Promoting Intercultural Critical Literacy among Moroccan University Students Through Online International Collaborative Education

Abdellah El Boubekri

Abstract The present chapter aims to explore technology-mediated Task-Based Learning (TBL) as a stepping stone towards intercultural and internationalized learning. It starts by reviewing the research done on implementing TBL in technology-based learning and teaching. It revisits some crucial contributions related to the theory and practice of intercultural communication education. To illustrate this approach, the chapter re-examines and reviews the methodological organization of a Collaborative Online International Learning course (COIL), a program that aims at connecting classrooms, students, and faculties across the world. It discusses the end outcome of students' collaboration; a sample COIL project of teachers and students from Morocco and the US is analysed and discussed in the light of such a synergistic approach. Cooperating students are reported to have bolstered their cross-cultural critical competence.

Keywords COIL · TBL · Technology · Intercultural competence · Internationalised learning · Morocco · The US

1 Introduction

Critical intercultural literacy refers to the development of certain competencies and attitudes needed for successful involvement in cross-cultural communication which has become a required skill for an empowered global economy. This literacy is closely related to the contemporary internationalization of higher education which focuses on the integration of technology into learning and teaching. Among the rationales for advocating internationalized learning is the growing need for intercultural skills and enhanced cultural understanding within the global economy. Escrigas (2016) envisages an urgent transformation in human concept of progress which

A. El Boubekri (✉)
Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohamed I University, Morocco, Oujda

39

reconsiders "the interdependence of the economic, social, political, and environmental spheres. The international community of students now needs to comprehend the diverse instructional contexts and approaches through which knowledge is mediated and meaning is created" (para 35). The celebrated initiative of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) embodies a viable opportunity for international students to engage with cross-cultural differences and fully connect with a global education that is free from cultural biases. It is run and sponsored by the State University of New York in the context of its drive to promote a global community of practice that is based on students' and teachers' mobility, ideas exchange, resource sharing, contextualized decision-making, critical digital literacy, professional support, leadership and cooperative problem-solving (for further information, see this website https://coil.suny.edu/about-suny-coil/).

Due to the difficulty of attending educational programs abroad, the celebrated initiative of Collaborative Online International Learning COIL (see this website https://coil.suny.edu/about-suny-coil/) customizes cost-effective partnerships and projects to connect faculty and students from varied cultures drawing on the existing resources of technology. The ubiquity of internet-assisted communication tools allows for networked classrooms through which the partners exchange innovative learning and teaching styles. According to Fowler (2014), the assistant director of SUNY COIL Center, "the courses are team-taught with professors working closely with international peers to generate a shared syllabus based on solid academic coursework emphasizing experiential and collaborative student learning" (para 4).

To explore the COIL initiative, the present study revisits a partnership experience of a COIL course in which the researcher's class collaborated with an American class on *Media Studies and Society*. The aim of the COIL program is to initiate and facilitate global academic partnerships through COIL-enhanced modules for both international partners. The COIL example boosts the spirit of collaboration and team-working through the task and project-based approaches. The ultimate goal is to enhance cross-cultural and multidisciplinary learning environments which would serve the professional development of the partners. Through the use of synchronous and asynchronous digital tasks, the collaborating students developed their intercultural competence; Moroccan students in particular had the opportunity to learn how to switch between their native language and English. The assigned tasks were often seeded with cultural information gaps involving stereotypical situations from both cultures; they paved the way for the negotiation of intercultural content and triggered critical consciousness of cultures. Even with the less culturally-oriented tasks, students demonstrated a capacity to decentre themselves and act as global citizens who are more concerned with diversifying their learning resources and strengthening their global insight awareness.

Theoretically, such collaborative learning is informed by a symbiosis of three fundamental research methodologies, namely technology-assisted instruction, task-based learning, and intercultural learning. Technology-assisted instruction works effectively through Task-Based Learning (TBL) which can be defined as the principled adoption of teaching activities that have "the potential to involve learners in meaningful language use." (Müller-Hartmann & Ditfurth, 2011, p. 22). TBL is

known for its usefulness in the teaching of languages, but it can also be used to teach humanities and social sciences in English as a foreign language (Purdam, 2016; Khatib et al., 2011), as the case in Morocco. Technology-mediated TBL is supposed to enhance intercultural learning which is promoted by the increasing calls for internationalized education. Such intercultural communicative competence is grounded on critical pedagogy that feeds on comparative and reflective practices fostering cross-cultural sensitivity and the promotion of global citizenship.

