

# EXPLORING RECIPROCITY IN TELETANDEM

## A quantitative and qualitative lexical analysis of student diaries<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** – The aim of this study is to examine the interplay between what students write in their reflective diaries and the concept of ‘reciprocity’ within the context of teletandem (Telles 2006). Reciprocity is a fundamental tenet of teletandem and a pivotal element of diverse peer learning frameworks as it implies the social dynamics and the exchange processes inherent in collaborative language learning (Koch 2017, Cappellini *et al.* 2020). The study initially conducts a quantitative analysis of learner diaries, discerning prevalent topics based on the frequency and distribution of nouns. Subsequently, a qualitative investigation seeks to pinpoint vocabulary and linguistic patterns that “directly address exchange activities” (Koch 2017, p. 128) in order to highlight if and how the principle of reciprocity emerges in teletandem learner diaries. Data has been selected from 662 diaries written both in English (L2) and in Portuguese (L1), two subcorpora which are stored in MulTeC (Multimodal Teletandem Corpus) (Aranha, Lopes 2019). The quantitative analysis show that the most frequently used and evenly distributed terms are the same in both subcorpora, i.e., ‘interaction’ and ‘partner’ (in the diaries written in English) and ‘*interação*’ and ‘*parceiro*’ (in the diaries written in Portuguese). These terms are semantically related to the notion of reciprocity. From a qualitative standpoint, the analyses revealed that the most relevant features of reciprocity perceived by teletandem participants are those related to the (i) organization of the teletandem practice, (ii) attendance of the partner’s needs and preferences, (iii) co-construction of a relationship, and (iv) collective decisions made by partners. These findings align with Cappellini *et al.*’s proposal and advocate for the effectiveness of employing a mixed-method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative analyses. This research methodology facilitates handling a manageable volume of data while preserving the significant aspects of learner diaries.

**Keywords:** teletandem; reciprocity; learning diary; learner corpora.

## 1. Introduction

Teletandem (TTD) (Telles 2006) is a bilingual model of telecollaboration in which two university students who speak different languages interact via VoIP technologies (i.e. videoconference and chat) so that one can learn a foreign language and help the other learn his/her own. This practice is based on face-to-face tandem and is guided by three principles: a) reciprocity, which means that each participant should be committed to their partner’s learning so that the experience should be mutually beneficial for both partners; b) separation of languages, which involves dedicating the same amount of time to each language.; c) autonomy, i.e. learners have to plan, organize and manage their own learning in Teletandem sessions. The principle of separation in languages has been recently reframed by Satar *et al.* (2023), who conducted a case study, revealing that although participants negotiate and

<sup>1</sup> The authors worked together in analyzing data, participated in discussions to address any differing opinions, and ultimately reached a consensus or shared perspective. This paper is the result of a writing partnership. However, to accomplish some countries’ academic requirements, we specify that Leone is responsible for sections 2.2, 2.3, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2 and for coordinating the study; Aranha is responsible for sections 1, 3.1, 3.2; Cavalari is responsible for sections 2.1 and 5.

respect the time of the conversation dedicated to each language, in fact, they actually use all semiotic resources, including the languages they know, to express themselves. The authors suggest that “diverse resources that constitute learners’ semiotic repertoires should also be valued to facilitate meaning-making processes” and, then, it would make more sense to conceive it as the “translanguaging principle” (Satar *et al.* 2023, p.15).

Teletandem practice entails complex learning scenarios which normally include weekly Teletandem Oral Sessions (TOSs), synchronous conversations via videoconferencing tools and Mediation Session, meetings in which the teacher-mediator offers support to students’ learning in teletandem. At UNESP, (Aranha, Cavalari 2014; Cavalari, Aranha 2016), the learning scenario also includes writing a learning diary after each TOS. Writing a learning diary may foster learner’s reflection, which is considered a key element in telecollaborative learning (Garcia de Moraes *et al.* 2017; Cavalari, Del Monte 2021). Some studies (Cavalari, Aranha 2022; Freschi 2023) reveal that student diaries may also be relevant for the teacher, who, in the context mentioned, reads them on a weekly basis and collects information that can be used to feed the mediation sessions.

The investigation of diaries in telecollaborative contexts is not new and can offer researchers different perspectives from participants’ experience. With respect to research on learning diaries adopting corpus analysis procedures, the studies by Flowerdew (2002) and Helm (2009) are worth considering. Flowerdew describes a qualitative application of corpus processing tools ‘to identify teacher education students’ attitudes towards language learning and language in general’ (Flowerdew 2002, p. 231). He identifies keywords and then looks at the stretches of text in which these words occur to build up a picture of students’ preoccupations as language learners.

Helm (2009) uses diaries to verify what they can tell us about learners’ gains in terms of intercultural competence. The author explores the potential of quantitative corpus-processing tools for qualitative analysis of narrative diaries from the Confronti Project, in which students were required to write a weekly diary, taking into consideration the following issues: their expectations, the relationship between language and culture, texts they were given to read about language, culture and social identity. In line with Flowerdew and Helm, the current study emphasises the learning diary as a way to support language learning and as a useful tool for research in TTD-based learning scenarios, which are a complex context for developing L2 competences. The current study analyses two diary subcorpora: TTEndLD (Teletandem English Learning Diaries) and TTPorLD (Teletandem Portuguese Learning Diaries).

In (tele)tandem learning settings, some studies on the use of diaries (Alonso 2011; Cavalari, Del Monte 2021; Cavalari, Aranha 2022; Leone *et al.* 2023) showed that students’ reflection may focus on how students deal with specific features of the teletandem experience, which seems essential for them to develop autonomy and, at the same time, enables the teacher who reads the diaries to have a deeper understanding of concrete practices. These studies, however, do not focus on students’ perceptions and attitudes in relation to the notion of reciprocity, which is an essential aspect of teletandem practice. The present investigation seeks to explore learning diaries’ contents at first, and then focus specifically on the ones related to students’ perceptions of the principle of reciprocity.

