

Low proficiency level learners' translingual and transmodal practices in teletandem: Challenging the separation of languages principle

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ABSTRACT

Teletandem is a model of virtual exchange in which two speakers of different languages meet over videoconferencing tools so that they can learn each other's language and culture. Research and practice on teletandem draw on the principles of autonomy (each participant should make decisions about their own learning), reciprocity (each participant should assist their partner's learning), and separation of languages (each language should have its own moment of practice and should not be mixed). Some researchers, however, do not consider separation of languages to be a principle of tandem learning and few studies have challenged it from the theoretical perspective of code-switching (Picoli & Salomão, 2020) and investigated learner interaction using translanguaging (Canals, 2021; Satar, 2020; Walker, 2017). In this paper, data come from the MuLTeC teletandem corpus. Using social semiotics, we investigate six recorded videoconferencing sessions of a Brazilian/American dyad with low language proficiency level and explore learners' transformative engagement with signs (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). Results reveal that participants draw on all the resources in their *complete language repertoire* (García & Wei, 2014) through translingual and transmodal practices, which allows them to make meanings beyond what they can express within their target language proficiency, creating opportunities to extend their semiotic repertoires. The findings evidence the inappropriateness of the separation of languages principle which neither works in practice nor is useful within current perspectives in language learning and teaching. Therefore, we propose a reframing of the principle as the *translanguaging principle*: based on the notion of translanguaging as co-learning, each participant should play fluid roles of expert/learner and capitalise on opportunities to extend each other's semiotic repertoires within multilingual and multimodal interaction.

1. Introduction

Teletandem is considered a model of virtual exchange, "a virtual, collaborative and autonomous context for learning foreign languages in which two students help each other to learn their own language (or language of proficiency) ... by using the text, voice and webcam image resources of VOIP technology (such as Skype)" (Telles, 2015, p. 604). Teletandem practice is based on the tandem

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model, which has been implemented in face-to-face contexts, or e-tandem, which uses diverse types of communication technologies (Lewis, 2020; Little & Brammerts, 1996). (Tele)tandem researchers and practitioners are unanimous in two core principles: reciprocity (each participant should assist their partner's learning) and autonomy (each participant should make decisions about their own learning) (Cappellini, Elstermann, & Mompean, 2019; Kapec & Schwienhorst, 2005; Lewis, 2020; Little & Brammerts, 1996; Telles, 2015). Tandem researchers/practitioners are also unanimous in recognizing the role of "bilingualism" (Kapec & Schwienhorst, 2005, p. 254) or 50/50 dual language use with equal emphasis on both languages by both tandem partners (Lewis, 2020). In the teletandem model, which is based in videoconferencing communication technologies, the latter is framed as a third principle - the principle of separation of languages: each language should have its own moment of practice and should not be mixed (Vassallo & Telles, 2006; Telles, 2015; Telles & Vassallo, 2006). This principle acknowledges the egalitarian status of both languages in the interaction and, at the same time, emphasises the fact that "languages must not be mixed" (Vassallo & Telles, 2006, p. 65). Vassallo and Telles (2006) state that, even though this principle has been undermined by other researchers, they consider it relevant for teletandem practice because it "encourages or challenges learners to speak the target language (...) and assures that both partners will also have their respective chances to communicate in the language in which they are proficient" (p. 65). If we consider that (tele)tandem practice is based on the idea that one participant is learning the other's language of proficiency as they interact, we may concede that it seems fair and legitimate for both learners to have equal chances of practising their target language. It seems, however, unlikely that languages will not be mixed. In fact, some recent studies (Picoli & Salomão, 2020; Lima-Lopes & Aranha, 2023) have revealed that teletandem participants may mix languages for various reasons, such as questions about vocabulary, phonetic misunderstanding/mispronunciation of words, or requests for clarification (Lima-Lopes & Aranha, 2023). This seems to bring evidence to the notion that the bilingual nature of teletandem practice does not necessarily mean that languages should not be mixed, but that they are mixed for specific purposes. For instance, Walker (2017) investigated synchronous audio chats in an English/German teletandem from within the theoretical framework of translanguaging theory. The study evidenced the ways in which translanguaging supports community building and communication. Canals (2021) examines data from a Spanish/Canadian teletandem via videoconferencing and reports that multimodality and translanguaging can resolve communication breakdowns in negotiation-for-meaning episodes. These results indicate the need for further research from a translanguaging perspective (García & Wei, 2014) exploring how participants utilise their full semiotic repertoires in teletandem practice.

Previous studies in contexts other than teletandem have examined the role of multimodality in videoconferencing (e.g., Develotte, Kern, & Lamy, 2011; Guichon & Wigam, 2016; Satar, 2015), highlighting its impact on enhancing communication through the use of audio, visual, and gestural cues. In teletandem exchanges, Cappellini, Holt, and Hsu (2022) investigated multimodal alignment presenting a semi-automatic analytical procedure and highlighting the role of facial expression alignment in teletandem. Investigating word-search sequences, Renner (2019) reported that in all successful word searches, the learner created a favourable environment through multimodality, specifically tone and facial expressions. Word searches were also signalled by syllable stretches, pauses, or repetitions, as well as by a distinct thinking-face and/or a gaze-shift away from the camera, the absence of which caused trouble. Additionally, multimodal research that adopts a social semiotics perspective to investigate videoconferencing (e.g., Satar, 2020; Satar, Hauck, & Bilki, 2023) has delved into the analysis of meaning-making processes to explore the complex dynamics of communication. Building upon these studies, our research takes a novel approach by adopting the perspective of *translanguaging as co-learning* (García & Wei, 2014) - which encourages participants to play fluid expert/learner roles during the exchange (Section 2.3) - to investigate translingual and transmodal practices in teletandem from a social semiotics lens. This allows us to explore the ways in which teletandem participants leverage all available resources and capitalise on opportunities to extend their semiotic repertoires.

Another area whereby teletandem principles and research outcomes appear to contradict is learners' language levels. Learners are expected to have a minimum level of receptive and productive proficiency in their target language to successfully engage in teletandem practice (Little & Brammerts, 1996). Yet, learners with low proficiency levels have also been reported to drive benefits from teletandem learning experiences (Guanoluisa & Viera, 2021; Kabata & Edasawa, 2011; Lewis & Qian, 2021). Therefore, in this paper, we explore dyadic teletandem interactions (English/Portuguese) and our research question is: "How do teletandem participants with low language proficiency engage in translingual and transmodal communication?"

By answering this question, we address the gap on the role of translingual and transmodal practices of low proficiency level language learners in teletandem and problematise the notions of bilingualism and separation of languages in this context.

2. Literature review

In this section we offer a more detailed review of literature on teletandem principles, teletandem between learners of low target language proficiency, and translanguaging and multimodality.

2.1. Teletandem principles

Teletandem is guided by three theoretical principles: separation of languages, reciprocity, and autonomy (Vassallo & Telles, 2006). The principles guarantee that synchronous interaction, whether written or spoken, should be divided into two parts and that participants switch roles as learners and experts (Cavalari & Aranha, 2016; Tang, Qian, Wang, & Hu, 2021).