The present chapter seeks to investigate the feasibility of the approach of technology-mediated TBL to foster critical intercultural learning. After reviewing the literature related to the suitability of applying TBL methodology to technology-based learning and teaching, it sets out to explore some important academic works pertinent to the theory and practice of intercultural communication education. Eventually, it proposes coupling the three pedagogical frameworks into one working approach instrumental for internationalized paradigms of learning. To illustrate this mixed approach, the chapter re-visits the methodological organization of the previously mentioned COIL course. It discusses the implications of a collaborative project undertaken by COIL students.

2   A Theoretical Framework

This section aims at shedding light at the three methodological frameworks which guide the present case study of a COIL project. It argues that technology-mediated learning is less effective in the absence of a principled methodology. Therefore, it lists some theoretical rationales for implementing the methodology of Task-Based Learning. The resultant Technology-mediated TBL is supposed to facilitate the critical intercultural learning goals underlined by the COIL initiative.

2.1   *Background of Technology-Mediated TBL*

TBL is one popular trend which accompanied the flourishing of the Communicative Approach in the late 1970s. Its principal objective is to train students for genuine use of language in life-like communicative situations. The application of modern educational technologies has likewise been motivated by language teachers' emphasis on the pedagogic gains from enhancing learners' engagement (Mofareh, 2019) and immersion in virtual interactive activities that are closer to reality. Apparently, although both TBL and technology appear to serve the same communicative purpose, attempts at combining their strengths remain unexplored.

Definitions of task-based learning are abundant in language learning literature. For the sake of simplicity, the current study will content itself with Jane Willis's understanding which is in harmony with the present communicative conception of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and teaching. For one thing, TBL is

compared to adventure-like learning whereby activities and content should not be determined a priori (Willis, 1998). This unpredictability reinforces the authenticity of learning, the creativity of learners, and reflects their real learning needs. It addresses their whole person learning requirements (socio-affective, cognitive and linguistic). In TBL, the purposeful use of target language is preferred to the structural rehearsal of grammatical forms; it is a "Goal-oriented communicative activity with a specific outcome, where the emphasis is on exchanging meaning, not producing specific language forms" (Willis, 1996, p. 36). As such, task designs are to observe Skehan's (1998) communicative criteria of the primacy of meaningfulness, purposefulness, innovation, authenticity, and the priority of the end product in assessment. Pedagogically, Willis' (1996) and Ellis' (2013) methodology is relevant to the present discussion. This methodology comprises three main steps. In the pre-task phase, the teacher brainstorms a certain topic with the students (the constructive nature of ads, for instance). As for the second phase (task cycle), the students are required to work in groups to plan, draft and report a certain task (analysing and deconstructing certain ads from two different contexts, say the US and Morocco). Finally, the post-task cycle is devoted to the language focus (analysis and practice).

Ellis (2019) addresses the need for teachers to understand exactly what is meant by TBL. As one example, he notes that tasks encourage "incidental learning [which] occurs when we pick up things without making a special effort to learn them" (p. 16). In a book offering practical pieces of advice to language teachers, Ur (2016) reminds us that students need to understand why they are being asked to do a particular task, not just how. By this, she means not only the surface learning goal but also the underlying one. For instance, she points out that through a discussion task students may have the aim of "reaching consensus on the solution of a problem" (p. 62) but, more deeply, the discussion is intended to improve fluency and skills, such as turn-taking.

The rationales for integrating technology in foreign language teaching are diverse and interlocking. To begin with, digital technologies have now become embedded in our life and learning/thinking processes. They have given rise to new tasks in real life; thus, they are transforming language needs. If the pedagogy does not match such changes, students are likely to be disengaged and become disaffected by school (Zyngier, 2008). Language teachers need to bear in mind that "today's language learners are expected to be able to develop multimodal communicative and task competencies above and beyond the reading and writing skills required by previous generations" (Thomas & Reinders, 2010, p. 6). In addition, instructional technologies are supposed to respond to diverse needs (Wahl & Duffield, 2005). Using cell phones, for instance, can secure full involvement of learners in class and outside school, which can culminate in increasing language retention and student engagement (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

Technology provides multimedia learning materials in the curriculum at any location in the world. It helps to link learners and teachers in geographically distinct locations and allows for flexible scheduling and interaction, which are supported by the multimodality options of networked computers which easily afford for online and offline communication resources (Evans, 2009). In addition,

technology-enhanced language learning softens the affective filter in that it reduces anxiety and the fear of making mistakes (Krashen, 1982) Arnold (2007) uncovers more anxiety among students from the traditional classroom setting than among the ones in computer-assisted classes. Kung & Eslami (2019, p. 1533) corroborate Arnold's findings by arguing that synchronous computer mediated communication reduces the anxiety of learners.