We intend to answer the following question: How does the context in which the most frequently used and evenly distributed nouns occur help to comprehend students’ perceptions or attitudes on reciprocity in teletandem learning experience?

This study engages in a two-fold investigation: firstly, to determine common topics regularly discussed by students in their learner diaries; and secondly, to closely examine the presence of ‘reciprocity’ within these often talked-about subjects. These objectives are achieved by carrying out a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Starting with a quantitative scrutiny of learner diaries, prevalent topics are identified through an analysis of noun frequency and distribution by means of Sketch Engine. This investigation is followed by a deeper exploration that delves into the collocation of these identified nouns alongside verbs. This analytical phase, significant for its intention to unveil linguistic patterns that “directly address exchange activities” (Koch 2017, p. 128), ultimately serves to illuminate the degree to which reciprocity is interwoven with what participants say. Following Cappellini *et al.* (2020), we investigate what students say about the principle of reciprocity in student diaries.

## 2. Background to the study

The current research is based on the notions that (i) learning diaries may reveal students’ perceptions, attitudes, feelings in relation to their learning experience within teletandem, and (ii) corpus analysis may assist researchers describe/investigate the most salient/relevant issues mentioned by learners.

### 2.1. Learning diaries

Diary studies have been under development for several decades and, over the years, insights from various research perspectives have contributed to our understanding of the nature of this genre. A concise and lucid definition of diaries in the area of language learning is provided by Bailey and Oschener (1983, p. 189), who describe diaries as “accounts of second language experiences recorded in a first-person journal”. According to the authors, diaries encompass reports on affective factors, language learning strategies, perceptions of the language learning experience, and students’ interpretations of different events. Diaries can be categorised as either introspective or retrospective, depending on the timing of their creation. Introspective diaries are written during the learning experience, while retrospective diaries can be produced immediately after the activity (immediate retrospection) or even years later (delayed retrospection). In both introspective and retrospective diaries, the writing process serves as a medium through which “what happens in the head” is represented, allowing others to read and interpret the contents (Moon 2004, p. 80). Consequently, diaries offer a unique representation of events that may not always be easy to decipher.

Porto’s (2007) study in the foreign language classroom indicates that diaries may reveal vital elements of students’ learning experiences, including: (i) personality, behaviour and attitudes, (ii) influence on and from others, (iii) learning styles and strategies, as well as components of instructor-student and student-student interactions. Besides, the results reveal that reflection encouraged by regular diary writing was linked to concrete classroom events and enabled learners to examine “their own thinking, their values and ideas, and their attitudes towards their language lessons in general and classroom activities and topics in particular” (Porto 2007, p. 690). The notion that diary writing may reveal students’ interpretations of their learning experience is pivotal for the achievement of the objectives of this study.

### 2.2. Corpora, learning diaries and automatic research tools for exploring data

In the field of corpus-based research, data can derive from both large and small corpora. A large corpus is considered representative of the entire language. For example, the Bank of English and the BNC, comprising 100 million words, encompasses a wide range of genres

and text types. Small corpora are more specialised, focusing on specific genres or topics. They are compiled based on socio-cultural and contextual features, such as medium, language variety, and genre (Aston 1997; Prat Zagrebelsky 2004). A corpus is considered plurilingual if it contains texts in multiple languages (Léglise, Alby 2016, p. 3). The learning diaries used in this study, compiled in an electronic format suitable for computerised analysis, constitute a small bilingual corpus, (L1, L2) with a total of 123,112 tokens across 662 diaries.

Corpus exploration relies on computer programs capable of performing various tasks with different query options. Regarding text mining instruments relevant to the current research, the following tools will be described: wordlist, concordance, collocation, variation in word distribution, and word sketch. The wordlist is typically the initial tool used for corpus exploration as it displays word occurrences and provides an overview of the corpus (Bianchi 2012, p. 45). A wordlist can generate a list of lemmas or different types of lists based on word attributes (e.g., words starting or ending with specific letters) or lexical categories (e.g., nouns). By selecting a word from the wordlist, a concordancer can be employed to search for language patterns (i.e., strings of text) or larger co-texts (e.g., sentences) in which a specific word, referred to as a word node or key word, appears. Furthermore, concordance lines can be used to investigate word collocation, which refers to the occurrence of two or more words in close proximity within a text (Sinclair 1991, p. 170). Word variation distribution indicates the parts of the corpus where a word occurs, allowing researchers to determine if its distribution is even throughout the corpus. Finally, an invaluable tool is the word sketch, which provides a concise overview of the primary grammatical and collocational behaviour of a word. The query is performed based on a specific word, and the result is a one-page panel highlighting collocations grouped by grammatical relations (e.g., nouns as subjects, predicate adjectives following a noun).

### **2.3. Teletandem and the principle of reciprocity**

Teletandem (TT) practice is based on the tandem model, which has been implemented in face-to-face context (Little, Brammerts 1996). (Tele)Tandem practice is guided by the theoretical principles of reciprocity and autonomy and researchers also recognize the role of separation of languages, as proposed by Telles and Vassallo (2006), or translanguaging, as proposed by Satar *et al.* (2023). The principles of autonomy and reciprocity, however, are consensually considered crucial for any tandem learning environment. The former, according to Cappellini *et al.* (2020), has received far more attention than the latter. Autonomy means that each participant should be responsible for his/her own learning in (tele)tandem (Little, Brammerts 1996; Telles, Vassallo 2006), which entails that each participant should set a goal and negotiate their learning preferences and needs with their partner.

Reciprocity, mentioned in Telles (2015, p. 614) “as mutual support and interdependence between the two partners based on equal commitment in such a way that both benefit as much as possible from their working together” (Brammerts 2003, p. 29), has been investigated by Cappellini *et al.* (2020). In an attempt to explore how learners express themselves about the principle of reciprocity, the authors analysed data from three different types of log formats written by Brazilian, French and Australian students and provide a thorough review of reciprocity in tandem language learning. They adopt a tentative definition from Koch (2017, pp. 126-127):

Reciprocity is the mode and rhythm of the exchange of information and objects in a given historical sociocultural situation between two or more communicators which bears the obligation to respond to a perceived impulse or gift in a way and time frame that corresponds

(sic) to an acknowledged convention. It contributes to the building and perception of meaning, social relationship and stratification.