Autonomy has been by far the most investigated principle (Bonfim, 2014; Cavalari & Del Monte, 2021; Garcia, 2012; Garcia, O'Connor, & Cappellini, 2017; Luz, 2009). These studies shed light on the characterising features of autonomous learning in teletandem: establishing goals, planning and selecting resources and strategies, monitoring and assessment. Reciprocity has received attention particularly because of its close relationship with the concept of collaboration (Telles, 2015; Cappellini et al., 2019; dos

Santos & Consolo, 2018). Research results showed that reciprocity involves (i) time and language division, and (ii) affective and emotional dimensions that have an impact on relationships (and on learning).

Separation of languages has been nominated as a principle by Telles and Vassalo (2006) and Vassallo and Telles (2006), who establish that each language should have its own moment of practice and that participants should avoid mixing the languages during the interaction. Not all researchers who investigate (tele)tandem settings, however, recognize this as a principle (Cappellini et al., 2019; Kapec & Schwienhorst, 2005; Lewis, 2020; Little & Brammerts, 1996; Telles, 2015). The bilingual nature of the exchange is acknowledged by these researchers, but from a sociocultural framework the focus is rather on language use as learning takes place *in* interaction. Nevertheless, there is room for debate on the implications of bilingualism/multilingualism for teletandem practice.

Taking a translanguaging perspective (Canagarajah, 2011), McAllister and Nancy-Combes (2019) revisited the principle of separation of languages to understand student beliefs. Interview data with 13 French students showed varied beliefs: the most relevant was that translanguaging practices, which are considered a naturally occurring phenomenon in other contexts, seemed to be curtailed in tandem settings.

Picoli and Salomão (2020) investigated the separation of languages principle in English-Portuguese teletandem oral interactions from within the code-switching theoretical framework. They concluded that the notion of language separation “seems to be a theoretical idealization supported by a monolingual perspective” (p. 1621) and does not reflect bilingual individuals’ natural use of language. They thus proposed the principle to be renamed as “princípio da igualdade”, or egalitarian principle.

Similarly, Lima-Lopes and Aranha (2023) quantitatively analysed teletandem oral sessions between English and Brazilian Portuguese dyads and evidenced that the principle of separation of languages was somewhat respected in each part of the teletandem session, but there was cross-use of multiple languages (for example English, Portuguese, Spanish) for meaning making purposes. The authors concluded that the data should be further investigated qualitatively from a translanguaging perspective to better understand the learning ecology of teletandem.

2.2. Teletandem between learners with low target language proficiency

Studies reviewed in Section 2.1 have not investigated interaction between teletandem partners who have low target language proficiency. This could be because Little and Brammerts (1996) state that “whether conducted face-to-face or via the Internet, tandem language learning requires a certain minimum proficiency in the target language” (p. 30). Nonetheless, there have been a few studies that have addressed low level proficiency and language learning in teletandem exchanges. Kabata and Edasawa (2011) investigated incidental learning within an asynchronous tandem project carried out between Japanese university students learning English, and Canadian university students learning Japanese. While students had opportunities to learn vocabulary, Kanji, grammar, and phrase/sentential expressions, the authors argued that Canadian students’ low proficiency level might have hindered learning of Japanese grammatical items since there was no explicit correction or grammar explanation.

In a Chinese/English teletandem exchange, Lewis and Qian (2021) examined nine dyads from the UK (A1 or A2 proficiency level) and Chinese speaking participants who had been studying English for at least eight years and presented higher levels of L2 proficiency. Even though there was evidence of L2 development and intercultural learning, most participants from the UK reported linguistic, technological and time-management challenges and demonstrated lower levels of engagement. On the other hand, on both sides of the partnership, learners seemed to have learned multi-word and multi-character expressions from each other’s cultures and those who persevered in carrying out the tasks “made demonstrable linguistic gains, which brought familiarity with cultural behaviours and enabled them to interact successfully with members of another culture” (Lewis & Qian, 2021, p. 11).

In light of the above, it seems clear that, even though limited L2 proficiency levels pose challenges to learning, participants with low levels of target language proficiency can still find strategies that lead to linguistic and intercultural gains.

2.3. Translanguaging and multimodality

Multimodal translingual practices involve interlocutors’ use of “diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401). Vogel and García (2017: 5–6) explain that translanguaging:

recognizes that all people ... have one linguistic repertoire, learned through dynamic social interactions, and from which they select and deploy features to make meaning in context ... in addition to social practices and features individuals “embody (e.g., their gestures, their posture) ...” (García, 2016).

According to Wei (2011), the act of translanguaging is transformative in nature as it creates a socially and culturally situated space for multilingual speakers by unifying diverse dimensions of their “cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience” (p. 1223). Trentman (2021) highlights that plurilingual pedagogies recognize the ways individuals can intentionally, actively, and creatively draw from their full repertoires to engage in transformative translanguaging spaces, expanding their linguistic repertoires. Creating a translanguaging space requires challenging dominant monolingual norms in order to foster an inclusive semiotic environment that supports and acknowledges the semiotic diversity of language learners rather than compartmentalising or separating their complex resources.

This brings to the fore a needed distinction between code-switching and translanguaging. Code-switching is seen as a linguistic phenomenon and, with that, it is *language-focused*. It gives the mode of speech prominence through its focus on the language itself, its structural features, and the practice of language alternation within a single discourse. In contrast, translanguaging, and our analysis that adopts social semiotics, are *learner-focused*. It shifts focus from what languages are being used and altered between to placing more

emphasis on how learners engage with *all modes* in language practice and draw on *all semiotic resources* from their repertoire to communicate meaningfully, express complex ideas, enhance understanding, so that they might learn each other's languages in the case of teletandem. Li and Ho (2018: 35) highlight that:

unlike code-switching, translanguaging is not simply a set of linguistic structures. It is a dynamic practice that involves different named languages and language varieties but more importantly, a process of knowledge construction that makes use of, but goes beyond, individual languages. It concerns effective communication, function rather than form, cognitive activity, and language production.

Translanguaging is not an individual practice, rather it is a collaborative process of *co-learning* “where multiple agents simultaneously try to adapt to one another's behavior so as to produce desirable outcomes that would be shared by the contributing agents” (García & Wei, 2014: 112). According to Brantmeier (n.d.), translanguaging as co-learning challenges the traditional dominant role in schooling environments and unequal power relationships as it moves both teachers and learners toward a more participatory and dynamic engagement in knowledge construction (cited in García & Wei, 2014). Tai and Wei (2021) present evidence for this process in a maths classroom. Characteristics of a co-learning relationship (Brantmeier, n.d., cited in García & Wei, 2014, p. 113) are:

- All knowledge is valued
- Reciprocal value of knowledge sharers
- Care for each other as people and co-learners
- Trust
- Learning from one another

From the above, *translanguaging as co-learning* is viewed as a collaborative and reciprocal practice of collective construction of meanings and knowledge where language learners actively and fluidly engage with their semiotic repertoires. Such a view recognizes the value of multiple semiotic resources and cultures, and promotes a more inclusive approach to language learning by promoting intercultural understanding, mutual learning, linguistic diversity, and collaborative language use.