The need for a kind of symbiosis between technology and TBL is articulated by several researchers (Thomas & Reinders, 2010; Lai & Li, 2011; González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Chen, 2019; Norris, 2009; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; Branden, 2006). They all seem to agree that in the absence of the methodological guidance of TBL, technology may turn into a means of entertainment rather than instruction. TBL can maximize the potential of technological innovations for EFL education. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL), for example, is congruent with active learning. González-Lloret & Ortega (2014, p. 3) argue that

> Web 2.0 technologies create unprecedented environments in which students can engage in "doing things" through technology-mediated transformation and creation processes, rather than just reading about language and culture in textbooks or hearing about them from teachers. It is this potential of new technologies to engage students in active learning and holistic tasks that makes them excellent candidates for their integration in TBLT.

Hence, TBL is a natural choice for E-learning since both are based on experiential instruction and learning by doing. The use of technology can engagingly facilitate the accomplishment of various learning tasks: playing interactive games, exchanging information with native speakers and doing group work projects.

Another reason for basing technology-enhanced education on the methodology of TBL is provided in Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which posits that human mental and physical activities are always mediated by tools. It is considered as "a theory of mind that recognizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artefacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking" (Lantolf, 2004, pp.30–31). Such a sociocultural argument is endorsed by language scholars. Qin (2017), for instance, supports research concentration on the influence and function of sociocultural theory in the social formation of the mind and enmeshment of learning in socially and culturally mediated activities. In the same vein, Chen (2018, p. 95) asserts that these activities can be facilitated through the use of blended learning (the mix of online and offline learning). According to Bellefeuille (2006), social constructivism encourages the learner to actively craft ideas from prior experiences, shared information, and collaborative undertakings. Language classroom is seen as a space which provides for collaboration, discussion, authentic learning, scaffolding, reflection, self-directed learning and learner autonomy. Closely related to social constructivism is the theory of connectivism, which also sees learning as a function of forming networks, sharing networked content and connecting with people either in reality or virtually through technological tools (Siemens, 2005).

It is important to highlight that technology alone is insufficient in maintaining online classes. The role of pedagogical methodology in using digital tools is crucial.

For example, in the contemporary context of Morocco, with the social and physical distancing and lockdown brought about by the outbreak of COVID-19, the Ministry of Education declared closure of public schools and universities; resort to online learning was the only viable solution to keep students engaged in their classes. With a particular focus on higher education, the availability of electronic platforms on the universities' websites was not as helpful as the Ministry ambitiously claimed. In spite of the affordable technological tools at their disposal, both students and professors seem not quite confident and well-informed enough to use these platforms effectively. They lack educational procedures to invest in technology-based learning.

In spite of the crucial role of blended learning as "one of the most significant developments of the 21ˢᵗ century" (Thorne, 2003, p. 18), the feasibility of technology-based TBL is not without challenges. Salient among these challenges is teachers' resistance (see Howard & Mozejko, 2015; Howard, 2013; Gläsel, 2018), which is attributed to several factors that range from their lack of digital skills, misconception of technology as fad or sometimes as an authority that dictates what and how to do things, doubt about their ability to control the class, and affordance of internet connection facility. The other serious challenge is the lack of teachers' preparedness to methodologically integrate technology in foreign language classes. In order to support teachers in their use of technology, some researchers have emphasized the need to include this topic in language teacher education programs. Another important challenge for this instructional symbiosis is how it can be systematically customized to incorporate intercultural pedagogy that has recently received monumental hype in the field of language teaching and internationalized learning (Mezger-Wedlandt, 2010, p.1). A preliminary question that can be asked here is how technology-mediated tasks can sustain chances for learners to compare their cultural knowledge with other cultural backgrounds to boost their spirit of openness and value cultural difference.