They also emphasize that Koch considers five dimensions of reciprocity in tandem learning:

- (1) Organisational: interactions are divided into two parts and both languages are used. Collaboration between partners is achieved at best through explicit negotiation or usually through implicit adjustments;
- (2) Intercultural: intercultural differences are treated as conversational topics and each partner explains to the other elements of his/her culture;<sup>2</sup>
- (3) Discursive: during tandem interactions, the interlocutors adapt to each other in multimodal ways by accomplishing social interactional acts such as turn taking (Sacks *et al.* 1974) or repair (Schegloff *et al.* 1977). This dimension relates mostly to co- or para-verbal dimensions of communication and is largely unconscious;
- (4) Semantic: participants negotiate the meaning of words and concepts in order to align their understanding;
- (5) Use of the interlocutor's target language: this dimension relates to the conversational adjustments (Bange 1996).

The authors' results partially corroborate Koch's definition of reciprocity, mainly the aspects related to the organizational and intercultural dimensions. Based on the analysis of the students' logs, they found out that students say they do the following things related to Koch's categories : (i) talk about time and language division (how the sessions were divided and with which language the teletandem pair start); (ii) take collective decision making (participants jointly take decisions about different aspects of their teletandem partnership); (iii) meet the partners' needs (how a learner establishes a learning goal he wants to pursue with the help of his/her partner); (iv) comparisons on cultural topics (i.e. topics associated with the countries of the interlocutors) and language skills (e.g. proficiency level in their respective foreign languages).

The results also indicate that the 'relationship' between participants seems to be a defining dimension of reciprocity in teletandem. This may be another dimension their analyses revealed, which is characterised by the following dimensions: (i) affective and emotional aspects (learners express their feelings about the contact they have with their partners), (ii) mutual interests (learners spend part of the oral session discussing their common interests and hobbies). They conclude:

relationship is directly linked to the principle of reciprocity since it is a foundation for it. In the case of the affective dimension, it seems to be conducive of subsequent engagement and sufficient motivation to overcome the limitations in the interlocutors' communicative competences. In the case of mutual interest, the reciprocity is expressed through the building of a safe common ground on which it is possible to deal with the uncertainty of different frames of reference. (Cappellini *et al.* 2020, p. 24)

The reciprocity-related aspects uncovered/proposed by these studies are intimately linked to the other, to the partner.

While Cappellini *et al.*'s approach centers on a data-driven qualitative method, the current study, starting from a frequency list, takes primarily a quantitative stance in order to access the corpus, thereby selecting a specific dataset for subsequent analysis.

<sup>2</sup> For a critical approach to this view of culture in tandem, see also Mompean and Cappellini (2015) and Hauck (2024).

In this study, just like in Cappellini *et al.*, data come from students' reflections as they write about the experience. Therefore, their theoretical-methodological proposal seems relevant for our analysis.

### 3. Methods

The present study involves the identification of prevalent topics commonly found in learner diaries and the investigation of the presence of the concept of 'reciprocity' within these extensively discussed subjects. These aims are achieved through the application of a mixed-method approach. Initially, quantitative techniques, using Sketch engine (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014), are employed to highlight the nouns with high frequency and distribution. Subsequently, content analysis (Neuendorf 2017) is used to analyse what students say when they use these nouns in collocation with verbs that possess semantic relevance to "direct exchange activities" (Koch 2017, p. 128).

#### 3.1. Teletandem Learning Scenarios at UNESP and data development

This study is based on the teletandem pedagogical scenario as it is implemented at São Paulo State University - São José do Rio Preto. According to Aranha and Leone (2017), this specific scenario comprises two macrotasks: teletandem oral session<sup>3</sup> and mediation. Each macrotask comprises different tasks whose purpose is to assist language learning and reflection in teletandem. One of these tasks is the learning diary, which is written either in Portuguese or English every week after the oral session.

According to Cavalari and Aranha (2016, p. 332), the learning diary is "a means to stimulate ongoing reflection about the learning process". Because diaries are supposed to be written after each oral session, they are considered an immediate retrospection (Bailey, Oschsner 1983). Participants should reflect upon their experience during the TOS and evaluate their progress towards their learning goals as well as the benefits the experience has brought to them. Ideally, students should write their diaries having in mind the goals they set in their initial questionnaire. Before they start the project, during the tutorial (or preparation phase), participants have access to the guiding questions they should follow in order to write the diaries. The following guidelines are offered to students during the tutorial:<sup>4</sup>

After each teletandem oral session, it is essential that you write a learning diary. Writing the diaries aims at helping you reflect upon what happens during the sessions and how you can benefit from the experience. When you write your diary, try to reflect on:

- Which topics were discussed during that specific session? What did you learn?
- Go back to the learning goals you set when you answered the initial questionnaire. Explain how your participation in the project has been helping you achieve them. If you conclude that you might be on the wrong track, think about ways to make adjustments.
- Make comments about (i) moments in which there was any conflict or you faced any difficulty; (ii) the causes for that; (iii) how (or if) the problem was solved. Has your partner been supporting your learning process? How? Did you negotiate these issues during the session??

<sup>3</sup> Teletandem oral sessions normally last one hour. They occur on a weekly basis.

<sup>4</sup> Instructions to learners were translated by the authors. The original text can be found in the website: <https://teletandemriopreto.wixsite.com/ibilce/como-produzir-o-diario>

The research methodology will be described in detail in the following subsections: 3.2 is dedicated to data description; 3.3 to procedure description.

