ARTIGO

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF HUMOR IN TELECOLLABORATION

(Funções sociais do humor em telecolaboração)

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ABSTRACT

Considering that humorous moments (BELL; ATTARDO, 2010; KIM; PARK, 2017; REDDINGTON, 2015) can arise when language learners interact, this study aimed at understanding the social functions of humor in telecollaborative activities. For the analysis, data from telecollaborative sessions and a mediation session were included. Among other social functions of humor, data analysis revealed "reinforcement of displeasure", "the lowering of the participants' affective filter" and "the maintenance of harmony among the participants". The outcomes indicated that the participants could engage themselves in meaning negotiation with language learners from other cultural horizons as they constructed humor.
keywords: Humor. Telecollaboration. Telecollaborative exchanges. Online teaching and learning of foreign language.

RESUMO

Considerando que momentos de humor (BELL; ATTARDO, 2010; KIM; PARK, 2017; REDDINGTON, 2015) podem surgir quando aprendizes de línguas interagem, este estudo teve como objetivo compreender as funções sociais do humor em atividades telecolaborativas. Para as análises, foram incluídos dados de sessões de telecolaboração e de uma sessão de mediação. Entre outras funções sociais do humor, a análise dos dados revelou "reforço de descontentamento", "diminuição do filtro afetivo dos participantes" e "manutenção da harmonia entre os participantes". Os resultados indicaram que os participantes puderam se envolver na negociação de significados com aprendizes de línguas de outros horizontes culturais enquanto construíam humor.
Palavras-chave: Humor. Telecolaboração. Intercâmbios telecolaborativos. Ensino e aprendizagem online de línguas estrangeiras.

RESUMEN

Teniendo en cuenta que momentos de humor (BELL; ATTARDO, 2010; KIM; PARK, 2017; REDDINGTON, 2015) pueden surgir cuando aprendices de lenguas interactúan, este estudio tuvo como objetivo comprender las funciones sociales del humor en actividades telecolaborativas. Para los análisis, fueron incluidos datos de sesiones de telecolaboración y de una sesión de mediación. Entre otras funciones sociales del humor, el análisis de los datos reveló "refuerzo de descontento", "reducción del filtro afectivo de los participantes" y "mantenimiento de la armonía entre los participantes". Los resultados indicaron que los participantes pudieron involucrarse en la negociación de significados con aprendices de lenguas de otros horizontes culturales mientras construían humor.
Palabras clave: Humor. Telecolaboración. Intercambios telecolaborativos. Enseñanza y aprendizaje en línea de lenguas extranjeras.

INTRODUCTION

A profusion of digital resources such as applications, videos and images, which can help users to learn other languages, have emerged through the possibilities given by the internet. For O'Dowd (2007), the use of these communication tools in the area of teaching and learning of foreign language (henceforward FL) allows for learning and integration amongst people from different cultures.

One of the ways to foster this integration is through telecollaboration, defined by O'Dowd (2013, p. 123) as "the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations to develop their FL skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work". O'Dowd (2018) goes on to say that telecollaborative

exchanges can be beneficial for FL learners, as they facilitate the practice of languages between students from different countries.

As in other contexts of FL teaching and learning, humorous instances, which are, according to Kim and Park (2017, p. 242), "quite pervasive", can emerge when language learners interact in telecollaborative environments. For the authors, humor can take place through "jokes, humorous anecdotes, puns, riddles, humorous language play, and so on" (p. 242).

Drawing on scholars such as Bell and Attardo (2010) and Holmes and Marra (2002), Kim and Park (2017, p. 242) underline that humor in the context of teaching and learning languages "has not received noticeable attention, despite the prevalence of humor in social interaction", and they add that "there has been little discussion about the use of humor" (p. 242). Reddington (2015, p. 22), in turn, makes clear that "researchers have sought to understand how teachers and students "do" humor" and the role it plays in the classroom context. Therefore, the lack of studies on humor as well as the fact that most of studies are linked to the classroom context (e.g. BELL, 2009; BELL; ATTARDO, 2010; FORMAN, 2011) appear to indicate not only the need for further studies on humor, but also the functions it serves in other contexts, for example, in the area of telecollaboration. This study seeks to bridge a gap by concentrating on the social functions of humor in telecollaborative activities.

Having said that, the objective of this study is to understand the social functions of humor in telecollaborative activities. To attain this objective, I outlined the following research question: what social functions were revealed in the telecollaborative activities?

This text is divided into five sections. This first section focused on the purpose of this investigation and, in addition, presented a brief contextualization of the object of study. The second section deals with the relevant literature to ground this study, while in the third I address the method used. In the fourth section, I present the data analysis and discussion. The final section presents considerations and offers suggestions for further research.

