer (1996) and other scholars as a facilitator of language learning, since various methodological procedures were being used in a number of ways and proved to be adaptable to different pedagogical objectives and learning contexts.

For O'Dowd (2019), through telecollaboration, which has established a strong presence in the context of language teaching and learning over recent decades, groups of students participate, for a certain period of time, in intercultural interaction with partners from other cultural contexts, for example, other countries or regions of the same country. O'Dowd (2013a) goes on to say that telecollaborative activities have the potential to develop foreign language skills and intercultural competence.

Belz (2007) explains that telecollaboration can be characterized as ethnographic, dialogic and critical. Ethnographic because learners can observe, analyze and interpret the behavior of their online partners. Dialogic in the sense that learners' utterances arise out of interaction with others. Finally, critical since "learners are not passive receptacles of received knowledge (i.e. a facts-and-figures approach to culture learning), but rather active participants in a dynamic process of knowledge construction" (p. 138).

3 The relationship between language and culture related to the intercultural approach[8]

Agar (1994) argues that utterances produced by users of a language are historically and culturally determined. Because of that, the foreign language area

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[8] It is worth explaining that, in the present study, part of the theoretical contributions on the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach was taken from my PhD dissertation (SCHAEFER, 2019a).

should not be only limited to teaching formal aspects of language, such as vocabulary, grammar, phonetics and morphology, but it should also deal with cultural aspects. The author names "languaculture", or "language plus culture", the intrinsic relationship between language and culture.

Risager (2007, p. 166), in turn, identifies two positions regarding the relationship between language and culture: 1) "language as being closely linked to its culture" and; 2) "language as a communication tool". The first position is strictly linked to a national-romantic current or "a closed universe of language" (p. 166). Although language and culture are seen as intrinsically linked, this position does not harmonize with the idea that cultural boundaries in today's world are more fluid. Regarding the second position, language as a communication tool, language is conceived as not related to any respective culture, which means that culture is neutral. The author adds that this view "denies the culture-bearing and culture-creating potential of human languages" (p. 166).

With her poststructuralist view, Risager (2007) is critical of how Agar (1994) conceptualized languaculture, partly because it is implicit in this conceptualization the vision of *one language = one culture*. Actually, she questions some scholars who considered the semantic-pragmatic (e.g. AGAR, 1994) or poetic dimensions (e.g. FRIEDRICH, 1989) in this term, but did not address sociolinguistics research. In this sense, Risager (2007) proposes a systematic definition of languaculture. She maintains that the vision one has of language is important in order to conceptualize the relationship between language and culture. Thus, grounding on Vygotsky (1978), who argues that language is a tool for action and thought, she came with two different visions regarding this relationship: "linguistic practice" and "linguistic resources".

The first vision has to do with written texts and oral interactions that "take place between people in real time (RISAGER, 1997, p. 168). It can also be associated with paralinguistic features, such as gestures, tone and pitch of voice and body language.

Linguistic resources, the second vision, concerns the idea that the various linguistic resources that individuals use when they communicate are "developed as part of the biography of the subject" (p. 169), as they are carried out by individuals themselves.

Drawing on Risager (2007), it could be said that languaculture should not be viewed as separated from the students' cultural identities, since they bring their own life experience to the fore when they interact in telecollaborative activities. Seen in this light, languaculture implies that learning is a personal process, forming a coherent whole with the learner's history as a speaker, listener, reader and writer. This way, every time a text (oral or written) is produced, languaculture can bring teachers, researchers and telecollaborative practitioners to better understand students' utterances, essentialist views underlying their discourses, among others. In this vein, Kramsch (1998) claims that taking into consideration the relationship between language and culture as part of the students' individual biography plays a role in understanding how they co-construct meanings, which can make them see some cultural representations through different lenses.

Regarding telecollaborative activities, it is possible to say that looking beyond stereotyped cultural representations, gaining knowledge of other people's values and behaviors, respect for other cultures, adaptation to different contexts, openness to other viewpoints and personal desire to know other cultures are relevant aspects when it comes to the development of students' intercultural competence. For Byram (1997), this competence is related to the ability to use language in interactions with people from other cultures. He adds that for the development of intercultural competence it is paramount that students "elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents and events" (p. 53).

To conceptualize the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach, Byram (1997) proposes five components (or what he names *savoirs*) for the development of intercultural competence, namely: (1) attitudes (or

savoir être), which are related to a "willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviors, and to analyze them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging" (p. 34); (2) knowledge (or *savoirs*), referring to knowledge of other cultures and the self in social interactions; (3) skills of interpreting and relating (or *savoir comprendre*), that is, "the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (p. 61); (4) skills of discovering and interacting (or *savoir apprendre/faire*), meaning that it is necessary to have the ability to interpret documents or events of other cultures and relate them to her/his own cultural horizons; and (5) critical cultural awareness (or *savoir s'engager*), which stands for the examination and interpretation of cultural differences.