2.2   Technology-Mediated TBL and Intercultural Learning

Intercultural education features as one of the most enquired-about topics in recent ELT scholarship. It has been recommended by international organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO, as well as international and national educational documents, including the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Alderson, 2002), and UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education (UNESCO, 2006). Fantini (2005, p. 1) defines intercultural competence as "the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself." Similarly, Schenker (2012, p. 450) draws on Byram's (1997) famous *savoirs* (knowledge-abilities) to illustrate his definition of intercultural communicative competence. He summarizes these *savoirs* as follows: "knowledge of self and other, attitudes of openness and curiosity, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness."

Research on the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) through the integration of technology has recently gained much pedagogical credence. The accumulating research probes different dimensions of this integration. Lawrence (2013) discusses the challenges that limit the pedagogical incorporation of online intercultural collaboration into classroom language teaching. He insists on involving the learners in the design and organization of these collaborations by investing in their sense of identity and community to maximize intercultural language learning procedures. In another context, El Boubekri (2017) advocates blended modes of instruction in Moroccan higher education to promote intercultural awareness; the study reveals that technology and intercultural learning rank at the top of students' curriculum expectations and needs. Likewise, Perren (2018) researches the effect of practical technology applications such as CALL and telecollaboration on intercultural communication. He looks into the pedagogical possibilities of reflective blogging, graphics and mobile devices. (See also Marczak, 2013; Uzun, 2014; Hoat, 2016; O'Toole, 2018; Taskiran, 2020). The application of technologies in intercultural language teaching and learning has been extensively tackled. For instance, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013, p. 107) claim that the spread of technology has contributed to the teaching of culture in contextual situations. The advent of the Web 2.0 instils an internet participatory culture which blurs the previous distinction between information technologies and social technologies such as e-mails or chats that facilitate social interaction across cultures (see also Kiswaga & Triastuti, 2019; Chen & Yang, 2014; Custer, 2016; Saba, 2016).

The implementation of TBL in intercultural learning is not uncommon (see East, 2012; Yi Ji, 2018; Lingling & Lv, 2019). In his study of intercultural tasks, Corbett (2003) capitalizes on Nunan's (1998) TBL framework in designing tasks for intercultural classroom. Nunan's framework consists of deciding on (1) the goal (a combination of intercultural and linguistic exploration); (2) the input (comparing L1 and L2 cultural constructs); (3) the activities (observing and discussing the input); (4) the learner's role (analyser, negotiator and reflector of cultural behaviours); (5) the teacher' role (adviser and guide of cultural behaviours); (6) the setting (individual, pair and group work). Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) suggest a circular intercultural classroom language methodology which starts with the process of (1) noticing two cultural constructs, then (2) comparing them, (3) reflecting on their similarities and differences and eventually (4) interacting and exchanging opinions. The authors think that well-designed pedagogic intercultural tasks involve EFL learners into reflective exchanges which might signal "the beginning of a process of decentering from their own cultural assumptions and beginning to think about their culture from other perspectives" (p.112). Intercultural tasks that require students to contrast and compare beliefs and views about certain everyday cultural constructs (e.g., family, youth, gender, authority, values, media, education…) to fill a cultural information gap can elevate their negotiating skills vis-à-vis the cultural content (Crookes & Gass, 1993). Equally, Mezger-Wedlandt (2013, p. 2) states that "with their focus on meaning, interaction, sharing and negotiating, tasks create an effective and motivating learning environment for intercultural learning". In addition, Müller-Hartmann (2000) advocates the use of TBL in intercultural learning as its interactive nature

helps learners unpack freely their personal as well as cultural views. He states that "task-based approach develops its fullest potential by allowing learners to develop and express their views, thus making real communication possible and consequently setting the stage to initiate processes of intercultural learning" (p. 145).

Apparently, the previous research tackled different manifestations of either the technology usefulness in boosting ICC in classroom or the effectiveness of TBL approach in intercultural learning. However, the customization of TBL approach to optimize such technology-based intercultural learning is poorly studied; intercultural learning through technology-assisted TBL is a timely and intriguing subject that has not carefully been attended to. E-learning materials enable intercultural interaction and collaboration with the target language native speakers in both synchronous and asynchronous ways. They provide opportunities for authentic language use and rich input. To optimize E-learning resources and activities for a meaningful intercultural instruction, E-learning materials should be handled in the light of TBL approach.