### 3.2. Data

The data used in this investigation come from MulTeC (Multimodal Teletandem Corpus) - a multimodal bilingual corpus that comprises written and spoken data generated from 2012 to 2015 by sixteen cohorts who participated in Teletandem, in a total of 282 participants (both from Brazil and the USA) who met the protocols for consent procedures.<sup>5</sup> Data was anonymized and all names were substituted for codes (for more details, see Aranha, Lopes 2019). Our subcorpus comprises the diaries Brazilian participants wrote after each of their teletandem sessions, as part of the steps followed by the ones involved in Institutional Integrated Teletandem (Aranha, Cavaliari 2014). The participants could choose the language they would write their diaries (either L1 or L2). For the current research, the diaries were divided in two subcorpora (Figure 1): TTEnLD (Teletandem English Learning Diaries) and TTPorLD (Teletandem Portuguese Learning Diaries). The former includes 350 diaries, containing 66,738 tokens and 59,150 words. The latter consists of 312 diaries and counts 56,344 tokens and 49,316 words. The difference between numbers of tokens and words shows that in the corpora some nonwords appear (such as the acronym by which each participant is anonymously referred to, i.e. TI code, Teletandem Identity). Roughly speaking, each diary is not particularly long: the average length of a diary in English is 169 words (from 11 to 14 lines), and the average length of a diary in Portuguese is about 158 words (from 10 to 13 lines).

Subcorpus	Number of diaries	Tokens	Words
TTEnLD (Teletandem English Learning Diaries)	350	66,738	59,150
TTPorLD (Teletandem Portuguese Learning Diaries)	312	56,344	49,316

Figure 1  
Learning diaries subcorpora composition.

### 3.3. Analysis procedure

Initially, both subcorpora underwent Sketch Engine Tools. Taking advantage of the query option for words' grammatical category, two wordlists of nouns (in Portuguese and in English) were compiled. To eliminate the effects of corpora different sizes, normalized frequency scores of most frequent nouns were considered and each frequency was converted into million words.

The nouns, representative of shared topics of discussion in learner diaries, were selected by considering not only their frequency in texts but also how they were spread throughout the two diary collections. For a more in-depth analysis, for those words whose frequency and distribution were comparable in both subcorpora, we also examined the contexts in which they appeared. This was achieved by using Word Sketch to highlight verbs often associated with the target word, giving access to concordances of each collocation. Finally, drawing inspiration from the content analysis methodology (e.g. Neuendorf 2017), we interpreted the context in which those search words were followed by verbs, considering the categories suggested by Cappellini *et al.* (2020).

<sup>5</sup> See Aranha and Lopes (2019) and Aranha and Wigham (2020) for details on consent procedures and on MulTeC compilation procedures.

## 4. Results and discussion

In the following section and subsections, we provide a description of numerical data, accompanied by selected examples that are representative of our qualitative analysis.

### 4.1. The most frequent and evenly distributed words in TTEndLD and in TTPorLD

In both frequency lists, depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3, ‘interaction’ (n. 1) and ‘partner’ (n. 2) are the most frequent terms in the TTEndLD subcorpus (Figure 2); while ‘*interação*’ and ‘*parceiro*’ hold the same positions in the TTPorLD (Figure 3).

	Noun	Frequency ? ↓	Frequency Per Million ? ↓
1	interaction	481	7,207.29 ...
2	partner	263	3,940.78 ...
3	movie	260	3,895.83 ...
4	time	194	2,906.89 ...
5	word	192	2,876.92 ...
6	thing	190	2,846.95 ...
7	english	183	2,742.07 ...
8	text	158	2,367.47 ...
9	brazil	155	2,322.51 ...
10	composition	150	2,247.60 ...

Figure 2  
The most frequent words in TTEndLD (with normalized frequency).



	Noun	Frequency <sup>2</sup> ↓	Frequency Per Million <sup>2</sup> ↓
1	interação	587	10,418.15
2	parceiro	321	5,697.15
3	inglês	286	5,075.96
4	português	223	3,957.83
5	redação	209	3,709.36
6	língua	156	2,768.71
7	correção	153	2,715.46
8	palavra	149	2,644.47
9	brasil	140	2,484.74
10	assunto	129	2,289.51

Figure 3  
The most frequent words in TTPorLD (with normalized frequency).

If we consider that reciprocity involves “the mode and rhythm of the exchange of information and objects in a given historical sociocultural situation between two or more communicators” (Koch 2017, pp. 126-127), the prevalence and broad usage of interaction and partner (*interação* and *parceiro*) may unveil how teletandem communicators connect and exchange information during the teletandem experience. Furthermore, ‘interaction’ had a normalized frequency (per million) of 7,207.29 and ‘*interação*’ 10,418.15. The emphasis placed by students on the interaction itself and its characteristics underscores the epistemological essence of teletandem, which places great significance on language practice, cultural exchange and collaborative learning for developing L2 communicative skills. We should also consider that these highly occurring terms might appear in the two subcorpora in the form of synonyms; for instance, ‘conversation’ for ‘interaction’, and the partner might also be mentioned by name (replaced by codes). Thus, references to these two concepts are higher than simply the counts of ‘interaction/*interação*’ and ‘partner/*parceiros*’. The distribution of the target word in the subcorpus was also examined to determine its relevance across different cohorts (Figure 4). The word ‘interaction’ was found to have a widespread distribution in TTEndLD (Figure 4), as well as ‘*interação*’ in TTPorLD, which indicate the significance of this topic across various groups. The second most frequent words in the two lists, ‘partner’ and ‘*parceiro*’, had a similar distribution. Results show that participants not only focus on their interaction but also put relevance on the Other.