For Kramsch (1993), the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach presupposes the deconstruction of fixed representations as well as of world views in general. The author suggested four lines of thought for this approach:

(1) Establishing a sphere of interculturality. Kramsch argues that interculturality is not about teaching factual information, but about reflecting between "the self" and "the other".

(2) Teaching culture as an interpersonal process. The author makes clear that as meanings emerge through interaction with "the other", teachers should provide opportunities for understanding "otherness" instead of only dealing with cultural facts. This understanding of "otherness" meets Luna (2018b, p. 39), who asserts that the process of IoC should involve moments of "de-hierarchization of knowledge, based on the recognition and harnessing of the Other"[9].

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[9] Original: "deshierarquização dos saberes, pautado no reconhecimento e aproveitamento do Outro".

(3) Teaching culture as difference. For her, with the purpose of not reducing culture simply to national traits, there should be reflection upon aspects such as gender, age, regions and ethnic groups in the classroom.

(4) Crossing disciplinary boundaries. The author claims that it is necessary to extend readings beyond usual disciplines that are academically recognized for the teaching of culture, such as Sociology, Anthropology, Ethnography and Semiotics.

As stated by Kramsch, (1993), the reflection about the self and the other, made possible by these lines of thought, can lead to intercultural competence, which stands for "an awareness and a respect of difference, as well as the socio-affective capacity to see oneself through the eyes of others" (KRAMSCH, 2005, p. 553).

In 1993, Kramsch coined the term *the third place*, that is, a hybrid space where a constant mediation between different cultures occurs. At the third place, such a mediation can help students to decenter themselves from cultural representations. More recently, Kramsch (2011, p. 354-355) defined third place as "a sphere of interculturality that enables language students to take an insider's view as well as an outsider's view" regarding cultural representations.

Kramsch (e.g. 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2014) and Kramsch and Whiteside (e.g. 2008; 2015) have been questioning Kramsch's (1993) concept of the third place, because cultural boundaries have proved to be more fluid in today's world. Kramsch (2011) suggests that "the notion of Third Culture must be seen less as a PLACE than as a symbolic PROCESS of meaning-making (p. 355). Beyond the metaphor of the third place, Kramsch (2011) claims that it is necessary to recognize a symbolic dimension that pervades the process of meaning-making in interaction, as it helps in understanding others. For Kramsch (2009a, p. 7), the meaning of symbolic is linked "not only to *representations* of people and objects in the world but to the *construction* of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, and values through the use of symbolic forms".

Thus, instead of the third place, Kramsch (2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2014) and Kramsch and Whiteside (2008, 2015) have proposed the conceptualization of the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach through the term symbolic competence[10]. It seems that the main reason why the authors have reconceptualized the third place metaphor concerns the fact that such place may suggest fixed and homogeneous spaces between cultures (e.g. "my culture" x "your culture"). Kramsch (2011) herself states that this term, besides being deeply rooted in a vision of nation-state and its institutions, is reinforced by a modernist perspective of culture as part of a common history, language and imaginings.

Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) argue for a symbolic competence at the core of the intercultural approach. For the authors, such a competence can be defined as "the ability not only to approximate or appropriate to oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used" (p. 664) as well as a "mindset that can create relationships of possibility" (p. 668). Kramsch (2011, p. 359) makes it clear that symbolic competence is not only the ability to question cultural essentialisms, but also "to resignify them, reframe them", and adds that for the construction of symbolic competence it is essential "to recognize the historical context of utterances and their intertextualities, to question established categories like *German, American, man, woman, White, Black* and place them in their historical and subjective contexts" (p. 359).

For Kramsch (2011, p. 357), there are three key dimensions of symbolic competence that permeate intercultural interactions. The first of them is called symbolic representation, which places emphasis "on what words say and what they reveal about the mind" (p. 357). The second dimension, symbolic action, draws

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[10] Müller-Hartmann and Kurek (2016) state that symbolic competence (KRAMSCH, 2006, 2009a, 2009b 2011, 2014; KRAMSCH; WHITESIDE, 2008, 2015) can be deemed as an extension of Byram's (1997) intercultural model, since it provides special attention to the complex and multifaceted reality of intercultural encounters in today's world.

attention to "what words do" (p. 357) as well as to people's intentions that can be revealed through the use of specific words. Finally, the third dimension, symbolic power, focuses on what words "reveal about social identities, individual and collective memories, emotions and aspirations" (p. 357).