The very little research (e.g., Canto et al., 2014) that has touched upon the issue of intercultural learning through technology-mediated TBL has not drawn on a clear methodological organization of tasks like the ones suggested above by Willis (1996) and Ellis (2013). Practically, it is not enough to argue that tasks involve learners in discovery, challenge, reflection and co-operation and overcoming cross-cultural conflict. Instead, it is significant to evince how to design and organize tasks electronically for the sake of managing interculturally-oriented language classroom. In this regard, O'Dowd and Ware (2009) affirm that

> [T]elecollaborative tasks generally involve different linguistic and cultural communities and thereby have a strong possibility of producing negotiation of meaning and providing opportunities for the exploration of different cultural perspectives. This makes them particularly suited to recent approaches to task-based learning which include a focus on issues related to intercultural communication…and…a focus on the skills of electronic literacy. (p. 175)

However, their concern was mainly on experimenting with the communicative task types as advanced by Nunan (1998) and Pica (2005). The focus of this chapter is, however, on implementing the methodological framework developed by Willis (1996) and Ellis (2013), which allows a concrete assessment of the learning outcomes in intercultural collaborative projects.

To sum up, this literature review section has attempted to suggest a methodological framework that can guide collaborative online international initiatives targeting the enhancement of university students' intercultural communicative competence. The feasibility of this framework will be verified through exploring a sample collaborative project. The major research question that informs this exploratory endeavour is the extent to which online internationalized educational projects can sustain opening up students' perspectives to unbiased ways of being, thinking and learning in a globalized age.

3   Method

This section provides details about the methods adopted to address the research's major problem. It aims particularly at highlighting the context of where, when and how the research was conducted, information about the methods of sampling, collecting and analysing data, and finally sketching out an example of an ad deconstructed and reconstructed into a counter-ad by a group of collaborating students.

3.1   The Research Context

The present chapter draws on a descriptive exploration of a Collaborative Online International Learning experience in which two teachers from Morocco and the US collaborate in the form of blended learning. Collaborating teachers participated in Stevens Initiative Workshop at the American University of Cairo, Egypt (October 30 to November 3, 2016). They received instructive sessions on how to design tasks that respond to the requirements of their current courses and open opportunities for intercultural learning through educational technologies.

In collaboration with Professor Marcia Blackburn, a SUNY college partner from New York, the researcher taught a joint-module on *Media and Society*. It was part of his semester 4 class: *Media Studies*. Starting in March 2017, he selected twenty interested students to collaborate with Blackburn's students (20 in total as well). This collaboration gave them the unique opportunity to explore topics in mass media with students from another country and culture. Before starting the collaboration and as icebreakers to test for technological equipment, the collaborators launched a mini-COIL unit at the end of fall semester 2016; they created a closed Facebook group and students were assigned to record personal videos about the places where they lived and some details about their daily routines. Students were prompted to comment on the things that seemed new to them.

During the spring term 2017, the collaborating students had a blended class on *Media Studies and Society*. In the offline classes, students received the same syllabus, which was centred on media literacy, the language of persuasion, deconstruction of print ads and reconstruction of counter-ads. Following Willis (1998) and Ellis (2013)'s models, the teachers structured online classes as follows:

Pre-task
Paired students choose print ads (from a given list) from either Morocco or the US. They discuss, describe, compare and analyse the contents of the ads. Drawing on their cultural knowledge, students interpret the meaning expressed in the ads. Teachers post some media literacy concepts and examples of deconstructed ads through some guided questions and assignments. Teachers encourage students to reread the ads based on their new acquired knowledge.

Task-cycle
Task:

In group of four (2 Americans and 2 Moroccans), students choose print ads of their own choice. Students discuss, compare and analyse the topic, language, audience, form, text and subtext of the selected ads.

Planning:

Drawing on the feedbacks of the other groups and the teachers, students create their own counter-ads in writing or speaking using pictures in which they demonstrate a grasp of the intended message.

Report:

Presenting and comparing the ads and whole class check if the deconstructed meaning is countered.

Post-task

The teachers provide some commentaries on the language used and concepts employed, along with some suggestions for improvements. Students provide debriefings about the challenges and the new learned knowledge. Students are encouraged to re-create their counter-ads based on the received feedback.