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

O'Dowd (2013, p. 128) explains that from the mid-1990s an increased attention to social and intercultural aspects in FL teaching and learning "led to the emergence of more complex forms of exchange" in telecollaboration. As a result, the author claims that from the aforementioned period onwards telecollaborative exchanges came to provide "fluid connections between students' online interactions with their partners and what was being studied and discussed in the local classrooms" (p. 128).

Teletandem (TELLES, 2015a, 2015b; TELLES; VASSALLO, 2006) is one example of telecollaboration. Telles (2015a, p. 604) defines it in the following way:

> 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). They do so by using the text, voice and webcam image resources of VOIP[2] technology (such as Skype[3]).

Teletandem has three guiding principles: autonomy, reciprocity and separate use of both languages (TELLES, 2015a, 2015b; TELLES; VASSALLO, 2006). Autonomy has to do with the responsibility that students have for both their own learning and the learning of her/his partner. This way, students can, for example, select the topic they want to talk about in the online exchanges. Reciprocity, the second principle, refers to the mutual support and interdependence between two learners who are engaged in equivalent commitment, in the sense that both of them aim at achieving intended results in this partnership. Lastly, separate use of both languages concerns the same amount of time used to practice the two languages. For instance, if one online session between a Portuguese learner and an English learner lasts one hour, the conversation should be thirty minutes in Portuguese, thirty in English.

Teletandem Brasil: foreign languages for all (TELLES, 2015a, 2015b; TELLES; VASSALLO, 2006) (henceforward TTB[4]) refers to a specific telecollaborative project, which is run at a state university in São Paulo's countryside by researchers, practitioners and teachers. Created to enable college students from Brazil to interact with college students from other countries, Telles (2015a, p. 605) makes clear that this thematic project was developed "from a socio-cultural perspective", and adds that it focused "on the vygotskyan concepts of ZPD[5] – zone of proximal development, scaffolding[6], and mediation" (p. 605).

In line with Vygotsky (1978, 1986), knowledge and meanings are socially co-constructed through language. Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning happens first socially and, subsequently, higher mental functions are developed. Furthermore, the author explains that historical and cultural

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[2] VOIP - Voice over Internet Protocol.
[3] Skype is a software that provides voice and video communications via the Internet.
[4] See http://www.teletandembrasil.org/ for further information on TTB.
[5] For Vygotsky (1978, p. 86), ZPD is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers". In the ZPD, thus, someone who is more experienced helps the other, who is less experienced, to learn and become more autonomous within her/his potential.
[6] The concept of *scaffolding* was introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976). For the authors, it refers to the support mechanism that helps the less experienced to learn in her/his ZPD where necessary. Such a support "enables a child or novice to solve a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (p. 90).

features contribute to this development. From this perspective, individuals are part of a particular cultural context through which they learn by constructing and negotiating social meanings.

Mediation is one of the central construct of SCT, also named "symbolic mediation". Vygotsky (1978, 1986) explains that the relation of the human being with the world is not direct, but mediated through the following elements: 1) instrument; and 2) sign. Instrument, the first mediating element, increases the possibilities of the transformation of nature and regulates the actions on the objects when the individual interacts with the world around. The second mediating element, sign, has the capacity to bring about internal changes because it regulates the actions on the people's psyche. For the author, language is a central psychological instrument, as it is through it that human beings can develop higher mental functions.

Linked to Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) conceptualization of mediation, mediation sessions, moments that happen after the online sessions (LEONE; TELLES, 2016), are part of the activities conducted in the TTB project, referred to previously. According to Salomão (2012), these sessions are an opportunity for the narration of experiences by those who experienced them, that is, the participants themselves. Lopes and Freschi (2016), on their turn, stress that mediations sessions are vital for facilitating further reflection upon cultural issues.

SCT can be reconciled with Phipps and Gonzales's (2004) concept of l*anguaging*, which stands for how people, through language, interact, produce meanings and shape the world around them. *Languaging* suggests that "through language they [people] become active agents in creating their human environment" (PHIPPS; GONZALES, 2004, p. 2). For the authors, teaching and learning occurs socially, or "inextricably interwoven with social experience" (p. 2), which allows "to enter the languaging of others [and] to understand the complexity of the experience of others to enrich their own" (p. 3). Indeed, it can be said that through *languaging* students can understand the functioning mechanisms of the language being studied, laugh about humorous situations and discuss different subjects, which can enrich their experience as FL learners.