Recent studies have adopted social semiotic analysis to understand translanguaging and how it transcends linguistic boundaries (Li & Ho, 2018), facilitates comprehension, expression, and engagement in meaningful learning experiences (Ho & Li, 2019), and supports language learning (Ho & Feng, 2022). Adopting social semiotics to understand translanguaging allows scholars like Li and Ho (2018) and Ho and Li (2019) to delve into the intricate interplay between language and meaning-making, present a comprehensive analysis of the various verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources employed in translanguaging practices, and uncover the cultural and social meanings constructed through and by individuals. Such an approach can highlight the richness and complexity of translanguaging and contribute to its transformative potential in language learning settings, such as teletandem. Likewise, we use the concept of transformative engagement from Bezemer and Kress's (2016) social semiotic approach to understand translanguaging and multimodality as a framework for our analysis of translingual and transmodal practices in teletandem (Section 3.3).

We also draw on Cenoz and Gorter (2020) work, which present two approaches to understanding translanguaging theory: pedagogical and spontaneous translanguaging. Pedagogical translanguaging refers to instructional strategies which integrate two or more languages in learning and teaching contexts, whereas spontaneous translanguaging concerns naturally-occurring contexts where fluid and constant shifting of linguistic boundaries are observed. The authors suggest that these two types of translanguaging can be best presented as a continuum (rather than a dichotomy). While pedagogical translanguaging is planned by the teacher, it may occur in spontaneous use of multilingual resources by the teacher (or the learners) to highlight particular elements in the curriculum. In this sense, for pedagogical reasons, languages can be viewed as distinct even though their boundaries are soft and fluid, i. e. speakers may use resources from their whole repertoire, but they may identify different languages at the conscious level.

Attitudes toward translanguaging in virtual exchange, and particularly teletandem settings have been ambivalent. Helm and Acconcia (2019) report that while some researchers view this approach to be a positive factor in promoting exchanges that employ multiple languages, others view it to be inappropriate or negative arguing it could slow down discussion or cause speakers to disengage. Several studies have investigated translanguaging in online interactions (e.g., Canals, 2021; Satar, 2020; Walker, 2017; Zheng, Schmidt, Hu, Liu, & Hsu, 2017). Canals (2021) showed the interplay of multimodality and translanguaging which occurred mainly during negotiation of meaning episodes; thus, reinforcing and complementing meaning-making in tandem sessions. Walker (2017) concluded that translanguaging can help prevent foreign language anxiety because it offers speakers “with expanded discursive means to communicate” (para. 47). Although these studies are insightful, further research is needed to explore translanguaging affordances for social interaction (Walker, 2017) and “to improve our understanding of the multimodal nature of translanguaging” (Satar, 2020, p. 148).

3. Methods

The teletandem and translanguaging literature provide the theoretical framework for this study. Methodologically, we take a social semiotic approach (Bezemer & Kress, 2016) to study “meaning-making processes and literacy practices” (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O'Halloran, 2016, p. 65) of the participants in their video-mediated synchronous computer-mediated communications. Our research design is a qualitative case study (Yin, 2017) since we select and investigate in-depth online interactions between a single pair of learners.

3.1. Participants and context

The data for this study come from the MulTeC (Multimodal Teletandem Corpus) (Aranha & Lopes, 2019) which comprises data from 282 university students (Portuguese/English) of 16 cohorts enrolled in different majors. 12 cohorts participated in the project as part of their regular English as a foreign language classes. Video recordings were made by each Brazilian participant using EVAER and stored in the computer. The screen was recorded as well as the chat conversations. Afterwards, the researchers compiled all video recordings in the corpus. All teletandem oral sessions (TOSs) were transcribed verbatim by the MulTeC project team using the software package Transana following transcription procedures proposed by Marcuschi (2003) and Gonçalves e Tenani (2008). In addition to recordings of videoconferencing sessions, the corpus comprises Brazilian students' questionnaire responses, diaries, texts they exchanged, and mediation sessions. Here we investigate three videoconferencing sessions from one Brazilian/American dyad, the selection of which is explained in the next section.

3.2. Data selection procedures

This study focuses on translingual, transmodal practices during English/Portuguese oral interactions between participants with low language proficiency levels. As Brazilian participants evaluated their own level of proficiency in the initial questionnaire according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of References for Languages) can-do self-assessed grid, the first step in data selection was to map out the learners who indicated levels A1 or A2 (Basic User) in spoken skills (Spoken production and Spoken interaction).¹ This step revealed six participants in the corpus (2012_I9F2_UGA2i; 2012_I8F16_UGA3i; 2013_I9F2_UGA2i; 2013_I8M11_UGA1i; 2014_I8M11_UGA3i; 2015_I8M2_UGA3i). The second step consisted of watching video-mediated TOSs of each of these participants in order to verify which participants' language skills could be comparable and representative of low-level proficiency. Only 2013_I9F2_UGA2i and her partner stood out as the ones whose performances actually presented features of A1 or A2 levels: they could communicate simple, concrete ideas related to their routines, but struggled to maintain the conversation in one language when the focus was on nuanced vocabulary items or complex ideas. The specific dyad selected participated in teletandem for seven weeks in 2013: a Brazilian female student (pseudonym: Maria), a Language and Literature major and an American male student (pseudonym: Mark) whose major was Business, both 20 years old. According to Maria's questionnaire, she self-assessed her language proficiency level as B1 in Listening, Reading, Speaking production and Writing; but A2 in Speaking interaction. Because of the information in her diaries, we know that her American partner "tinha bastante dificuldades com o português, mas fui ajudando ele a dizer o que gostaria com calma, e no fim deu tudo certo"² (first diary) and "ainda tinha bastante dificuldades com o português, mas parecia se arriscar a falar mais. Eu o corrigia sempre que necessário e ele continuava falando, o que era muito bom para o aprendizado dele"³ (fourth diary).

The teletandem oral sessions (TOS) analysed in this paper (Table 1) were their first, third and the last session in an attempt to cover the time span of the project.

In each session, extract selection involved identification of 'How do you say X'-questions, which both participants used extensively, and especially their practices in instances where they struggled to maintain the conversation related to nuanced vocabulary items or complex ideas.

3.3. Data analysis methods: social semiotics

To study the multimodal, plurilingual practices of the participants, we analysed video recordings of the selected TOSs using social semiotics (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). Social semiotics aims to understand meaning-making through multiple mediational means, addressing "meaning in all its appearances" (Kress, 2010, p. 2) within a specific socio-cultural context. Signs are considered to be motivated (reflecting the interests of the social actors), shaped by the environment (the affordances of the modes), and chosen based on their appropriateness to represent the intended meaning within a given socio-cultural context (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). Within this perspective, language is perceived to be one of the semiotic resources (and not necessarily the most important) utilised in meaning-making. In this sense, language users are better positioned as multimodal sign-makers.