3.2 Sampling Technique

The collaborating students were required to create counter-ads as the end-products of their COIL session; the researcher selects randomly and anonymously one example of these counter-ads from the platform to elucidate the intercultural dimension of such collaboration.

3.3 Data Gathering and Analysis Method

The following data were posted in the SUNY Blackboard platform that the cooperating students used to interact and accomplish their collaborative work. Besides, drawing on some of their displayed comments and feedbacks, the researcher reports the selected ad as it is, how the partnering students deconstruct it in the light of the techniques discussed in offline classes, and how they manage to create counter-ads that translate their awareness of common global issues. This is followed by a general discussion of how this collaborative initiative, which was sustained by a technology-mediated TBL, contributes to the development of students' intercultural cognizance.
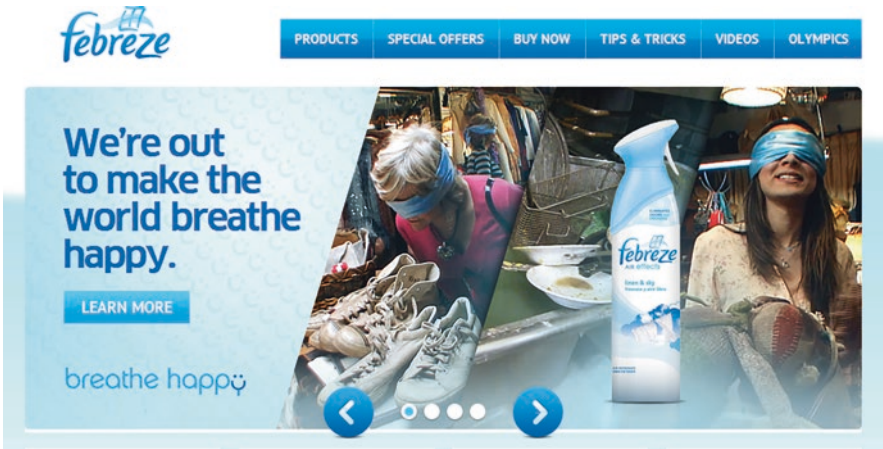
Fig. 1 Deconstructing an Ad (a reported example)

3.3.1   The Sampled Data

The following data consist of a sample ad that a group of collaborating students choose to deconstruct and turn into a counter-ad. Their analytical and deconstructive texts are reported as they appear in the platform (see Fig. 1). In deconstructing ads, students are taught to focus on identifying the source of the ad, its audience, its text and subtext, the techniques of persuasion it utilizes, and finally the points of view it reflects.

Source In 1998, Procter and Gamble P&G came up with the idea of *Febreze*. In 2008, it got upgraded to what we know today.

Audience Women, wives, and moms: middle class, working class; car and pet owners.

Text & Subtext
Text: "We're out to make the world breathe happy": The text claims that the company is working closely for consumer satisfaction by providing a fresh odour. This is further depicted through the images which show women of different ages who seem to be from the middle class based on their clothing, and are exposed to a dirty area, but clueless to the fact thanks to Febreze.
Subtext: The sentence (we are out to make the world breathe happy) itself is not only vague but grammatically incorrect. However, in most cases with product promotion, the expression has been used as a catchphrase indicating that Febreze will provide a likeable odour that would enhance the consumer's happiness. Nonetheless, Febreze seems to have neglected the negativity behind the message it conveys through the images. The fact that the images depict the previously

mentioned concept of negativity makes the consumer think: "Is Febreze really cleaning the odour, or simply masking it and exposing me to even more germs?"

Persuasion techniques   The methods of persuasion used are simple, and effective:

Plain Folks – The ad uses everyday Americans, average working-class people, to authenticate **P&G's claim**. It also allows the audience to associate with people using the product in the ads.

Scientific Evidence – They use experts and test to prove that Febreze cleans the air; they also use a fake study, with a test to show it.

Association – The ad links Febreze to a clean, odour- free home that many people strive to have.

Explicit Claims – Although the ad doesn't mention the dangerous aspects of Febreze, it does present the claim that Febreze totally cleans the air.

False Claims – The first issue with these commercials is that their claims are untenable. Febreze barely masks the odours, let alone destroys them. Consumer Reports actually did an experiment of their own, using the exact same situation. They used 2 groups of test subjects, both blindfolded. First was the smelly room without Febreze (the room was full of day-old sardines, a used cat litter box... etc). The test group found the room absolutely intolerable. The second group was sent into the room immediately after it had been sprayed with two types of Febreze, odour eater, and pet odour eliminator. Although the stench had improved slightly, it was still intolerable to the second group of test subjects.