Vinall (2016, p. 4-5), by drawing on Kramsch's (2011) conceptualization of symbolic competence as well as from her three core dimensions as presented above, developed three specific features of this competence: 1) relationality; 2) transgression, and; 3) potentiality. Relationality is linked to the idea that meaning does not lie, for example, only in one text, in a single person or in a single modality (e.g. written language and images), but rather "in the relations, reframings, and dialogues that emerge between them" (p. 4). Transgression, the second feature, means that it is necessary to have language learners reflect upon themselves, worldviews in general and the language through which they produce utterances. To put it another way, transgression involves problematization and development of a critical attitude with respect to hegemonic thinking and cultural stereotypes. Finally, potentiality is connected with the view that meaning "points to the potential for another [meaning], in what becomes an endless process of resignification, recontextualization, and reframing" (p. 5).

It could be claimed that symbolic competence, made possible by contestation in telecollaborative activities, has the potential to engage students in reflections, which can help them recognize the intertextualities underlying their utterances and place them in their historical contexts. Besides that, such competence can lead them to resignify, reframe, and (re)contextualize cultural essentialisms by playing with the tension between text and context. In this regard, Belli *et al.* (2018, p. 51) stressed earlier that intercultural meetings in the context of IoC should be based on "an investigative

stance that stems from nonconformity with universalizing knowledge and excluding monocultural practices"[11].

Converging with the notions of symbolic competence previously presented, Luna (2018b) contends that hegemonic thinking can be fought through two sociological procedures, initially theorized by Santos (2002): (1) the sociology of absences and; (2) the sociology of emergencies. Luna (2018b, p. 35) explains that for the sociology of absences "the absences, in principle and in practice, can be transformed into presences in the classroom"[12], as well as in the teaching plan of the various disciplines of the curriculum. One way to deal with the absences, according to him, is through questioning and non-conformity regarding monocultural practices, which tend to reduce the multifaceted character of knowledge to a single paradigm. The sociology of emergencies, in turn, suggests the "investigation of concrete alternatives for the future (...) that have the capacity and possibilities to expand knowledge, the practices and the subjects involved in them"[13] (LUNA, 2018b, p. 35).

It is possible to incorporate into telecollaborative activities everything that, traditionally, has been deemed to be marginal or "non-existent" (sociology of absences) in the curriculum. Besides that, expanding the possibilities of interpretation concerning the same phenomenon (sociology of emergencies) is also of paramount importance. For this to be possible, the following Kramsch's (2009b, p. 117-118) questions, actually suggested for the development of symbolic competence, can be useful: "Who is speaking, for whose benefit, within which frame, on which timescale, to achieve what effects? What are the ideological value and the historical density of words?".

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[11] Original: "uma postura investigativa que emerge do inconformismo com saberes universalizantes e práticas monoculturais excludentes".

[12] Original: "as ausências, em princípio e na prática, podem ser transformadas em presenças na sala de aula".

[13] Original: "investigação das alternativas concretas de futuro (...) que têm capacidade e possibilidades de ampliação dos conhecimentos, das práticas e dos sujeitos nelas envolvidos".

In keeping with the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach seen so far, Belli *et al.* (2018) state that IoC can lead to global citizenship. Luna (2018b, p. 41) defines global citizen as someone who "knows the world, even without leaving her/his school, her/his campus, as regards its linguistic-cultural manifestations"[14]. For Clifford (2018, p. 15), the concept of global citizen has to do with people "who become involved in global issues, at the local, national or international level, and understand that the world is interdependent, that every action we take, every decision we make, affects other people". Leask (2015), in turn, makes clear that IoC addresses characteristic themes of the globalized world such as those previously mentioned by Clifford (2018), enabling the development of a professional future committed not only to the community where she/he lives, but also to global issues.

From the aforementioned authors' perspective, it could be claimed that global citizenship has the potential to encourage the sociology of emergencies (SANTOS, 2002; LUNA, 2018b) through moments of reflection upon the role of students as citizens in telecollaborative activities. For instance, discussions on the responsibility for their own actions, indignation with social injustice, cultural differences and essentialisms, environmental sustainability and ethnic-racial issues (OXFAM, 2006) can be promoted.

In the following section, I will discuss how two "IaH actions", which are conducted under my coordination and supported by the literature concerning the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach previously presented, seem to be playing a part towards the process of "going down the tower". The first action relates to a telecollaborative project in which I was a

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[14] Original: "conhece o mundo, mesmo sem sair da sua escola, do seu *campus*, em suas manifestações linguístico-culturais".

teacher-mediator[15], whereas the second involves three ongoing telecollaborative projects.

4 Two actions towards the process of "going down the Tower of Babel"

The first action to be described refers to the telecollaborative project *Teletandem Brasil: foreign languages for all* (TTB)[16] [17] (TELLES; VASSALLO, 2006; TELLES, 2015a, 2015b). Created in 2006, it allows college students from Brazil to interact with college students from other countries. In this project, between September and December 2016, I was the teacher-mediator[18] [19] [20] of a group of 8 students from a state university in Brazil, where TTB is developed. Such students interacted with a group of 8 students from a university in the United States.