In this study, I relate humor, the object of this study, with SCT. According to Dunn (1993), humor can be considered as a vehicle for communication between people, and the effort used by them to "do" humor is seen as an integral part of their social development.

The reconciliation between the concept of humor and SCT is also evident in Martineau's (1972) and Martin's (2007) definition of this concept. For the former, humor is a social mechanism, taking into account that social functions are defined by such a mechanism. Martineau (1972, p. 114) goes on to say that "humor is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous by any of the interacting parties". Martin (2007, p. 5), in turn, underlines that

> Humor is a broad term that refers to anything that people say or do that is perceived as funny and tends to make others laugh, as well as the mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such an amusing stimulus, and also the affective response involved in the enjoyment of it.

Neuliep (1991) explains that humor can be placed into five categories. Regarding the first, *teacher-targeted humor*, humorous situations are prompted by the teacher, the center of humor in this case; as concerns the second category, *student-targeted humor*, students are deemed to be the target of humor, whereas *untargeted humor* refers to the fact that an issue, subject or topic, for instance, are at the heart of humor, and not the students or the teacher. *External source of humor*, the fourth category, stands for, by way of illustration, historical events, anecdotes and cultural references. Lastly, *nonverbal humor* includes kinesthetic humor (e.g. gestures, funny face, body movements, and so forth).

According to Carter (2004, p. 82), "giving pleasure", which is linked to humorous situations regarding the creative use of language, has to do with moments where language learners entertain themselves. Crystal (1996, p. 328), in a similar fashion, names such situations "language play", which come about "when people manipulate the forms and functions of language as a source of fun for themselves and/or for the people they are with".

In the following paragraphs, I consider it relevant to conceptualize *discourse* since my study is based on the assumption that humorous instances are materialized in situated discourses, as the latter are constructed "together with someone who embodies the discourse" (PHIPPS; GONZALES, 2004, p. 88).

For Kramsch (1993, p. 11), discourse can be construed as "the process through which we create, relate, organize and realize meaning", and she notes that interactions in situated discourses are directly determined by the political and social context. Gee (1989, p. 6-7), on his part, argues that "discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes". From this perspective, it could be said that discourse creates fertile ground for better interpreting humorous moments in telecollaborative activities.

I see that discourse analysis can be useful for interpreting instances when the participants engage themselves in humorous situations because, according to Fairclough (2003, p. 2), it draws 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.

Blommaert (2005) makes clear that language-in-use – or discourse – takes place in real-time communication, and he adds that it is "simultaneously encapsulated in several layers of historicity, some of which are within the grasp of the participants while others remain invisible but are nevertheless present" (p. 130). Thus, as discourse plays a part in the construction of "social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief" (FAIRCLOUGH, 1993, p. 134), it could be said that it allows to better understand the participants' utterances as well as references to particular humorous events.

In line with Dervin (2014), the concept of *voice* is at the heart of discourse. As stated by Roulet (2011, p. 209), "any discourse is always associated with former discourses and voices". Blommaert (2005. p. 4) notes that the concept in question "stands for the way in which people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so" (p. 4), and he contends that the study of voices "must be situated at the intersection of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis" (p. 15). Looking at different voices (e.g. specific pronouns) that language learners employ in telecollaborative activities can thus facilitate the interpretation of humorous instances, as through such voices individuals have the chance to clearly express their thoughts and views.

2. METHODOLOGY

The data used in this qualitative[7] study[8] were collected in the aforementioned TTB project between September and December 2016. During that period, there was a telecollaborative partnership between a group of 8 students from a state university in Brazil, where TTB is developed, and a group of 8 students from a university in the United States[9]. I was the teacher-mediator of the former group and collected data for my PhD research[10] (SCHAEFER, 2019).

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[7] A qualitative research presupposes, according to Patton (1985, p. 1), "an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there".

[8] The data 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.

[9] In this study, I included data only from one of the eight students of the American university: Lucienne.

[10] The data used in this study are therefore from my PhD investigation completed in 2019.

This research included two participants in particular regarding the telecollaborative sessions: Cristiane and Lucienne[11] [12]. Cristiane, a Brazilian 27-year-old learner of English at the time of the data collection, interacted with Lucienne, an American 27-year-old learner of Portuguese.

The excerpts analyzed in this study were taken from (a) 2 out of 10 telecollaborative sessions and (b) 1 out of 8 mediation sessions. The telecollaborative sessions between Cristiane and Lucienne took place on *Zoom*[13] and were video-recorded. In the mediation sessions, which occurred right after the telecollaborative sessions, Cristiane, the other seven participants of the Brazilian university[14] and the teacher-mediator were able to discuss different aspects regarding the online sessions. Both the telecollaborative sessions and the mediation sessions occurred in the TTB laboratory.