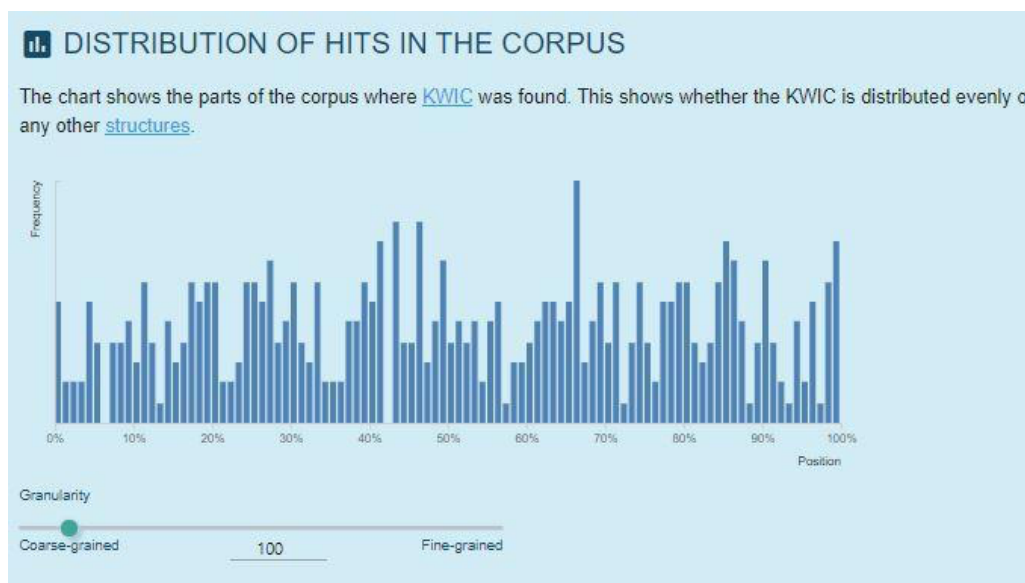


Figure 4

Distribution of “interaction” in TTEndLD. The vertical line represents the frequency of word occurrences in each subcorpus file.

During this phase of the analysis, the following terms were also brought to light. We report them, showing their positional frequency in both the English and Portuguese subcorpora.

- ‘word’ (n. 5) and ‘*palavra*’ (n. 8), ‘English’ (n. 7) and ‘*inglês*’ (n. 3), as well as ‘Brazil’ (n. 10) and ‘*Brasil*’ (n. 9), which are common to both subcorpora but have different rankings.
- ‘movie’ (n. 3), ‘time’ (n. 4), ‘thing’(n. 6), ‘text’(n. 8), and ‘composition’(n. 10) which appear in TTEndLD subcorpus while the Portuguese subcorpus contains ‘*redação* (composition/essay)’, ‘*língua* (language)’, ‘*correção* (correction)’, and ‘*assunto* (subject)’.

Although there are some differences between the two frequency lists in terms of word choice and ranking, both word frequency lists reflect specific features of the learning scenarios of each cohort. For instance, despite being one of the most frequently used words in terms of relative frequency, the word ‘movie’ had a low distribution in the English subcorpus, suggesting that this topic appealed to only a limited number of students, particularly those who discussed a task determined by a specific learning scenario, i.e., one that included two movie discussions (one Brazilian and one American movie, chosen by the teacher) as a mandatory task, probably because part of the syllabus of that very cohort. The high frequency of the term ‘movie’ signifies the students’ dedication to reporting and discussing participants’ activities during the teletandem oral session. The word ‘*redação*’, that appears in the 5th position, is relevant to a recurring task in the learning scenario. In this context, participants write texts in the language they are learning and exchange them with the proficient speaker so that he/she can contribute for their improvement. ‘Composition’, which is a synonym of ‘*redação*’, also appears as frequent, which is obviously related to the fact that participants talk about the activities they perform during the TOS.

Additionally, the use of the word ‘thing’ in the L2 subcorpus, which is in the fifth position, may be considered a ‘generic word’, that was probably chosen as a communicative strategy to compensate for an unknown term. The presence of the words ‘*inglês*’, ‘*português*’ and ‘English’ may be twofold: they might indicate the language they are speaking and, consequently, due to the principle of separation of languages, the language

switch that occurs in the middle of the TOS, or they can indicate the need for translation of words, terms, meanings, usages, etc., i.e., their appearance may be both related to linguistic matters and to the principle that underlies the practice.

In the following subsections, using word sketch and the concordance tool we analyse more deeply the usage of the two most frequent and widespread words: ‘interaction/*interação*’ and ‘partner/*parceiro*’.

## **4.2. An insight into the context of ‘interaction/*interação*’ and ‘partner/*parceiro*’**

To achieve a more in-depth description of language use in context, we investigated the collocational behaviour and the concordances of ‘interaction’ or ‘*interação*’, ‘partner’ or ‘*parceiro*’, when these nouns served as objects and as subjects (section 4.2.1). Sentences in which nouns and verbs occurred were coded by means of content analysis (Neuendorf 2017) and categorised according to Koch (2017, 2020)’s and Cappellini *et al.* (2020)’s proposals: (i) time and language division; (ii) collective decision making; (iii) how the partners’ needs are met by the native speaker; (iv) comparisons on topics and language skills and (v) relationship (i.e. affective and emotional dimensions and mutual interest).

### *4.2.1. Collocational behaviour: focus on verbs*

The analysis reveals that ‘interaction’ serves as an object with verbs that describe the organization of the activity (Koch 2017, 2020), such as ‘start’ and ‘miss’, and with verbs that indicate students’ perceptions of teletandem, such as ‘enjoy’, ‘hope’, and ‘like’. When ‘interaction’ takes on the role of the subject, certain verbs, ‘take place’ and ‘start’, for example, are associated with activity description, while ‘be’ and ‘go’ are utilized to evaluate the event.

When working with the Portuguese subcorpus, the Word Sketch tool does not explicitly indicate grammatical relationships, such as a noun’s function as an object or subject. Instead, its focus is on the structural positions of language forms, particularly emphasizing the proximity and sequential connection between verbs and nouns. This differentiation stems from the inherent disparities in the tagging system used for Portuguese, as well as other languages like Italian, when compared to English. In English, automated text mining tools provide a higher degree of investigational convenience due to the language’s extensive research history, especially within the corpus linguistics domain. This advantage is attributed to the well-established tagset and reliable automatic tagging systems that have evolved over decades (Zingano Kuhn, Kosem 2017). As a result, our examination of the subcorpus highlights combinations of verbs and the term ‘*interação*’, specifically instances where ‘*interação*’ is followed or preceded by a verb.