The telecollaborative activities in TTB can be either institutionally "integrated" or "non-integrated" (ARANHA; CAVALARI, 2015; LEONE; TELLES, 2016). Integrated teletandem sessions "are embedded in regular foreign language lessons" (ARANHA; CAVALARI, 2015, p. 763). Non-integrated teletandem sessions, on the other hand, take place more autonomously, are characterized as extra-curricular activities and are not part of classroom contents (LEONE; TELLES, 2016). Having said

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[15] I will present the meaning of "teacher-mediator" at the beginning of the next section.

[16] For Telles (2015a, p. 604), teletandem is "a mode of telecollaboration - a virtual, collaborative and autonomous context for learning foreign languages in which two students help each other to learn their own languages (or language of proficiency)".

[17] See http://www.teletandembrasil.org/ for further information on TTB.

[18] For Rocha and Lima (2009. p. 240), the teacher-mediator's role in the teletandem context is, in addition to "trimming the edges and preventing disinterest, misunderstandings and cultural clashes from happening between the interactants", to mediate the contact between Brazilians and foreigners. Original: "aparar as arestas e evitar que ocorra desinteresse, mal-entendidos e choques culturais entre os interagentes".

[19] I was actually "a teacher-mediator researcher", since I collected data for my PhD investigation (SCHAEFER, 2019a).

[20] Mediation sessions (SALOMÃO, 2012; TELLES, 2015b, LEONE; TELLES, 2016; LOPES; FRESCHI, 2016; SCHAEFER, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b), that is, moments that happen after the online sessions, are essential for facilitating, according to Lopes and Freschi (2016), instances of further reflection. Salomão (2012) adds that mediation sessions are an opportunity for the narration of experiences by those who experienced them, that is, the participants themselves.

that, it is important to mention that the teletandem activities that will be hereinafter presented were institutionally non-integrated, which means that they were not integrated into a specific course or discipline, and the participants were undergraduate students of different courses, e.g. Psychology, *Letras*[21] and Nursing.

The three[22] [23] [24] excerpts that will be analyzed[25] below were taken from one experience report and two semi-structured interviews. Through experience reports via Google Forms[26], Rodolfo[27] and Clementina[28], the participants[29] [30] [31] of the Brazilian University (BU), had the opportunity to submit personal impressions regarding their weekly telecollaborative interactions that took place on Zoom[32], with, respectively, Amelia[33] and Evelyn[34], the participants[35] of the American University (AU). Rodolfo

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[21] Language Arts.

[22] Excerpts 2 and 3 were taken from my PhD research (SCHAEFER, 2019a).

[23] The data used in this qualitative study (DÖRNYEI, 2007) are from a research project duly approved by Research Ethics Committee of Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa com Seres Humanos - CEPSH-UFSC) with the Approval Number 1.762.956. CAAE: 56955216.8.0000.0121.

[24] I translated the excerpts from Portuguese to English, upon which I take full responsibility. I make the originals in Portuguese available as footnotes.

[25] For Dörnyei (2007, p. 38), the findings, in qualitative research, are "ultimately the product of the researcher's subjective interpretation of the data". In fact, the data collected underwent a long process of interpretation and reflection.

[26] On Google Forms, it is possible to create virtual forms, e.g. open-ended, multiple choice and evaluation questions.

[27] Rodolfo, a Brazilian 21-year-old learner of English at the time of the data collection, was an undergraduate nursing student.

[28] Clementina, a Brazilian 27-year-old learner of English at the time of the data collection, held a degree in Letras (Language Arts) with certification as a teacher of English.

[29] Fictitious names in order to safeguard the participants' identity.

[30] For ethical issues, a consent form (Free and Informed Consent Term) was signed by these participants.

[31] In relation to the 8 students of the BU, I included in this study data only from Rodolfo and Clementina.

[32] Zoom combines online meeting, videoconferencing and mobile collaboration. It also provides cloud-based video communication.

[33] Amelia, an American 19-year-old learner of Portuguese at the time of the data collection, was an undergraduate Justice and Peace student.

[34] Evelyn, an American 27-year-old learner of Portuguese at the time of the data collection, was pursuing her Master's degree in International Development.

[35] Fictitious names in order to safeguard the participants' identity, though I did not include in this study data from any of the 8 participants of the AU.

and Clementina also participated in interviews[36], through which I could better understand what they had addressed in their experience reports. Next, I will present some discursive analyzes[37] on the basis of Rodolfo's and Clementina's narratives.