The excerpts analyzed in this study refer to "culture-related episodes" (TELLES; ZAKIR; ANDREU-FUNO, 2015)[15], that is, moments where I noticed instances of humor while the discussion of cultural topics was in progress.

In order to facilitate and optimize the transcription process, I used *Transana*[16]. I translated the three excerpts[17] [18] from Portuguese into English, upon which I take full responsibility. In the excerpts, I used "C" referring to Cristiane, "L" to Lucienne, "G" to Gabriel, "V" to Victoria, "M" to Maria and "R" to the researcher. The information between two parentheses, that is, (( )), concern the researcher's comments.

The humorous instances that will be analyzed can be, to some extent, related to the already mentioned Neuliep's (1991) categories of humor *untargeted humor* and *external source of humor*, as such instances in my data were not prompted by activities prepared beforehand by the teacher-mediator. In the same way, the topics discussed emerged spontaneously, which implies that they were not previously suggested by the teacher-mediator, for instance, and that the participants had the opportunity to choose[19] and address the cultural topics they wanted. This is what Vassallo and Telles (2006, p. 98) call "natural process of interaction", meaning that "such interaction is content- and

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[11] All the participants in this study were given fictitious names in order to protect their identity.

[12] For ethical issues, a consent form (Free and Informed Consent Term) was signed by the participants in this study.

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

[14] In this study, in addition to Cristiane, I included data from only tree more Brazilian participants as regards the mediation session: Victoria, Maria and Gabriel. Both Victoria and Maria were English learners, while Gabriel, besides also being an English learner, had been working as an English teacher at that time.

[15] Telles, Zakir and Andreu-Funo (2015, p. 374) define *episódios relacionados à cultura* (culture-related episodes) as "any part of a dialogue in which the focus is on some explanation, questioning or curiosity about aspects of one's own culture or the partner's culture" (my translation).

[16] See http://www.transana.org/ for further information on *transana* program.

[17] One of the four excerpts in this study is originally in English.

[18] I should explain that I made available as footnotes the excerpts originally in Portuguese.

[19] The opportunity that students have to select the topic they are willing to discuss is in keeping with *autonomy* (TELLES, 2015a, 2015b; TELLES; VASSALLO, 2006), one of the principles of teletandem as presented in the section on the review of literature.

information-oriented, that arises from learners' own communicative needs, and that it is triggered by their attempt to communicate with the other" (p. 98).

3.   DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the social functions of humor that emerged in the telecollaborative activities will be tackled. In such a journey, I will invite the reader to embark on humorous situations, the sharing of personal opinions and the expression of displeasure that arouse during two tecollaborative sessions as well as in a mediation session.

In a telecollaborative session, Cristiane, the participant of the Brazilian university, told Lucienne, the participant of the American university, that one week prior to that session some people in Brazil had held a demonstration in support of Donald Trump, then candidate for president of the United States. The following excerpt, taken from the fifth telecollaborative session, depicts how this event outraged Cristiane:

1. C: Can you believe it?
2. L: ((she laughed out loud))
3. C: ((she laughed)) Because I can't believe in something like that to me it's...
[...]
4. C: I simply find this completely... THINGS ((smiling)) it's very it's pure nonsense...
(…)
5. L: They are... are Brazilians who... are... in favor?
6. C: I think so... GOOD QUESTION GOOD QUESTION GOOD QUESTION.
7. L: ((she laughed))
8. C: Because I think they were all Brazilians... but I think they forgot that they are *latinos* and that... Trump... HATES *latinos*. ((she laughed))
9. L: ((she laughed)) *(Excerpt 1 / telecollaborative session / my translation into English[20] / Cristiane and Lucienne / 02-11-2016)*

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[20] Original in Portuguese:
"1. C: Você acredita?
2. L: ((she laughed out loud))
3. C: ((she laughed)) Como eu não eu não consigo acreditar numa coisa dessa pra mim é...
[...]
4. C: Eu simplesmente acho isso completamente... COISAS ((smiling)) é muito é absurdo...
[...]
5. L: São... são brasileiros que... são... a favor?
6. C: Eu acho... BOA PERGUNTA BOA PERGUNTA BOA PERGUNTA.
7. L: ((she laughed))
8. C: Porque eu acho que eram todos brasileiros... mas acho que eles esqueceram que eles são latinos e que... o Trump... ODEIA latinos. ((she laughed))
9. L: ((she laughed))".