The term ‘*interação*’ is used in conjunction with verbs like ‘*começar, combinar, fazer, iniciar*’. Furthermore, ‘*interação*’ is associated with verbs such as ‘*haver, fluir*’, in addition to being linked with two other verbs, namely ‘*ajudar*’ and ‘*corrigir*’.

‘Partner’ as a grammatical object appears with verbs which address exchange activities, such as ‘meet, confuse, tell, help’. ‘Partner’ as subject appears with ‘have’ as well with verbs associated with exchanging activities such as ‘tell, say, write, explain, help’.

Concerning ‘*parceiro*’, this noun is followed by verbs such as ‘*dizer, fazer, querer*’ and wishes ‘*gostaria*’ (*I would like*). ‘*Parceiro*’ is preceded by verbs which address exchange such as ‘*receber, notar, ouvir, compreender*’.

In the upcoming sections, we delve into the meaning conveyed within the contexts in which the two most prevalent and widely used words occur.

#### 4.2.2. Various aspects of reciprocity

In this section, we examine the emergence of dimensions associated with various aspects of reciprocity. We will focus specifically on the search words and the use of verbs to explore what kind of information they convey in relation to the concept of reciprocity, as outlined in Koch (2017, 2020) and Cappellini *et al.* (2020). Given that the four target words, ‘interaction/*interação*’ and ‘partner/*parceiro*’, are semantically linked to “the mode and rhythm of the exchange of information and objects” (Koch 2017, pp. 126-127) and they “directly address exchange activities” (Koch 2017, pp. 128-129), we follow Cappellini *et al.* (2020) in order to specifically examine how (or if) this teletandem principle is emphasised in terms of activity organisation, which includes the dimension of collective decisions, how partner’s needs are met by the native speaker, comparisons on culture and language skills and relationship. We also discuss other relevant features in relation to reciprocity that might emerge during the empirical analysis.

#### 4.2.3. ‘Interaction/*interação*’ and ‘partner/*parceiro*’: activity organisation

Cappellini *et al.* (2020) state that students, when discussing aspects related to activity organization, confirm their mutual relationship within the teletandem context (Koch 2017). This might include discussing time and language division, for example.

The following extract illustrates discussions regarding ‘interaction/*interação*’ in relation to the organisation of the activity. Within these contexts, sometimes students explicitly delineate the specific date of the online meeting (Extract 1).

1. The fifth interaction took place on the 10th of April.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, sometimes, they write about a delay in the starting of the teletandem session (Extract 2).

2. My partner today was late so we started the interaction twenty minutes later.

There are also instances in which students convey to the reader that a session was missed (Extract 3).

3. Once again my interaction didn’t happen with U0F14

Another mentioned aspect is the difficulties faced by the learner when the interaction started and students’ mutual support that emerges (Extract 4). This is a crucial dimension of reciprocity as it highlights the partner’s disposition to collaborate.

4. Quando a interação começou de fato, eu notei algumas dificuldades, fiz dezenas de perguntas a minha parceira e ela, muito dispostamente, as respondeu<sup>7</sup>.

‘Interaction/*interação*’ and ‘partner/*parceiro*’ are used also to address, more specifically, technical problems and session management, as in extract 5.

<sup>6</sup> Extracts represent the original text produced by learners and have not been corrected.

<sup>7</sup> “When the interaction did start, I realized some difficulties, I have made a bunch of questions to my partner and she answered them gladly”.

5. Eu tentei perguntar novamente, mas ele não entendeu. Eu também tive problemas com o som, pois em vários momentos não consegui ouvir meu parceiro<sup>8</sup>

In extract 5, the participant highlights challenges in communication, probably deriving from poorly functioning technologies.

Learners also address the aspect of organization when discussing the partner's absence from the session (Extract 6).

6. O meu parceiro U0F12 faltou nesta interação<sup>9</sup>

Even though the learning scenario in which these data were generated involves the establishment of a calendar of activities by the teachers, our analysis indicates that learners recognize elements of the activity organization which are dependent on themselves and in relation to their partner, such as being present and on time for the oral sessions, for example. Additionally, the extracts highlight how students share their experiences of difficulties at the beginning of interactions, offering mutual support between partners. Technical issues and session management are also addressed using the terms 'interaction/*interação*' and 'partner/*parceiro*'.

#### 4.2.4. 'Interaction/*interação*' and 'partner/*parceiro*': collective decisions

This dimension of reciprocity emerges when students make decisions together regarding various aspects of their teletandem partnership. This occurs when the word '*interação*' collocates with the verb '*combinamos*', as demonstrated in the following extract:

7. Por fim, combinamos a nossa oitava interação (interação extra), falando cada um o login do Skype e combinando o horário para nos encontrar.<sup>10</sup>

A limited number of instances of this dimension of activity organization was identified in our dataset. This is likely attributed to either the logistical aspect, where teachers have already made most decisions for students (such as dates/time, duration, video conference tool, user/account for interaction, and tasks), or to the data we are analysing, which are based on the use of four words: 'interaction/*interação*' and 'partner/*parceiro*'.

#### 4.2.5. 'Interaction/*interação*' and 'partner/*parceiro*': how partners needs are met by the expert speaker<sup>11</sup>

According to Cappellini *et al.* (2020), this dimension of reciprocity addresses the fulfilment of the partners' needs by the native/expert speaker. When interaction/*interação* are used, this dimension of reciprocity emerges as a description/narration of how students 'spent their time' (Extract 8).

8. We spent the whole interaction working on my review of the movie Crash.

<sup>8</sup> "I tried to ask again, but she could not understand it. I also had problems with the sound system, because I could not hear my partner many times".

<sup>9</sup> "My partner U0F12 was absent in the last interaction".