In the interview, Rodolfo was invited to talk about his experience regarding the telecollaborative sessions with Amelia up to that moment. Excerpt 1 below shows the former's favorable opinions:

1. Researcher: What is your opinion about your participation in the teletandem sessions?

2. Rodolfo: One hundred percent productive [...] it's been unbelievable because... Amelia has been teaching me a great deal... and I guess the same in relation to her.

3. Researcher: Ahm.

4. Rodolfo: And… to me teletandem is a way of participating in an exchange program without leaving home.

5. Researcher: Ahm.

6. Rodolfo: Like... and as I am in the process of learning the language, I have seen a lot of results mainly regarding ((name of the AU where Amelia was interacting)) because I can see that the conversation flows you know?

7. Researcher: Ahm. *(Excerpt 1 / semi-structured interview / Rodolfo and the researcher, 07/11/2016 / my translation from Portuguese[38])*

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[36] The interviews were audio-recorded.

[37] For Fairclough (2003, p. 2), discourse analyzes are based on the "assumption that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life (…) this means that one productive way of doing social research is through a focus on language, using some form of discourse analysis".

[38] Original:

"1. Researcher: Como é para você participar das sessões de teletandem?

2. Rodolfo: Cem por cento produtivo [...] está sendo inacreditável porque... a Amelia ta me ensinando muito... e eu acredito que o mesmo com ela.

3. Researcher: Ahm.

4. Rodolfo: E… pra mim o teletandem ta sendo uma forma de fazer um intercâmbio sem sair de casa.

5. Researcher: Ahm.

6. Rodolfo: É... e como eu to no processo de aprendizado do idioma eu to vendo muito resultado principalmente com ((name of the AU where Amelia was interacting)) porque eu vejo que é uma conversa que flui sabe?

7. Researcher: Ahm."

In turn (2), Rodolfo explained that his partner was helping him to learn English. This meets Telles (2015a), for whom interactants in teletandem can teach each other their native language (or another language, for example, language of proficiency). Schaefer and Sehnem (2019), on their turn, claim that telecollaboration provides a meaningful practice of the foreign language that students are learning, while O'Dowd (2013a) stresses that telecollaborative activities can play a role in foreign language learning.

In turn (4), Rodolfo claimed that the telecollaborative activities were being "a way of participating in an exchange program without leaving home". Indeed, in line with Crowther *et al.* (2000), IoC can materialize in a domestic context. It is therefore possible to see how such activities were facilitating the integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the informal curriculum (BEELEN; JONES, 2015), or, in keeping with Aranha and Cavalari (2015) and Leone and Telles (2016), into the non-integrated teletandem activities.

The following excerpt from the experience report illustrates how Rodolfo emphasized the fact that the telecollaborative sessions made it possible to discuss different points of view:

> We talked about several topics in our interactions and topics which generated a great deal of debate between her and me, and I really like this, because it allows for knowledge of different viewpoints, because I have a vision and she has another one in my opinion. *(Excerpt 2 / Rodolfo's experience report / 03-11-2016 / my translation from Portuguese[39])*

Similarly, Excerpt 3 below depicts how the telecollaborative sessions were significant for Clementina, and this was in response to the researcher's question about

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[39] Original: "Falamos vários assuntos em nossas interações e assuntos que deram um bom resultado de debate entre eu e ela, uma coisa que eu gosto muito, pois visa o conhecimento de diferentes olhares, pois eu tenho uma visão e ela tem outra em minha opinião".

how this participant had been evaluating her experience in the telecollaborative activities:

> Ah they ((the teletandem sessions)) are very useful in general [...] at the time I started ((previous teletandem experiences)) I regarded them as a way of improving my English which was far worse than now ((smiling)) but now it's also an exchange of culture of knowledge ah... in some ((teletandem)) interactions I come and I leave very different [...] it makes me different in some ways like it transforms me and I find it very enriching. *(Excerpt 3 / semi-structured interview / Clementina and the researcher / 08-11-2016 / my translation from Portuguese[40])*

Based on what Rodolfo reported in Excerpt 2 and what Clementina explained in Excerpt 3, it can be said that the telecollaborative sessions offered an opportunity for developing the discovery and interaction skills (BYRAM, 1997) of these participants with their respective online partners, as well as for the exchange of different points of view (KRAMSCH, 1993; BYRAM, 1997; BYRAM; GRIBKOVA; STARKE, 2002; O'DOWD, 2013a). Moreover, Rodolfo pointed out that such sessions were favoring moments of debate with Amelia, while Clementina emphasized that she was able to participate in a process of cultural and knowledge exchange, in this case, with her partner Evelyn. This converges with Benedetti (2010, p. 49), in the sense that language learners in teletandem sessions "find fertile ground for the comparison between the languages and the cultures"[41], which could eventually facilitate the development of intercultural competence.