Social semiotics entails fine grained, qualitative analyses of meanings made in texts, artefacts, and interaction. Key concepts of analysis include mode, modal affordance, transformation, transduction, and mimesis. A "mode is a socially organised set of semiotic resources" (Jewitt et al., 2016, p. 71) such as writing, speech, gesture, gaze, image, layout, spatial positioning, etc. Modes always appear in *ensembles* and each mode offers unique potentials (affordances) for meaning-making.

Bezemer and Kress (2016) explain learning as *transformative engagement* within which learners can manipulate and explore meaning potentials offered by the material affordances of each mode. Learners are perceived to extend their understanding of meanings and concepts through three processes of transformative engagement: *transformation* (change in material quality with the same mode, e.g. prose to poetry, or Portuguese to English), *transduction* (change of meanings across modes, e.g. writing to image), and *mimesis* (re-enactment or embodied imitation of existing meanings and actions produced by someone else).

¹ These descriptions can be found in the CEFR self-assessment grid (Levels A1 and A2): <http://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>.

² He had a lot of difficulties with Portuguese, but I helped him say what he wanted very calmly and at the end, everything went well.

³ He still had a lot of difficulties with Portuguese, but was taking more chances. I corrected him when necessary and he kept speaking, which was very good for his learning.

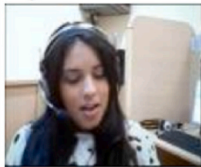
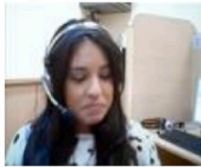
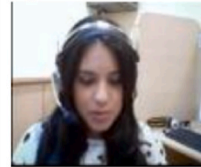

Table 1
Teletandem Oral Sessions (TOS) dataset analysed in this article.

TOS number	Number of words	Session duration
1st	3415	38'59''
3rd	3978	46'28''
6th	3433	44'57''

3.4. Data selection and analysis procedures

In order to select the data extracts for detailed semiotic analysis, all co-authors initially watched the video recorded interactions of selected TOSs repeatedly alongside verbatim transcriptions and took notes in relation to learners' translanguaging and transmodal practices. The authors then met three times to share observations of salient extracts. Authors noted that the learners used several 'How do you say X?'-questions (and their related family of questions 'How do I say?', 'How can I say X?', 'What is X in English/Portuguese?', 'como se diz/dice?' etc.), which was then agreed to be chosen as the analytical focus in this paper. This process led to the identification of a total of 29 'How do you say X?' extracts with varying lengths.

'How do you say X?'-questions have been described as learnables because they offer opportunities to actively engage in learning (Eskildsen, 2019; Kurhila, 2006; Svennevig, 2018). As metapragmatic or explicit search markers (Brouwer, 2003), they are only one way of initiating a word search (Duran, Kurhila, & Sert, 2022; Tüma & Sherman, 2022). Moreover, Svennevig (2018) showed how participants expanded "the word search sequence beyond the identification of the word searched for" (p. 68) and treated this sequence as an orientation to a learnable "at the expense of the progression of the workplace task at hand" (p. 68). While such work tends to treat linguistic shifts within 'How do you say X?'-questions as L1 (first language) use or code-switching, in this study we take the



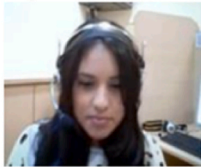

Line, time, pseudonym	Screenshot	Gesture, gaze, writing, and posture	Speech
1 05:00-05:04 Maria	Fig 1 	Gaze: averts gaze from recipient	Oh (Fig 1) (.) it's a way to: (.)
2 05:05-05:12 Maria	Fig 2 	Gesture: compresses her lips	ahm (Fig 2) sub-miss (.) Brazil I don't know how can I say it (.) ahm
3 05:13-05:16 Maria	Fig 3 	Writing: types in text chat 'submissos' ' <i>submissive</i> '	we can be (Fig 3) submissos:: <i>submissive</i> :: ((typing sounds))
4 05:17-05:19 Mark	Fig 4 	Gesture: smiles minimally	Submissos <i>submissive</i> oh ok (Fig 4)

Extract 1. submissos (session 1).

translanguaging approach (García & Wei, 2014; Wei & García, 2022), and explore translingual and transmodal practices for meaning-making and translanguaging as co-learning. We approach 'How do you say X?'-questions as an incidence of transformative practice, which can then lead to an opportunity to extend one's semiotic repertoire *for the benefit of* progression of the teletandem task at hand.

Once 'How do you say X?'-questions were identified, we focused on the whole context of the data segment beginning from how it was triggered until the end of the topic termination focusing transformative engagement within the extract. We then annotated the data for learners' transformative engagement with meaning: transformation, transduction, and mimesis (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). Hence, we did not only focus on the shifts in language use (transformation), but we actively sought processes of transduction (such as between speech and writing or speech and gesture) and mimesis. In the next section, we present social semiotic analyses of five extracts where participants struggled to maintain the conversation due to nuanced vocabulary items or complex ideas they wished to convey. These illustrate how participants utilised their whole semiotic repertoires for meaning-making and capitalised on or missed opportunities to extend their existing repertoires through translanguaging as co-learning.

As a first step in our analysis, we produced multimodal transcripts in four columns (Flewitt, 2011) and followed Baldry and

Line, time, pseudonym	Screenshot	Gesture, gaze, writing, and posture	Speech
1 6:00-6:04 Maria	Fig 1 	laughs	wait! ((laughs)) (Fig 1) and pão de queijo <i>cheese bread</i>
2 6:05-6:06 Maria	Fig 2 	Gaze: downwards	how can I say cheese (Fig 2) ((typing sounds)) cheese
3 6:07-6:09 Mark	Fig 3 	Gaze: towards the screen	oh cheese (Fig 3) pal de queijo <i>stick of cheese</i>
4 6:10-6:13 Maria	Fig 4 	Gaze: downwards	yeah cheese bread you know? (Fig 4) ((typing sounds)) it's not cheese burger
5 6:14-6:18 Mark	Fig 5 	Gesture: smiles minimally	oh pão de queijo sim <i>oh cheese bread yes</i> ok yeah cheese bread ok (Fig 5)

Extract 2. how can I say cheese (session 1).

Thibault (2006) in our approach to presenting each mode in a separate column. The first column shows the line number, timestamps and participant code in the corpus. The second column shows screenshot(s) of interaction which were taken because of their relevance to the signs being made. In the third column, we offer a description of participant behavior in the modes of gesture, gaze, writing, and posture. The final column is the transcription of the speech mode using Jefferson's (2004, pp. 24–31) transcription notations (see Engman, 2019 for a similar approach) so that we can evidence certain speech features that we analyse semiotically. The word where the screenshot was taken is presented in bold font. Typing sounds are indicated within the speech mode as ((typing sounds)). We offer English translations of speech in Portuguese, which are italicised and in grey colour in the transcript.