In this excerpt, it can be seen how Cristiane and Lucienne, in keeping with Kim and Park (2017, p. 242), were "appreciat[ing] humor by themselves". In turn (2) and (7), Lucienne laughed in reaction to Cristiane's comments, and this may have been induced by the latter's smiling expression, or perhaps simply because Lucienne intended to show that she agreed with her partner (I agree with you that this is actually odd). In turn (3), Cristiane expressed indignation because of the demonstration in question. Her display of outrage continued in turn (4), and she even uttered "things" as a means of sidestepping another word that could ultimately be regarded as "inappropriate" for that particular moment in the TTB laboratory, but Cristiane ended up choosing a "more suitable" word: "pure nonsense". In this respect, Van Lier (2004) asserts that the environment has physical, symbolic and social characteristics that can have a considerable effect on the students' interaction, whereas for Burbules (2006, p. 117) it "shapes the form and content of what is said or written".

Shortly after in turn (8), Cristiane said that she *supposed* that the people who had participated in the protest were Brazilians, which indicates that she was not sure of it. This corroborates with O'Dowd (2006, p. 105), in the sense that telecollaborative exchanges may not be appropriate when language learners are "asked to report factual information about general issues in their society with which they may be unfamiliar or have not thought about to any great extent". Also in turn (8), Cristiane stated emphatically that Donald Trump had an aversion to Latin Americans, which once more allowed room for laughter in turns (8) and (9). Considering that Donald Trump's candidacy for president really became an interesting focus of media coverage at that time, part of Cristiane's opinion on this topic may have been formed on the basis of different media *voices* (BLOMMAERT, 2005; DERVIN, 2014; ROULET, 2011) that portrayed a conflicting relationship between the then candidate and *latinos*.

It seems that humor in Excerpt 1, which converges with Neuliep's (1991) categorization of humor *external source of humor* as previously mentioned, whereas the humorous event in question refers to a cultural event, served the function of helping Cristiane express her discontent. In other words, through humor, Cristiane was able to reinforce her displeasure by conveying a critical tone towards the demonstration. Besides that, linking back to Carter (2004), through this humorous situation Cristiane and Lucienne could have a moment of fun.

In another telecollaborative session, Cristiane and Lucienne provided information on what they were studying, their age and personal preferences. In response to a question from her partner, Cristiane explained that she was born in a city of the State of São Paulo, and that she was currently living in this same state, but in another city. She also noted that she had already lived in two states in the Northeast of Brazil. The coming excerpt, taken from Cristiane and Lucienne' first

telecollaborative session, illustrates the impressions that the former had of having lived in these places:

1. C: The weather is very different the food is different the behavior of the people is different… ah… the the… way to… the way to… ((facial expression indicating that she did not know how to say in English)) ah...
2. L: Say that in Portuguese... ((laughing)) ((they both laughed)) I need to practice.
((in turns (7) and (9), Cristiane alternated her speech between Portuguese and English))
3. C: O... o... *obrigada o jeito das pessoas se vestirem é muito diferente*[21] it's very different.
4. L: Uh-huh[22].
5. C: The clothes are different ah… *eu*[23] yes ((giving a shy laugh)) it's very different… maybe because there it's ah very hot and here is colder and the people ah… ((facial expression indicating that she did not know how to say in English)) *esqueci de falar* (incompreensible) *mas as pessoas se vestem de uma forma diferente... eu acho que aqui no Estado de São Paulo... nós somos um pouco mais conservadores...*[24].
6. L: Huh[25]. *(Excerpt 2 / telecollaborative session / original in English / Cristiane and Lucienne / 28-09-2016)*

As is evident from this excerpt, Cristiane created representations of two cultural entities: the two states of the Northeast, where she had lived, and the State of São Paulo, where she was born and was currently residing. Through such representations, Cristiane evoked preceding *voices* (BLOMMAERT, 2005; DERVIN, 2014; ROULET, 2011), that is, her previous experiences of having already lived in the Northeast and in the state of São Paulo. As Roulet (2001, p. 209) stressed, "any discourse is always associated with former discourses and voices".

In turn (2), as a result of Lucienne having noted that Cristiane was struggling to express herself in English, there was a humorous effect on the participants, despite the fact that Cristiane's laughter had been somewhat "shy". As Souza (2016) puts it, lower levels of language proficiency play a part in the participants' interaction in telecollaborative exchanges.