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[40] Original: "Ah são ((the teletandem sessions)) muito proveitosas no geral [...] na época que eu comecei ((previous teletandem experiences)) era mais por questão de tentar melhorar meu inglês que era muito pior que hoje ((smiling)) mas hoje também é uma troca de cultura de conhecimento é... tem ((teletandem)) interações aqui que eu chego e saio muito diferente [...] me faz diferente de alguma forma assim me transforma e eu acho isso muito enriquecedor."

[41] Original: "encuentra tierra fértil para la comparación entre las lenguas y las culturas".

From Excerpts 1, 2 and 3, one could say that the telecollaborative activities in the project TTB proved to be a valuable opportunity for not only the oral practice of a foreign language, but also the dialogue related to different subjects, which seems to have favored, albeit very timidly, initial steps towards the process of "going down the tower". As stated by Helm (2016, p. 153), through the intercultural dialogue "participants explore identities and difference, personal experience and emotions, which contributes to awareness of self and others", or, in keeping with Luna (2018b, p. 39), to the "recognition and harnessing of the Other"[42]. In the same vein, Kramsch (1993) highlights that cultural representations must be negotiated through the dialogue between the "self and "the other".

The second action to be described, which also aims to promote the process of "going down the tower", refers to the telecollaborative projects *English Conversation Club*, *Club de Conversación en Español*[43] and *Percepções de Aprendizes de línguas do IFC sobre atividades telecolaborativas e Contação de Histórias Digitais*[44].

At *Instituto Federal Catarinense*[45] (IFC), I teach the discipline *English for Specific Purposes*[46], which has approximately 20 students each semester, in the 30-hour course *Computer Network Technology*[47]. This course, according to its 2018 political-pedagogical project, aims to prepare professionals who have "a qualified practical and theoretical vision and the capacity to work on the development, implantation, management and maintenance of logical and physical projects of local or long-distance networks"[48] (p. 12).

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[42] Original: "reconhecimento e aproveitamento do Outro".

[43] Spanish Conversation Club.

[44] Perceptions of IFC Language Learners about Telecollaborative Activities and Digital Stories.

[45] Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology (IF).

[46] *Inglês Instrumental*.

[47] *Tecnologia de Redes de Computadores* (REDES).

[48] Original: "uma visão prática e teórica qualificada e com capacidade de atuarem na elaboração, implantação, gerenciamento e manutenção de projetos lógicos e físicos de redes locais ou de longas distâncias".

The topics of the discipline in question is as follows: fundamental strategies for reading and textual comprehension in English / technical vocabulary in the area of *Computer Network Technology* / semantics and syntactics of English / reading scientific and didactic texts in the area of *Computer Network Technology*.

For the presentation of the projects further along, I drew on Leask's (2015) five-stage model for the process of IoC, namely: (1) *review and reflect*, where it is discussed the extent to which an institution's curriculum is internationalized; (2) *imagine*, implying the search for other ways of thinking and acting, that is, imagining to allow new possibilities; (3) *revise and plan*, when there is a focus on the necessary changes to an internationalized curriculum; (4) *act*, that is, the implementation of the plan to make the curriculum internationalized and; (5) *evaluate*, the discussion on the outcomes obtained from the implementation.

Initially, I reflected on the degree of IoC in relation to the topics in the discipline *English for Specific Purposes*, which enabled me to realize that the latter does not cover indicatives of IoC in the light of the theoretical contributions on the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach previously discussed. Then, I imagined possibilities to make the curriculum internationalized, and I ended up choosing telecollaborative activities, since they provide the online contact between people from different cultures (O'DOWD, 2013a). Afterwards, I planned my actions with regard to the way in which such activities would be implemented, prompting me to select the ones that encourage the intercultural dialogue (BELZ, 2007; HELM, 2015, 2016).

In the next paragraphs, I will mainly concentrate on the fourth stage suggested by Leask (2015), that is, the implementation (*act*) of the projects, even though I will also address, very briefly, some preliminary evaluations, bearing in mind that these projects are in progress.

The 1-hour weekly telecollaborative meetings of the extension project *English Conversation Club* have the objective of bringing the participants (not only students of the discipline *English for Specific Purposes*, but also people from the external community in general), while practicing their speaking skills, to broaden their intercultural perspectives as well as to expand knowledge, which corroborates the concept of sociology of emergencies (SANTOS, 2002; LUNA, 2018b). The same goes for the project *Club de Conversación en Español*, in which both students of the discipline in question, who are interested in learning Spanish in addition to English, as well as the external public (people from Brusque community and neighboring cities, different states of Brazil and other countries) participate. Moreover, these projects aim to work on the development of the interaction (BYRAM, 1997) of Brazilian participants with people from other cultures and to facilitate "a sphere of interculturality" (KRAMSCH, 1993, 2011) through dialogue.