4. Analysis

The learners' motivation to participate in teletandem was to learn and use each other's languages. As we will show in our analyses, they utilised 'How do you say X'-questions when they struggled to make meaning. Through translanguaging and transmodal interaction (which covers Bezemer and Kress's (2016) notions of transformation, transduction, and mimesis), they expressed themselves, ensured continuation of talk, and offered each other potentials to extend their semiotic repertoires. Here, we present social semiotic analyses of five extracts which demonstrate this process and learners' attempts for meaning-making using all the resources in their *complete language repertoire* (García & Wei, 2014).

In Extract 1, Maria is engaged in two transduction processes to assist her in her attempt to extend her semiotic repertoire by adding a signifier in English for the sign/concept of economic submission. Her existing repertoire involves the signifier *submissos* in Portuguese in speech and in writing. The extract comes from the first teletandem session, and when the instruction was to speak in English.

At the beginning of Extract 1, Mark and Maria discuss American businesses in Brazil and Maria indicates her views on economic submission of Brazilian people when Americans set up businesses in Brazil – which makes Brazilians consumers, and not producers, thus damaging their economy and making them dependent on American produce.

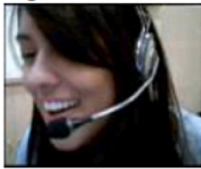


The search for the English equivalent of the Portuguese signifier 'submissos' begins in line 1. The sign 'uncertainty' is evoked first in Line 1 with Maria's facial expression (Fig 1 and 2) and in the mode of speech (lines 1–2). Maria withdraws gaze from her recipient and lowers her eyelids (Fig 1) and then purses her lips downward (Fig 2), which are signs of a characteristic thinking face (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986, p. 61). In the mode of speech, Maria indicates her lack of an appropriate signifier in her repertoire in English (line 2). In line 3, in the mode of speech, we observe translanguaging "we can be submissos" where the Portuguese signifier *submissos* features a buzzed lengthening on the last syllable. This lengthening is a semiotic feature of speech and can be considered as an elongation feature that produces "a momentary slow-down, a hesitation" (Bezemer & Kress, 2016, p. 20) which appears to draw attention to the Portuguese word. Here Maria also provides a transduced solution (from speech to writing) as she types *submissos* in chat (Fig 3, looking down, potentially towards the keyboard).

Meaning-making is completed when Mark, in Line 4, demonstrates his understanding in the mode of speech ("submissos oh ok"). Mark also smiles minimally (Fig 4) which "adds specific affective-ameliorative meaning" (Bezemer & Kress, 2016, p. 22) to the sign for the resolution of word search. In this extract, the mode of writing appears to be an apt choice to get Mark to notice the positive transfer between the signifiers *submissos* (Portuguese) and *submission* (English). Writing here offers certain *gains* and affords distinct semiotic potentials: it makes possible a visual, lexical representation of the sign *submissos* free from variation in pronunciation and has permanence. Maria's transduction practice, thus, assists Mark's meaning-making process of the Portuguese signifier *submissos*. However, as Mark does not offer the English signifier for the same sign, the opportunity for Maria to extend her repertoire is lost.

Extract 2 is also from the first teletandem session, and when the instruction was to speak in English. It shows Maria's attempt to explain a culturally-specific vocabulary item with a nuance: cheese bread instead of cheese burger. In lines 1 and 2, Maria translanguages choosing the speech mode in Portuguese to be an apt resource to express the sign *pão de queijo* which refers to a specific food item for breakfast in Brazil.

In line 2, Maria's request for a signifier in English demonstrates her attempt to extend her repertoire. She engages in transformation for *queijo* from Portuguese to English (cheese) in the speech mode, but does not do the same for *pão*. Given there are no entries in our chat records during this extract, we predict that Maria uses an online dictionary while looking downwards in line 2. In line 3, Mark translanguages, and in the mode of speech says "oh cheese pal de queijo" ("oh cheese stick of cheese"). In line 4, Maria confirms the transformation, but also highlights that the signifier for the food item in English is "cheese bread" and not "cheese burger". As the extract ends, Mark demonstrates his understanding in the gesture mode with a minimal smile and by repeating both signifiers in the speech mode, first in Portuguese, then in English (line 5). Fluid mix of languages in this extract enable opportunities for both participants to expand their semiotic repertoires by giving them access to the signifiers in both languages.

Extract 3 demonstrates the ways in which participants draw on transformation, transduction, and mimesis as they shift languages, type, and act out the target sign they wish to communicate: the act of breathing. The extract comes from teletandem session 6, and the part of the exchange allocated to English. Before the extract, Maria mentions that she is stressed due to workload at the university. Extract 3 then starts with Mark choosing Portuguese as the apt resource to initiate a 'How do you say X?'-question to offer advice (line 1). In speech, he offers three candidate signifiers for the sign 'to breathe': 'virar respirar', 'to respira', and 'breath'. We observe transformation as two signifiers are offered in Portuguese and one in English. Mark also engages with transduction while typing two Portuguese signifiers: 'respirar' and 'respira', the latter being the intransitive verb 'to breathe'. Maria displays her understanding of Mark's advice to breathe (line 2) with an acknowledgement token in the mode of speech indicating an epistemic change-of-state (Gudmundsen & Svennevig, 2020). She moves her head forward (posture), and then smiles in (Fig 2, gesture). These outwardly made signs, i.e., the acknowledgement token, the smile, and posture shift, signify her understanding of Mark's utterances in Line 1. In Line 3, Maria engages with a process of mimesis: she responds to Mark's instructions by markedly acting out breathing: inhaling (Fig 3)

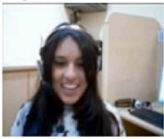
Line, time, pseudonym	Screenshot	Gesture, gaze, writing, and posture	Speech
1 02:51-03:05 Mark	Fig 1 	Writing: types in text chat 'respirar' <i>breathe</i> 'respira' <i>breathe</i>	ahm como se dice virar ((typing sounds)) respirar (Fig 5) to (.) respira (.) <i>how do you say to ((typing sounds)) breathe (Fig 5) to (.) breathe</i> [breath
2 03:04-03:06 Maria	Fig 2 	Posture: moves her head forward Gesture: smiles	[to breath (Fig 6) ah!
3 03:07-03:09 Maria	Fig 3  Fig 4 	Gesture: inhales and exhales	((breathing sound))
4 03:09-03:10 Mark	Fig 5 	Gesture: nods	good
5 03:10-03:13 Mark and Maria	Fig 6 		hhh

Extract 3. como se dice virar respirar (Session 6).

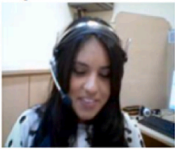

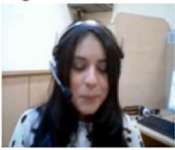


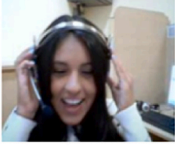
and exhaling (Fig 4) in the mode of gesture, further confirming Mark's successful search for the Portuguese signifier 'respira'. Thus, through transformation, transduction, and mimesis, Maria and Mark appear to understand each other and move the conversation forward through translingual and transmodal interaction.