Given that this situation caused a seeming embarrassment to Cristiane, Lucienne may have laughed with the aim of putting forward a positive face, that is, someone who was concerned about making her partner feel more comfortable and, for this, she suggested that Cristiane speak in Portuguese. Indeed, Palmer (1994, p. 15) claims that "laughter does not necessarily mark the place of a joke – it might mark embarrassment, for instance", whereas Kim and Park (2017, p. 245) highlight

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[21] My translation: "the way how people dress is very different".
[22] The interjection "uh-huh" is used, according to Cambridge Dictionary (see https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/uh-huh), "to agree with or show understanding of something that has just been said" as well as "to express agreement to what has just been said, or to mean yes".
[23] My translation: "I".
[24] My translation: "I forgot to say (incomprehensible) but people dress in a different way... I think that here in the State of São Paulo… we are a little more conservative…".
[25] The interjection "huh" can indicate, according to Written Sound (see http://www.writtensound.com/index.php?term=huh), affirmation, surprise, disbelief, agreement, among other possibilities.

that humor "has positive and constructive functions as to lower learners' affective filters"[26]. In the same vein, Tarone (2000) contends that humor can contribute to lowering the students' affective filter.

In addition, it could be said that Lucienne added "I need to practice" (Portuguese) as a strategy to soften her previous utterance "say that in Portuguese", and as a means not to make Cristiane lose face. This strategy, specifically in the TTB context, is named "negotiation of face" (my translation[27]) by Souza (2016, p. 132). Therefore, it could be argued that this humorous instance had the function of providing the maintenance of harmony between the participants, taking into account that a face-threatening act[28] (BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987) appeared to be taking place.

In a mediation session a month and a half after that telecollaborative session (Excerpt 2), where Gabriel, Maria and Victoria were also present, the topic about cultural differences between the two Northeastern states vs. the State of São Paulo was referred to by Cristiane. Excerpt 3, taken from the sixth mediation session, illustrates how the latter addressed this topic after Gabriel voiced outrage over the fact that his online partner, a U.S. citizen, had asked him if he was keeping an affective relationship with someone:

1. G: It was our first contact, right? I always think on their part... an invasion when they ask if I'm dating... I think like... I look at the person like but I think... "how dare you ask that"?
2. ((everybody laughed out loud))
3. G: ((he laughed a great deal)) "Hey do I know you?".
4. ((everybody laughed))
5. G: Isn't it?
[...]
6. G: I feel a bit… ashamed (incomprehensible) already wants to know about my life...
7. V: It's more like the opposite right? like Brazilians want to know more intimate things and then Americans think "huh... this guy?"
8. G: ((he laughed)) YEAH!
9. C: But today I discussed something with Lucienne I found it very... as you were saying... like... I think that Paulista in general… I was talking to her… there are some cultural differences like… and Paulista we ARE a little more conservative like we are we are colder… when compared to Northeast for example…
(…)
10. M: I find that like... it's the space between São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul because Paraná…
11. (incomprehensible)
12. G: BECAUSE I AM A TEACHER!
13. V: Too!
14. ((the participants laughed)) *(Excerpt 3 / mediation session / my translation into English[29] / 16-11-2016)*

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[26] For Krashen (1987), language learners can have a high affective filter or a low affective filter. The higher the filter, the less likely that learning will take place. On the other hand, the lower the filter, the more likely that learning will occur.
[27] Original quote: "Negociação da face".
[28] For Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 65), interaction entails the use of face-threatening acts "that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker".
[29] Original in Portuguese:
"1. G: Foi nosso primeiro contato né?... eu sempre acho por parte deles... uma invasão quando eles perguntam se eu to namorando... tipo eu acho... eu olho pra pessoa assim mas eu penso... "quem te deu essa liberdade"?
2. ((everybody laughed out loud))
3. G: ((he laughed a great deal)) "Ai eu te conheço?".

It can be seen how the participants, through *languaging* (PHIPPS; GONZALES, 2004) and by drawing on the cultural differences voiced throughout this excerpt, engaged in a humorous instance. In turns (2) and (4) laughter broke out among them as a reaction to Gabriel's comments, and in turn (6) the latter claimed that he felt ashamed when he had to deal with issues related to his personal life.

It is implicit in Gabriel's comment in turn (12) that the fact that he is a teacher represents sufficient grounds for, in a first online encounter, not asking him questions of a personal nature. This way, it could be said that in this participant's discourse is implied the *voice* (BLOMMAERT, 2005; DERVIN, 2014; ROULET, 2011) that teachers *must be treated with respect by not asking them very personal questions*. In turn (13), Victoria agreed with Gabriel, and the participants in turn (14) laughed at his positioning.