In 2019, these telecollaborative activities took place in person at IFC, and both the foreign participants and the Brazilians who lived far from the campus interacted on Zoom. In 2020, due to the suspension of face-to-face school activities in order to prevent the spread and proliferation of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), such telecollaborative exchanges have been occurring solely through Google Meet[49].

In the activities, participants from Brazil and other countries, such as Spain, England, Paraguay, the United States, Mexico and Canada, can discuss different topics suggested by the coordinator. For instance, the topic chosen in one of the meetings was *the meat industry*. According to the article *Reduza seu consumo de carne*[50] (Reduce your meat consumption), published on the Greenpeace's website (*greenpeace.com*), meat production "is responsible for the emission of polluting gases and accelerates the

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[49] Google Meet refers to a video communication service developed by Google.
[50] See https://www.greenpeace.org/brasil/participe/reduza-seu-consumo-de-carne/

effects of global warming"[51]. In another meeting, the participants discussed the challenges involved in *climate change*, in which first they said whether they agreed or not with statements such as *climate change is not caused by human activity*, *global warming is primarily driven by human activity* and *developed countries are more responsible for the damage done to the climate than the emerging countries*. After that, they explained the reasons why they agreed or not with these statements, which paved the way for the exchange of different points of view (KRAMSCH, 1993, 2011). As stated by Leask (2015), Clifford (2018), Belli *et al.* (2018) and Luna (2018b), issues revolving around environmental concerns can contribute to the development of global citizenship.

Another topic discussed was *cultural stereotypes*. The following questions, among others, were raised: *where do you think most of the stereotypes come from?*; *what are the most common stereotypes about your country? and; how do you think stereotypes are transmitted?*. Indeed, Byram, Gribova and Starkey (2002) recommend that it is necessary, in intercultural relations though dialogue, to focus on issues related to the creation and maintenance of cultural stereotypes. When seen as "transgression", one of the features of symbolic competence by Vinall (2016), the participants have been able to reflect not online upon fixed cultural representations, but also "excluding monocultural practices"[52] (BELLI *et al.*, 2018, p. 51). In addition, stereotyped representations are problematized, where a constant mediation between different viewpoints has been taking place at the third place (KRAMSCH, 2011).

The research project *Percepções de Aprendizes de línguas do IFC sobre atividades telecolaborativas e Contação de Histórias Digitais* brings with it the idea of promoting the contact between students of the discipline *English for Specific Purposes* and other English speakers. More specifically, it aims to analyze the perceptions of the former in relation to their participation (a) in telecollaborative activities, where they interact in

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[51] Original: "é responsável pela emissão de gases poluentes e acelera os efeitos do aquecimento global".
[52] Original: "práticas monoculturais excludentes".

English and in Portuguese with speakers of English from other countries on the application Tandem[53] Language Exchange[54] [55] and; (b) in the creation of digital stories[56], through which they can share how their experience in the application in question was like.

The students write experience reports on a weekly basis and participate in interviews, besides being engaged in dialogues in the classroom or, more recently, on Google Meet, to discuss their experience in the proposed activities, which scholars such as Telles (2015b), Lopes and Freschi (2016) and Schaefer (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b) call *mediation sessions*. Such sessions relate to moments when the teacher-mediator can encourage reflections on different cultural representations as well as on the development of the activities in general. This way, in terms of symbolic competence, these sessions have been an arena for "relationships of possibility" (KRAMSCH; WHITESIDE, 2008, p. 668) with regard to the issues discussed, in which, linking back to Luna's (2018b, p. 35) conceptualization of sociology of emergencies, there have been "possibilities of expanding knowledge"[57].

The three aforementioned projects, conducted from the perspective of the theoretical contributions on the relationship between language and culture related to the intercultural approach, appear to have made possible initial steps towards the

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[53] Tandem, which is related to an autonomous virtual mode of foreign language learning where two students learn each other's language (BRAMMERTS, 1996), is a specific example of telecollaboration (TELLES, 2015a; SCHAEFER, 2019a 2019b, 2020a, 2020b). Brammerts (1996, p. 10) underlines that learning foreign languages in tandem involves two people of different languages working in partnership "to learn more about one another's character and culture, to help one another improve their language skills, and often also to exchange additional knowledge for example, about their professional life".

[54] This application is available at https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=net.tandem&hl=pt

[55] The general idea underlying the interactions in this application is as follows: *we talk about different subjects while I teach you my language and, in return, you teach yours to me or one you are proficient in*.

[56] Digital storytelling, according to Castañeda (2013, p. 45), can be defined as "the practice of combining multiple modes of technology, such as photographs, text, music, audio narration, and video clips, to produce a compelling, emotional, and in-depth story".