<sup>10</sup> "At last, we arranged our 8th session (the extra one) by giving our skype login and setting the time to our meeting".

<sup>11</sup> Instead of "expert speaker" Cappellini *et al.* (2020) use the expression "native speaker". In our context and in various studies within Teletandem (cf. [www.teletandembrasil.org](http://www.teletandembrasil.org)), however, the term "expert", instead of "native", is adopted because the partner may not be native, but more proficient in the target language.

Additionally, this reciprocal aspect arises when the focus of the interaction is described. As in extract 8, in extract 9 partner's needs consist in developing writing skills, particularly those related to a "movie review in Portuguese".

9. The third interaction was focused in the writing of the movie review in Portuguese, so most of the time I spent correcting my partner's mistakes

More examples of this dimension are found in contexts in which 'partner/*parceiro*' occurs. In them, authors delve into participants' considerations of their partners, encompassing their perspectives on the learning experience. This is in alignment with Leone's *et al.* (2023) results, which revealed that a key element in learners' reflections is the recognition of their partner's role in their learning. Also, it should be taken into consideration that most teletandem learning scenarios in this data set involves a text exchange task (Aranha *et al.* 2023), which may guide learners' practice if they think it is relevant working on the revision of their texts during the oral sessions. The data indicate that the task offers support to these learners' practice as they discuss the text revision, focusing on the partner's needs. This reveals, on the one hand, space for autonomous decisions on what is relevant for each individual student, and, on the other, the partner's role in collaborating.

In extract 10, the learner shows his/her sensitivity towards the partner's difficulties; in extract 11 towards the partner's achievements, comparing his/her learning success with his/her own.

10. There were some moments when my partner confused Spanish and Portuguese words, like picking the verb 'bailar' instead of 'dançar'

In extract 11, the employment of the verb '*receber*' before '*parceiro*' illustrates how certain students view their collaborative efforts, emphasising not only their contribution but also the input and the assistance they receive from their partner.

11. Enfim, creio que o retorno que estou recebendo do meu parceiro está sendo muito bom tanto em termos orais quanto escritos<sup>12</sup>

In extract 12, the student points out that engaging in English conversation with their partner serves as a valuable practice in the second language (L2).

12. Poder dialogar com meu parceiro me ajuda a exercitar meu pensamento em inglês, além de que por ele ser um falante da língua me ajuda a dizer corretamente<sup>13</sup>

This dimension also includes all instances of the verb 'to help/*ajudar*' when used before or after the word 'partner/*parceiro*'. In the following extracts the diary authors show expert speakers' strategies for trying to meet partner's needs: talking more (Extract 13), improving vocabulary (Extract 14), showing mistakes (Extract 15, 16), and offering suggestions on how to express oneself more naturally (Extract 16).

13. I still think I have to talk more in Portuguese to help my partner.
14. My partner helped me to find words that I had forget and to use better words to express my ideas.
15. My partner helped me showing my mistakes and what I need to learns more.

<sup>12</sup> "Well, I believe that the feedback I have been receiving from my partner has been very good both in the oral and written aspects".

<sup>13</sup> "Being able to interact with my partner helps me to develop my thinking in English, besides, because he is a proficient speaker helps me speak correctly".

16. My partner helps me a lot and he tries to correct me when I say something wrong or gives me advices on how to say things in a more natural way

In the above-mentioned extracts, students demonstrate consideration of their partner's challenges, learning process, knowledge, and a reflective attitude of the learner diary's author, as discussed in Leone, Aranha, Cavalari (2023).

In our dataset, the dimension of how partners' needs are met by the expert speaker becomes apparent when 'interaction/*interação*' are used. When describing how teletandem session time is spent, students specify the focus of the language exchange, which is often related to developing speaking and writing skills in L2 (e.g., vocabulary). This feature is also relevant when the words 'partner/*parceiro*' are used. In these contexts, students show sensitivity to partners' difficulties and highlight the reciprocal nature of their collaborative efforts.

#### 4.2.6. 'Interaction/*interação*' and 'partner/*parceiro*': comparisons on cultural topics and language skills

The principle of reciprocity is also defined by Cappellini *et al.* (2020) in terms of 'comparison' related to cultural topics and language skills. These imply discussing cultural problems, overcoming reductionist views of the target culture (Extract 17, 18), and comparing partner's proficiency with one's own (Extract 19). This dimension emerges when 'partner/*parceiro*' is used.

Extract 17 represents Cappellini *et al.* (2020) dimension 'reciprocity as comparisons on topics and language skills'. The author shows concern about avoiding any cultural bias during interactions. He/she also underscores how the partner played a crucial role in ensuring the appropriateness of communication.

17. I didn't knew how to talk about it in english without sounding prejudiced too, but my partner really helped me.

In extract n. 18, the use of the verb '*notar*' preceding the term '*parceiro*' reflects the student's focus on his/her partner and his/her active observation of his/her L2 culture.

18. Eu notei no meu parceiro um conhecimento muito grande com relação ao Brasil, tanto à história e geografia, quanto à política.<sup>14</sup>

Extract 19 shows the learner's recognition of the partner's achievements, comparing partner's learning success with his/her own.

19. Meu parceiro aprendeu muitas palavras novas e outros significados de uma mesma, como também aprendi mais algumas e outras<sup>15</sup>

In our dataset, the principle of reciprocity emerges in terms of comparison on cultural topics and language skills when 'partner/*parceiro*' is employed. Overall, the extracts confirm the multifaceted nature of this dimension, encompassing cultural understanding, linguistic proficiency, and collaborative learning experiences.

#### 4.2.7 'Interaction/*interação*' and 'partner/*parceiro*': reciprocity and the partners' relationship

<sup>14</sup> "I realized that my partner had great knowledge about Brazil, both related to Geography and Politics".

<sup>15</sup> "My partner has learned many new words and other meanings of the same one, as well as I have learned some new ones and others".