Both Victoria in turn (7) and Cristiane in turn (9) attributed characteristics to people in terms of larger and fixed entities, and stereotypical images of this nature also occurred on the part of Maria in turn (10). For Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002, p. 27) stereotypes "are based on feelings rather than reason" and can give vent to various forms of prejudice, since they place emphasis on the differences between social groups. Cristiane used "in general" in turn (9) probably with the intention of making it clear that her comment did not regard all the people from these regions, even though a prevailing homogeneous *voice* (BLOMMAERT, 2005; DERVIN, 2014; ROULET, 2011) is echoed. The following is implicit in Cristiane's discourse: *I had Lucienne see that not all the people in Brazil are open*. At the same time, however, Cristiane provided her classmates with essentialist cultural representations. Taking into account that it is necessary to challenge stereotyped representations (LOPES; FRESCHI, 2016; TELLES, 2015b) and suggest other viewpoints (BYRAM; GRIBKOVA;

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4. ((everybody laughed))

5. G: Né?

[...]

6. G: Eu fico meio… acanhado (incompreensible) já quer saber da minha vida...

7. V: É mais como o contrário isso né? tipo os brasileiros quererem saber coisas mais íntimas e os americanos ficarem "hum.... esse aí?"

8. G: ((he laughed)) É!

9. C: Mas hoje eu comentei uma coisa com a Lucienne eu achei muito... como vocês tavam falando... é... eu acho que paulista no geral… eu tava falando com ela… tem umas diferenças culturais assim… e paulista a gente É um pouco mais conservador assim a gente a gente é mais frio… comparando com o Nordeste por exemplo…

[...]

10. M: Eu acho que tipo... é o espaço de São Paulo até o Rio Grande do Sul porque o Paraná...

11. (incompreensible)

12. G: PORQUE EU SOU PROFESSOR!

13. V: Também!

14. ((the participants laughed))".

STARKEY, 2002), the next excerpt, also taken from the sixth mediation session, portrays how I positioned myself in reaction to the participants' comments:

1. R: I see that differences are much more individual than necessarily whether I am Brazilian or whether I am from the region X and so on... [...] then I also think that it's a matter of the... of the... individual.
2. C: Yes.
3. R: That is, each person receives according to her/his history... according to what she/he thinks... to her/his convictions... isn't it? of course... there can be also influence of where the person is... of where she/he lives in of where she/he comes from... everything... right?
4. Researcher: And what do you think of this of what I explained do you agree with or not?
5. C: I agree.
6. ((other participants said "yes"))
7. R: Really?
8. C: Not necessarily the region but the person.
9. V: Point of view.
10. C: Yes point of view stereotypes.
11. G: But this could just be in my mind, who knows next time I try to let myself go "I'm dating".
12. ((everybody laughed))
13. R: Or even if you are not dating but you say "hey I'm dating".
14. G: Yeah.
15. V: "I'm dating everybody[30]".
16. ((everybody laughed out loud for a few seconds))" *(Excerpt 4 / mediation session / my translation into English[31] / 16-11-2016)*

One of the characteristics of the collaborative learning, according to Vygotsky (1978), is the role of someone more experienced to find ways to help another person who is less experienced to learn in the ZPD[32]. This way, this excerpt depicts how I provided the participants with "different voices" (BLOMMAERT, 2005; DERVIN, 2014; ROULET, 2011) or, according to Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976, p. 90), a "scaffolding", to Cristiane as well as to the other participants in the sense

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[30] My free translation for "tô namorado todo mundo".
[31] Original in Portuguese:
"1. R: Eu vejo que as diferenças são muito mais individuais do que necessariamente se sou brasileiro se eu sou da região X ou tal... [...] então eu acho também que parte um pouco do... do... individual.
2. C: É.
3. R: Ou seja cada pessoa recebe de acordo com a sua história... de acordo com aquilo que pensa... das suas convicções... né? claro... pode sim haver também influência de onde a pessoa está... de onde ela mora de onde ela vem... tudo tem... né?
4. R: E o que vocês acham disso que eu expliquei vocês concordam ou não?
5. C: Concordo.
6. ((other participants said "sim / yes"))
7. R: É?
8. C: Não necessariamente a região mas a pessoa.
9. V: Ponto de vista.
10. C: É ponto de vista estereótipos.
11. G: Mas também pode ser coisa minha também quem sabe da próxima vez eu tento me soltar mais "to namorando".
12. ((everybody laughed))
13. R: Ou também nem que não esteja namorando mas diz "olha to namorando".
14. G: É.
15. V: "To namorando todo mundo".
16. ((everybody laughed out loud for a few seconds))"
[32] Zone of Proximal Development.

that I explained to them that perspectives and behaviors also vary from person to person. Seen from this angle, in line with Phipps and Gonzales (2004. p. 3), I was attempting to "enter the languaging" of the participants to eventually enrich our cultural horizons.