The next extract comes from teletandem session 1, when the instruction was to communicate in Portuguese. Just before [Extract 4](#), Maria asks Mark whether he has a girlfriend and how many in the speech mode with a laughter signified both in speech and gesture modes (line 1). This triggers Mark's 'How do you say X?'-question and process of transformation to direct a rhetorical question in line 2 in English and in line 4 in Portuguese ('Who do you think I am?'/ 'Quem você acha que eu sou?'). As Maria, in line 3, does not provide the signifier in Portuguese, it is likely that Mark looks up the question on an online dictionary or translation tool, and repeats himself in Portuguese. Maria's response is again exactly the same as in line 3, and in the same semiotic resources: in English (speech mode), and laughter (in speech and gesture).

As the conversation moves on, in line 6, Mark uses another 'How do you say X?'-question to ask for the Portuguese signifier for the sign that can be represented through the English signifier 'player', followed by an attempt to provide an explanation in Portuguese in the mode of speech ("como se disse uma player? *ahm uma pessoa que ah tem ah muitos namorados e namoradas?*")



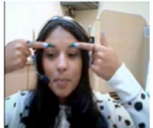

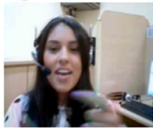

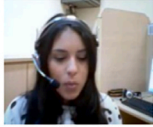
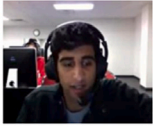
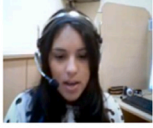
Line, time, pseudonym	Screenshot	Gesture, gaze, writing, and posture	Speech
1 15:55-15:58 Maria	Fig 1 	laughs	((laughs)) (Fig 1) quantas? muitas? <i>how many? many?</i>
2 15:59-16:04 Mark	Fig 2 	laughs	((laughs)) (Fig 2) ahm how do I say this? who do you think I am?
3 16:05-16:09 Maria	Fig 3 	laughs	((laughs)) (Fig 3) I'm just asking ((laughs))
4 16:10-16:14 Mark	Fig 4 	Gesture: touches shirt's collar	quem você acha que (Fig 4) (.) eu sou? <i>who do you think (Fig 4) (.) I am?</i>
5 16:15-6:18 Maria	Fig 5 	Gesture: brings microphone closer to mouth	((laughs)) I'm just (Fig 5) asking but
6 16:19-16:30 Mark	Fig 6 	Gesture: touches jacket's collar	como se dice uma player? (.) (Fig 6) ahm uma uma pessoa que ah (.) tem ah muitos namorados e namoradas? <i>how do you say a player? (.) (Fig 6) ahm a person who ah (.) has ah many boyfriends and girlfriends?</i>
7 16:31-16:52 Maria	Fig 7 	Writing: types in text chat 'namorado' 'boyfriend' 'namoradeiro' 'flirt'	ahn é: (.) (Fig 7) ((typing sounds)) namoradeiro namora/namoradeiro <i>flirt flirter/flirt</i> [but [Mark: namora [Mark: flirter [Maria: namoradeiro but it's it's a good a good way to say it but [if you say
8 16:51-16:53 Mark	Fig 8 	Gesture: smiles	[oh oh (.) how do you say it the bad way? (Fig 8)

Extract 4. how do I say this? who do you think I am? (session 1).


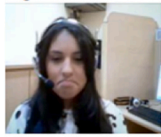

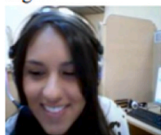
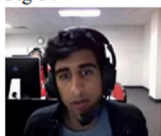

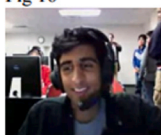
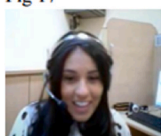

9 16:54-16:58 Maria	Fig 9 	Writing: types in text chat 'canalha' <i>'scoundrel'</i>	the bad way it's ahn ((typing sounds)) (Fig 9) canalha? <i>scoundrel?</i> [I think
10 16:58-16:59 Mark	Fig 10 	Gesture: smiles	[canalha? <i>scoundrel?</i>
11 16:59-17:02 Maria	Fig 11 	Gesture: compresses lips	yeah (Fig 11) ahm
12 17:02-17:06 Mark	Fig 12 	Gesture: smiles	então (Fig 12) você acha que eu está ahm canalha <i>so</i> (Fig 12) <i>you think I'm ahm a scoundrel</i>
13 17:06-17:08 Maria	Fig 13 	Gesture: brings microphone closer to mouth and shakes head	((laughs)) no (Fig 13)
14 17:09-17:10 Mark	Fig 14 	Gesture: smiles	eu sabe (Fig 14) eu sabe <i>I know</i> (Fig 14) <i>I know</i>
15 17:10-17:13 Maria	Fig 15 	Gesture: hands on headphone	I (Fig 15) I I don't think so ((laughs))

Extract 4. (continued).

In what follows, we continue to observe Maria choosing English in the speech mode as the apt semiotic resource (lines 7, 9, 11, 13, 15) and offering three signifiers in Portuguese (“namorado”, “namoradoiro”, and “canalha”) in speech and in writing (transduction). They both mix English and Portuguese during the conversation and despite differences in their low level of proficiency, through multimodal and multilingual exchanges, Mark and Maria appear to understand each other, continue the conversation, and engage in a challenging episode where Mark successfully rejects an accusation of being a ‘player’ through a rhetorical question: “Who do you think I am?”. Transformative engagement with signs (in both languages, and in speech and writing) enables the learners to explore nuances

Line, time, pseudonym	Screenshot	Gesture, gaze, writing, and posture	Speech
1 19:37-19:43 Maria	Fig 1 	Gesture: hands up and fingers apart	Índia (.) you: você parece meio indiano (Fig 1) <i>India(.) you: you look half Indian (Fig 1)</i> I don't know your
2 19:43-19:44 Mark	Fig 2 	Gaze: looks down Writing: types in text chat 'racisita' 'racist'	ahm (.) (Fig 2)
3 19:44-19:51 Maria	Fig 3 	Gesture: touches eyebrows	black hair and (.) ah [big bush (Fig 3) (.) how can I say it?
4 19:48-19:53 Mark	Fig 4 	Gesture: smiles and raises brows up	[racista /racist (.) oh (Fig 4) (.) my eyebrows?
5 19:53-19:54 Maria	Fig 5 	Gesture: lowers hands	yeah (Fig 5)
6 19:54-19:57 Mark	Fig 6 		ah ahm como se dice racist? (Fig 6) <i>ah ahm how do you say racist? (Fig 6)</i>
7 19:58-20:02 Maria	Fig 7 	Gaze: looks down	(.) racist (Fig 7) (.) racisto? racista? <i>racist? racist?</i>
8 20:02-20:03 Mark	Fig 8 	Gaze: gaze down Writing: types in text chat 'racista' 'racist'	racista right? (Fig 8) <i>racist right?</i>
9 20:03-20:06 Maria	Fig 9 	Writing: types in text chat 'racista' 'racist'	yeah (Fig 9) (.) but (.)