This dimension exemplifies ‘reciprocity’ concerning the ‘partner relationship’, emphasizing the focus on mutual interests and on the ‘affective and emotional dimensions’ of the experience (Cappellini *et al.* 2020). As suggested by the authors, this phenomenon does not neatly align with the traditional definitions of reciprocity, nor does it align with Koch’s five elements of reciprocity in tandem learning (organizational, intercultural, discursive, semantic, use of the interlocutor’s target language). It seems, however, a relevant aspect of how teletandem partners may establish common ground into which to build a reciprocal relationship. Extract 20 is an example of topics shared and discussed by students:

20. A nossa interação começou em português e começamos falando sobre um livro que ela me recomendou: Heart of darkness.<sup>16</sup>

The first sentence of extract 20 (*A nossa interação começou em português*) highlights the language used, which is related to activity organization. The second one focuses on what Cappellini *et al.* (2020) refer to mutual interest (*começamos falando sobre um livro*).

Reciprocity as expression of the relationship also emerges when students evaluate the interaction in terms of emotions. In extract 21 the session is judged as an ‘enjoyable’ experience, which implies a positive reciprocal relationship.

21. Today’s interaction was really enjoyable. We not only discussed some characteristics of the ‘favelas’ and ghettos but some grammar aspects

In extracts 22 and 23 emotions/feelings emerge to justify the positive judgements of the interactions when compared to the preceding ones.

22. I personally think this interaction was better the previous ones as I felt more confident to talking without pauses. Also, U0F1 helped me with some words or  
 23. Acredito que a última interação entre mim e U0F18 foi a melhor, comparada a todas as outras, devido à liberdade que tivemos para falar

Both extracts underline positive feelings: confidence and freedom. As suggested by Cappellini *et al.* (2020) “friendly climate” is “conducive of involvement and motivation”. These extracts reveal that the positive assessment is credited to both participants’ attitudes towards the interaction, i.e., the positive environment is perceived as a co-construction, either with the use of the first-person plural (*we discussed / liberdade que tivemos*) or with the presentation of what one feels in relation to what the other does (*I felt more confident ... U0F1 helped me*).

When using ‘partner/*parceiro*’, the emotional dimension describes partners’ attitudes. Particularly, in the following extracts, partner’s patience (24) and tolerance (25) show acceptance of the author’s learning needs and limitations in using the L2.

24. Fortunately, my partner had patience with me and helped in all she could, she answered all my doubts and always tried to understand me even though  
 25. Notei que o foi tolerante quanto à minha pronúncia em inglês e procurei sê-lo, também, quando ele utilizou o português<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> “Our interaction started in Portuguese and we talked about a book that she recommended: Heart of darkness”.

<sup>17</sup> “I realised my partner was very condescending in relation to my pronunciation in English and I tried to be too when he used Portuguese”.



In our dataset, reciprocity as mutual interest is described when discussing the topic of an interaction. Reciprocity as an expression of the relationship is also evident in emotional evaluations, such as the interaction being judged as ‘enjoyable’, thus indicating a positive reciprocal relationship. Positive judgments of interactions are also given in terms of confidence and sense of freedom in speaking. These positive assessments highlight a co-constructed positive environment. Instances with the use of ‘partner/*parceiro*’ highlight the affective emotional dimension, describing partners’ patience and tolerance, which demonstrate acceptance of learning needs and linguistic limitations in the second language. Overall, these findings indicate that affective and emotional dimensions are a relevant factor in establishing a reciprocal relationship among teletandem partners. Aligning with Cappellini *et al.* (2020) we believe that this feature should be included in the conceptualization of reciprocity, underscoring the crucial role that emotions play in learning a language. When learners are emotionally engaged, they are more deeply motivated (Dörnyei, Ushioda 2011) and more likely to talk with their partners using their L2 (Macintyre *et al.* 1998).

## 5. Concluding remarks

This study offers insights into learning diaries in Teletandem Pedagogical Scenarios. The methodology involved accessing the corpus via the most frequently and evenly distributed words. The results indicate the vital presence of elements related to the principle of reciprocity in the teletandem learning, and corroborate some of Koch’s (2017, 2020) and Cappellini *et al.*’s (2020) results, showing that students seem to perceive reciprocity as an essential aspect of this model of telecollaboration. In fact, the most frequent and evenly distributed words, ‘interaction/*interação*’ and ‘partner/*parceiro*’, have a direct relevance to the exchange activity in terms of the communication process between the learners and of their attitude towards the other/interlocutor, what is in accordance with the notion of reciprocity as defined by Koch (2017, p. 128).

More specifically, the results of the analysis of the dataset show that the most relevant aspects of reciprocity are those concerning:

(i) organisation of the activity in terms of when and how the interaction took place: this is in alignment with Koch’s and Cappellini *et al.*’s results. Even though the calendar is set by the teachers in the learning scenario we focused on, participants reported if their partner was absent, if there was a delay, if they faced any difficulties, or which language they used to begin the encounter;

(ii) meeting the partner’s needs: the most important features of this dimension is consideration of the partner’s difficulties, accomplishment of the tasks the partners seems to value, use of both languages and comparisons of topics;

(iii) building a relationship: affective and emotional aspects (learners’ feelings about the interactions are the key features in this dimension). It is worth noting that learners report both their own and their partners’ roles in establishing a positive relationship;

(iv) collective decisions: this aspect of reciprocity seems less relevant in our data and it certainly deserves further attention.

These results support the idea that utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses can be effective. This research approach allows for the management of a reasonable amount of data while retaining the important elements of learner diaries. In particular, these findings suggest that reciprocity is more than a theoretical principle since, from the learners’ perspective, it guides teletandem practice. In this sense, our results seem to corroborate

Koch's statement (Koch 2017, p. 122) that "reciprocity is the basic human behaviour for the construction of society and culture" as they indicate that reciprocity is an attitude for the construction of teletandem practice and language learning. This research could potentially contribute to the implementation of teletandem learning scenarios, particularly in relation to how to offer assistance to teachers and or to students on what the principle of reciprocity means in practice.

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