Cristiane in turns (5), (8) and (10), other participants in turn (6) and Victoria in turn (9) agreed with me, and in turn (8) Cristiane proved to be able to capture the essence of my positioning when she said "not necessarily the region but the person". Indeed, Lopes and Freschi (2016) posit that the role of the teacher-mediator is essential for deeper discussion in telecollaboration, and they add that "a problematizing approach to group discussion seems to be the most effective alternative, viewing the mediator as a stimulating figure for the necessary reflection in this regard" (p. 69, my translation[33]).

In turns (12) and (16), the participants burst out laughing. As was seen in Excerpt 3, Gabriel had already made the participants laugh when he complained that he felt uncomfortable when someone asked him, at a first contact, whether he is dating. In turn (11), he said jokingly that in a next opportunity he would say "I'm dating" to his online partner, and I also embraced this funny moment in turn (13). As a reaction to my last comment, in turn (15) Victoria uttered the *voice* (BLOMMAERT, 2005; DERVIN, 2014; ROULET, 2011) of a well-known Brazilian song[34] section (*to namorando todo mundo[35]*). Stimulated by this participant's funny comment, this situation reached its most humorous effect. This is in harmony with the following function for creativity by Carter (2004, p. 82): "expressing identities"[36]. That is, Victoria may have appropriated such section to convey the image of someone who was really enjoying that funny situation.

It can be argued that in Excerpts 3 and 4 the humor instances had the function (a) to provide a moment of fun between the participants themselves and the teacher-mediator and; (b) to awaken a sense of unity between the participants themselves and the teacher-mediator. Furthermore, specifically in Excerpt 4 humor functioned as a way of reestablishing the humorous and relaxed atmosphere that had taken place in turns (2) and (4) in Excerpt 3, keeping in mind that that funny instance had been replaced by a "more serious" moment from turn (9) onwards (Excerpt 3) but mainly on my part when I presented, in Excerpt 4, a different perspective in turns (1) and (3). In fact, Canagarajah (2004) emphasizes that humorous instances can help language learners relax.

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[33] Original quote: "a proposta da problematização no grupo nos parece ser a alternativa mais eficaz, tendo no mediador a figura instigante da reflexão necessária para tal".

[34] The title of the song is "Aquele 1 %", by Marcos and Belutti. The lyrics can be found at https://www.vagalume.com.br/marcos-e-belutti/aquele-um-por-cento-part-wesley-safadao.html

[35] My translation into English: "I'm dating everybody".

[36] For Carter (2004, p. 82), "expressing identities" is related to the idea that through a creative use of language the person shows who she/he is and the way how she/he wants to be recognized as.

FINAL REMARKS

Data analysis allowed for the interpretation of "*symbolic* meaning[s]" (O'DOWD, 2006, p. 86) underlying the participants' verbalizations and, besides that, it made it possible to understand that they transited through a multitude of personal and social identities as they built humorous situations. Within a Bakhtinian vision (1981), these symbolic meanings, in addition to having being produced socially, were continuously (re)appropriated by the participants.

As said earlier, as a means of achieving the objective of this study, that is, to understand the social functions of humor in telecollaborative activities, I outlined the following research question: what social functions were revealed in the telecollaborative activities? In response to this research question, a close look at discourse in the data analysis revealed that humor served the social functions of: (1) reinforcing displeasure by expressing a critical view; (2) providing moments of fun (CARTER, 2004); (3) lowering the participants' affective filter (KIM; PARK, 2017; KRASHEN, 1987; TARONE, 2000); (4) enabling the maintenance of harmony among the participants; (5) awaking a sense of unity amongst the participants and; (6) reestablishing the humorous and relaxed atmosphere that had been replaced by a "more serious" moment.

In the telecollaborative activities, the participants produced meanings, externalized their thoughts, burst out laughing prompted by humorous instances, asked questions, and so forth. In this sense, in line with Phipps and Gonzales (2004), my participants were *languaging*, since they were "given an extraordinary opportunity to enter the languaging of others" (p. 3) and, by extension, to discuss some cultural topics.

As the data showed, situations where the participants expressed humor emerged both in the telecollaborative sessions and in the mediation session. Therefore, given that the TTB project was the specific telecollaborative context in my study, further research could investigate the social functions of humor in other telecollaborative contexts.

Last but not least, the participants of this study, by means of humor as they discussed different topics, had accessibility to the *languaging* (PHIPPS; GONZALES, 2004) of the other. In other words, as the participants constructed humor in the telecollaborative activities, they could engage themselves in the process of meaning negotiation with language learners from other cultural horizons, a process which, according to Phipps and Gonzales (2004, p. 3), can "become more deeply human as a result".

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