[57] Original: "possibilidades de ampliação dos conhecimentos'.

process of "going down the tower". This is because there have been discussions on cultural essentialisms, hegemonic thinking, issues related to contemporary societies, such as manifestations of prejudice, inclusion and cultural diversity, ethnic-racial differences and various forms of discrimination – for example, religious beliefs, gender and sexual orientation. In this process, Kramsch's (2011, p. 364) recommendations for the development of symbolic competence have also been of utmost importance:

> (1) Use communicative activities as food for reflection on the nature of language, discourse, communication and mediation; (2) pay attention to what remains unsaid, or may even be unsayable because it is politically incorrect or disturbing; (3) bring up every opportunity to show complexity and ambiguity; (4) engage the students' emotions, not just their cognition.

In short, these ongoing projects have been fostering the dialogue about, in line with Byram (1997) and Byram *et al.* (2016), diverse cultural values, stereotypes and worldviews, in addition to reflections on local and global issues – aspects necessary for the development of a global citizen (LEASK, 2015; CLIFFORD, 2018; BELLI *et al.* 2018) – , preparing the ground for the fight against monocultural practices.

5 Final remarks

For Kramsch (2014), the process of globalization has given rise to considerable concerns by scholars, as this process produces substantial changes in terms of how people behave, think and learn. In the wake of these changes, Kramsch warns that students' interaction in virtual environments often create and reinforce stereotypes and, in addition, hide cultural differences. In view of this reality, considering that "language education are at the forefront of those concerns" (KRAMSCH, 2014, p. 297), Schaefer and Heemann (2019, p. 191) argue that "telecollaborative projects can

contribute to the development of students' understanding of cultural diversity, as well as to the capacity for critical reflection on political and social issues"[58].

The objective of this study was to discuss how the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach can lead students "to go down the Tower of Babel" through telecollaborative activities in the context of Internationalization at Home. To achieve this goal, first I presented some theories regarding such an interaction by scholars including Risager (2007), Byram (1997), Kramsch (1993, 2011, 2014), Belli *et al.* (2018) and Luna (2018b), followed by the description of some telecollaborative projects, for instance, *English Conversation Club*, *Club de Conversación en Español* and *Percepções de Aprendizes de línguas do IFC sobre atividades telecolaborativas e Contação de Histórias Digitais*.

As Beelen and Jones (2015) put it, the process of IoC must be initiated in a domestic environment. Seen in these terms, the description of the three "domestic projects" mentioned above seems to indicate that there have been not only initial opportunities towards the internationalization of the institution where such projects are conducted, but also towards "going down the tower", in the sense that many concerns related to the current world, e.g. cultural differences, discrimination and prejudices, where students can "see themselves both from the inside and from the outside" (KRAMSCH, 2013, p. 62), have been integrated into the discussions. In this regard, Helm (2015) calls *critical telecollaboration* projects that foster the understanding of different worldviews, as they address social and political issues in a world increasingly polarized and dominated by conflicts, inequalities and injustices.

Belli, Heemann and Sehnem (2016) explain that the internationalization of educational institutions has been traditionally materialized through student-teacher mobility, providing "transformations in the design and execution of curriculum

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[58] Original: "projetos de telecolaboração podem ajudar a desenvolver nos alunos o entendimento da diversidade cultural, bem como a capacidade para reflexão crítica acerca de temas políticos e sociais".

components"[59] (p. 2), whereas Baranzeli, Morosini, Woicolesco (2020), in a similar fashion, reminded us earlier that mobility programs are deemed to be one of the strategies for internationalization. Nevertheless, as the current situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented physical academic mobility from happening, telecollaborative projects including the four mentioned in this study have been an alternative, which O'Dowd (2013b) calls *virtual mobility*.

In line with an intercultural approach, future telecollaborative practice and research could take into account that having the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultures involves, among other aspects, the ability to look beyond hegemonic thinking and stereotyped cultural representations, since they can trigger negative visions of other groups (BYRAM, 1997). In order for this to happen, Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002, p. 25) claim that foreign language teaching should struggle "to examine and challenge generalisations or stereotypes, and suggest or present other viewpoints", which has been the case with respect to the telecollaborative projects described in my study.

In conclusion, I suggest that future telecollaborative practice and research be based on the vision that the interaction between language and culture related to the intercultural approach, which enables critical reflection, is materialized in situated discourses. In other words, this interaction is not seen as two distinct entities and completely independent of each other, since "language and culture are dialectically related [and] materialized in socio-historically situated 'discourses'" (FILHO; GIL, 2016, p. 1501). Hence, telecollaborative projects conducted in the context of IaH can provide not only the practice of foreign languages, but also steps towards the process of "going down the tower" from moments of further reflection through dialogue.

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[59] Original: "transformações na concepção e na execução dos componentes curriculares".

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