Extract 5. racist (session 1).

10 20:07-20:08 Mark	Fig 10 	Gaze: down	racista (Fig 10) <i>racist</i> (Fig 10)
11 20:09-20:15 Maria	Fig 11 	Gesture: compresses lips	yeah racista <i>yeah racist</i> but wh (.) why? (Fig 11) por quê? <i>why?</i> ((laughs))
12 20:16-20:24 Mark	Fig 12 	Gaze: gazes left	ahm (.) e:u (Fig 12) (0.2) ah como p l (.) é (.)
13 20:25-20:30 Maria	Fig 13 	Posture: moves her head forward	say in English and I tell how can you say in Portuguese ((laughs)) (Fig 13) you can say in Portuguese
14 20:30-20:32 Mark	Fig 14 	Gesture: tilts head slightly	are you saying I don't look white? (Fig 14)
15 20:33-20:53 Maria	Fig 15 	Gesture: touches hair	no no no the hair ah the black hair I said (Fig 15) ((laughs)) the black no the blacky hair your hair and big (.) thing ah bush it's like Indian guys you [know Indian from India
16 20:52-20:55 Mark	Fig 16 	Gesture: smiles	[eu eu eu yeah sim (Fig 16) eu sou indio [I I I yeah yes (Fig 16) I am native <i>American</i> ⁴
17 20:56-20:57 Maria	Fig 17 	Gesture: smiles	(.) really? (Fig 17)
18 20:57-20:58 Mark	Fig 18 	Gesture: smiles	sim (Fig 18) <i>yes</i>

Extract 5. (continued).

in signifiers between the signs player (line 6), namorado (line 7), namoradaira (line 7), and canalha (lines 9, 10, 12), and thus have opportunities to extend their semiotic repertoires.

Our last example, [Extract 5](#) is an example where the teletandem participants were able to playfully navigate the challenging concept of racism by drawing on their full semiotic repertoires. The extract comes from the first teletandem session and the section when participants were instructed to communicate in Portuguese.

[Extract 5](#) starts with Maria's exploration of Mark's heritage and family ties in India in the mode of speech by saying "you look half Indian" in Portuguese with the word "you" articulated in English as well. We also observe transduction of the signified "you look" in the mode of gesture as Maria holds her hands up just below her face, fingers apart, about 15 cm away from her head (line 1, Fig 1). She then continues in the speech mode in English, hedging her claim with the words "I don't know" (line 1) and providing evidence on Mark's looks as characteristics of an Indian origin: "black hair and big bush" (line 3). We observe transduction of the word "bush" into the mode of gesture as Maria places both her index fingers over her eyebrows (Fig 3). Maria indicates her lack of knowledge of the semiotic resource she was looking for in English to express the sign "eyebrows". Mark offers the appropriate signifier in English in line 4, and Maria confirms this in the mode of speech and gesture as she lowers her hands. Although Maria starts the exploration in Portuguese, she appears to find the semiotic resources of English more appropriate to provide examples.

So far, the 'How do you say X?'-question centres around the concrete and tangible concept of eyebrows as Maria ignores or misses Mark's use of the signifier "racist" in Portuguese first in the mode of writing in chat (line 2), then in the mode of speech (line 4) which overlaps with Maria's utterance in line 3 (big bush). In line 6, Mark initiates a 'How do you say X'-question in speech mode in Portuguese for the sign 'racist', which is resolved and the gendered suffix confirmed (racista) with neutral expressions in the modes of speech (lines 7, 8, 10, 11), with transduction in writing (lines 8 and 9), accompanied by predominantly downward gaze, and static postures of both participants. With the female suffix 'a', the signifier/form 'racista' in the speech mode potentially involves the signified/meaning of 'you are racist' - given Maria is the only female participant - and thus can function as an accusation. Yet Maria in line 11, does not allude to this specific form-meaning-function relationship available in the sign 'racista', and questions the purpose of the 'How do you say X'-question both in the mode of speech using the signifier 'why' (in English and then in Portuguese), laughter at the end, with a transduction in gesture (Fig 11, downward lips). The sign that Maria creates using multiple semiotic resources appears to function as a dismissal of the accusation.

As Mark struggles to explain his perspective in Portuguese (line 12), Maria invites him to use English (line 13), with a promise to offer a transformation in Portuguese afterwards, respecting 'transformation as co-learning', i.e. ensuring that translanguaging enables meaning-making, and that opportunities to extend semiotic repertoires of both learners are cared for. Maria laughs, expressed in speech and gesture (Fig 13), moves closer to the camera in the mode of posture, which are in contrast with Mark's serious facial expressions and tone in line 12. Mark's response involves a more explicit reference to the idea of racism as in the speech mode he says "Are you saying I don't look white?" with a tilted head and serious facial expression. This is when Maria objects for the first time and provides justification in speech (English), with transduction in the mode of gesture for the sign *black hair* (Fig 15) repeating her previous examples of "black hair and big bush" (line 3). Thus, Maria appears to be ignorant of the potential meanings of racism available in the signs she makes in speech and gesture, and defy the signifier(form)-signified(meaning) relationships between 'hair colour and eyebrow shape', and 'racism', reducing racism to skin colour (colourism).

Lines 15–18 demonstrate each participant's preference for the first language of their teletandem partner as the apt resource chosen for meaning-making and smiling facial expressions (gestures) for the rest of the interaction. In line 16, Mark does acknowledge his Indian family heritage in speech "eu sou índio"⁴, and smiling gestures of both participants (Figs 16–18) set the tone and potentially indicate that Mark's accusation could have been a humorous challenge all along.

5. Discussion

This study aimed at answering the research question: "How do teletandem participants with low language proficiency engage in translanguaging and transmodal communication?" Data were selected from the MuLTeC teletandem corpus and interactions between Mark (American, male) and Maria (Brazilian, female) were analysed using social semiotics. The analysis showed that participants in this teletandem exchange (i) drew on different resources in their *full semiotic repertoire* to communicate through translanguaging and transmodal practices, and (ii) possessed semiotic agility (Prior, 2010), i.e., despite their low target language proficiency levels, they resolved 'How do you say X?'-questions by employing all three transformative processes: transformation, transduction, and mimesis. Bezemer and Kress (2016) argue that all semiotic changes, whether inter-modal (transduction) changes, intra-modal (transformation) changes, or mimetic re-enactment, are productive of new meanings and constitutes learning because during such processes the meaning-making resources of learners will have been augmented, and thus their semiotic repertoires extended.

The interplay between multimodal affordances and translanguaging has been documented in a number of teletandem studies to have a role in reinforcing speech, disambiguating meaning, enhancing noticing, and self-repairs (Canals, 2021); meaning-making, constructing trusting relationships, creating knowledge (Walker, 2018); and assisting learners' comprehension (Freschi & Cavalari, 2020; Canals, 2021). As our results revealed, the use of multimodality and translanguaging, overall, provided an environment facilitative of meaning-making for learners with low proficiency levels in teletandem. Learners' translanguaging, transmodal practices and the way modes were combined in a complementary fashion assisted continuation of talk and maintenance of conversational flow. This

⁴ In line 16, Mark says 'eu sou índio' which translates to "I am native American" [the indigenous people of the Americas]. Maria later on corrects Mark by saying "when you say you are índio it's not right it's indiano" which translates to *Indian*.

corroborates [Freschi and Cavalari's \(2020\)](#) findings, which focused on peer feedback and multimodality in that language learners with low proficiency levels may indeed benefit from participating in teletandem as long as translingual multimodal practices come into play. In this article, we showed how 'How do you say X?'-questions prompted such practices, enabled learners to make meanings beyond what they can express within their L2 linguistic proficiency, and provided opportunities to extend their semiotic repertoires. This is in line with [Satar's \(2020\)](#) argument that the varied combination of multimodality and learners' multilingual repertoires can reinforce and complement meaning-making processes and create learning opportunities in videoconferencing.

In this article, we demonstrated the semiotic ecology of teletandem by focusing on translingual and transmodal learner practices and challenged the separation of languages principle ([Telles & Vassallo, 2006](#); [Vassallo & Telles, 2006](#)). Few previous studies explored teletandem participants' mixed use of languages, such as [Picoli and Salomão \(2020\)](#) from a code-switching perspective, and [Lima-Lopes and Aranha \(2023\)](#) for meaning-making purposes using quantitative analysis. The latter showed that while participants largely demonstrated a willingness in learning each other's language(s) they are proficient in during the time allocated to those languages as instructed, total separation was not realistic, nor desired.

The principle of separation of languages continues to guide the design and implementation of current teletandem projects, particularly in the Brazilian context, where the dataset used in this study comes from. Yet, we argue that the concept of separation should not imply a separation of languages in learners' cognition, nor a separation of a strictly monolingual period of language practice during the teletandem session. On the contrary, it should be understood and interpreted as an allocation of a set period of time as a guide, where one of the teletandem participants predominantly becomes the learner and the other acts as the expert/teacher with an orientation towards 'co-learning' and extending semiotic repertoires with flexible and dynamic multilingual and multimodal interaction. Within this new perspective, the expert user's linguistic repertoire(s) is(are) not the sole objective of teletandem interaction. As the expert/learner roles shift dynamically throughout the exchange, the learnables thus also shift, creating opportunities for both participants to expand their linguistic, multimodal, and diverse cultural repertoires and worldviews. That said, in line with translinguaging as co-learning ([García & Wei, 2014](#)), participants can both simultaneously enact their learner roles as they co-construct new knowledge and expand their semiotic repertoires together by exploring semiotic representations of signs in various languages and modes. Teletandem, therefore, offers the potential to be a translinguaging space and promote equitable multilingualism by creating activities and moments where translingual practices are modelled and encouraged ([Helm & Hauck, 2022](#)). Teletandem practitioners can thus discuss translinguaging and multimodality (instead of separation of languages) with the participants in preparation for the exchanges, during tutorials, and while giving feedback to learner diaries or sharing reflections.

Therefore, our main argument is that a reconsideration of the separation of languages principle is required in line with contemporary theories and understandings in language education. We propose a renaming and reframing of the principle as the principle of translinguaging. We argue that this revised principle based on translinguaging as co-learning offers an ideal environment to nurture a mutually-supportive and equally powerful relationship between (tele)tandem partners, without which interactions can fail ([O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006](#)). The principle of translinguaging in teletandem can give participants a powerful voice by offering them a space to unlearn "cultural conditioning" (p. 112) and take pride in their ethnolinguistic identities ([García & Wei, 2014](#)). In this translinguaging space, "it is the combination of both languages that keeps the task moving forward" ([Creese, Blackledge, & Blackledge, 2010](#) cited in [García & Wei, 2014](#): 92) and gives teletandem learners the ability to express their diverse perspectives in ways which would not be possible within the monolingual separation of languages principle. Drawing on data from an A2 level (CEFR) teletandem interaction, we showed that the translinguaging principle is applicable and transformative even with low proficiency level language learners.

6. Conclusion

Many studies have explored teletandem (one type of virtual exchange) from diverse theoretical frameworks. Yet, there are limited studies which focus on data from low-proficient learners ([Kabata & Edasawa, 2011](#); [Guanoluisa & Viera, 2021](#); [Lewis & Qian, 2021](#)) and on their practices from a translinguaging theoretical perspective. While previous studies have investigated multimodal meaning-making practices within the SLA perspective (e.g. [Canals, 2021](#); [Lee, Hampel, & Kukulka-Hulme, 2019](#)), our work contributes to expanding our understanding of sign- and meaning-making in teletandem within a social semiotic, translinguaging perspective.

In line with [Picoli and Salomão \(2020\)](#), our findings suggested that the notion that languages can be separate is not realistic nor desirable for language learning in teletandem settings. While [Picoli and Salomão \(2020\)](#) took a bilingual, code-switching perspective, we argued that diverse resources that constitute learners' semiotic repertoires should also be valued to facilitate meaning-making processes. For this reason, we proposed that the principle of separation of languages needs to be revisited and reframed as the *translinguaging principle*: based on the notion of translinguaging as co-learning, each participant should play fluid roles of expert/learner and capitalise on opportunities to extend each other's semiotic repertoires within multilingual and multimodal interaction.

In this article, data from one partnership were analysed, where partners' translingual, transmodal meaning-making practices did not cause discomfort or threaten the reciprocity principle (as reported in [Garcia, De Oliveira, & Santos, 2022](#)). Future analysis of data from different low-proficient dyads can further the arguments we have made. Future research can also explore the applicability of a *translinguaging principle* in dyads of higher proficiency levels. We would expect translingual and transmodal resources to assist communication with these groups as well since translinguaging is not only restricted to learners of low-level proficiency. Unfortunately, investigating the longitudinal aspects of a learning trajectory was outside the focus of this study, but would certainly be of interest to the teletandem community. Future research can trace the learning trajectory from the first teletandem session to the last with participants of various proficiency levels.

As we have shown in the analysis, the teletandem pair presented in this article demonstrated semiotic agility ([Prior, 2010](#)) and was

able to engage with transformative processes to sustain interaction (Satar, 2020). However, not all pairs in the MuLTec corpus had the same level of semiotic skills. In terms of pedagogy, when setting up teletandem exchanges, we recommend teachers to use MuLTec extracts and analysis as part of the training they provide to their learners to prepare them for their online interactions to illustrate how skilful learners with semiotic agility interact with each other. This, in turn, means that teletandem coordinators should not advocate a monolingual perspective that curtails translanguaging in each part of a tandem exchange.

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