The Hidden Secret – Procter and Gamble has hidden a dark secret from the public. A few of the active ingredients in Febreze have been linked to health complications. These issues run across a wide, varying spectrum ranging from skin irritation, to cancer, and even death.

Points of view   The points of view reflected in this ad are simple. The first point of view is of an outside viewer watching the above-mentioned experiment and the outcome: this makes us feel like it is true and scientifically proven. The second point of view is of the people who own homes or cars. The reason they do this is to invite us to feel like we are the owner of the property, and have empathy for the fact that their car or home smells like dogs, or football equipment, or garbage (see Fig. 2).

4   Discussion

The ice breakers session on a closed Facebook group (available on the following link https://www.facebook.com/groups/1741673092824469/) constitutes a significant platform for collaborating students to gain first-hand understandings of one another's lifestyle, cultural identities and worldviews, which are essential prerequisites for the development of intercultural skills and mutual acceptance. Students appreciate their differences and the particularity of each culture. They exchange information about the posted videos and pictures of current political

Fig. 2 Reconstructing counter-ads (reported examples)

events and cultural ceremonies. Through the use of diverse forms of technology (social networks, videos, pictures, and Blackboard platform) Moroccan students have the chances to listen, observe, watch and know about the nuances in verbal and non-verbal communication styles which help them express appropriately their views and stories both in English writing and speaking. Students from both cultures come to notice different cultural practices, interact, compare and reflect on their specificities without being biased to their own cultural mindsets. Such cultural inter-changes make the students less intimidated by the difference of their peers and prepare them for collaboration in task-based assignments related to the subject of *Media Studies and Society*.

The technology-assisted task-based teamwork reflects a process of intercultural collaboration in which students from different cultural and geographical back-grounds are trained to deconstruct a print ad and create a counter-ad that is possibly free from cultural stereotypes. In so doing, students demonstrate a critical aware-ness of an issue that is germane to their human existence and commonality. They expose the health damage that Febreze and other similar chemical products might cause while giving the illusion of catering for the wellbeing of the customers. They contest the producer's marketing claim of masking the odour and warn against the insidious effects of the product. The use of air freshener products is not perceived through the prism of cultural stereotypes. For instance, during the deconstruction stage, it is easy to notice that the partnering students display respect for each other's views and eschew some clichéd presumptions related to the hygienic states in their cultures. They do not perceive the use of these products in terms of the cleanliness habits in their corresponding cultures. Similarly, they do not interpret the ad along the gender-based line of thought which would underline women's obsession with cleanliness and household distribution of roles. During this group's discussion of the poster, a Moroccan female student reported that the focus of the deconstruction should be on gender-based employment of women in issues related to household chores. She said, "…is it a normal thing to see only women dealing with bad odour in different parts of the house? Why not men? Are not they concerned with the sani-tation of their homes?" The different group members started commenting on the validity of this remark and its relevance to both their cultures only to eventually agree on concentrating on what is more harmful for both men and women. They cast away these controversial issues and grappled with what is commonly hazardous to all humans. In circumventing the specificities of cultural settings and dwelling on the mutual threat, the collaborating students displayed an intercultural conscious-ness based on self-decentring and negotiation of what was taken for granted. They developed a kind of international citizenship and literacy with regard to the con-sumption of media and shared sense of humanity. In this connection, Ramirez (2019, p. 1) finds that "COIL project students demonstrated global citizenship skills such as the ability to analyse international relationships, critically consume media, and make them identify points of global interconnectedness."

TBL guides the use of online synchronous and asynchronous interaction which is entailed in COIL projects. TBL provides a more structured and organized frame-work whereby students get involved in a sequence of meaningful, authentic,

purposeful, and situated communicative tasks. Ziegler (2016, p. 137) explains that the interplay of TBL and technology "can enhance or facilitate the benefits of task-based language teaching as well as addressing how TBL can serve as a framework in which to ground research conducted in CALL contexts." Technology-mediated tasks allow for genuine opportunities of cultural interaction between the collaborating students who scaffold one another. They are also encouraged to confidently communicate with their teachers and receive continuous support and feedback during the completion of the tasks.

In using technology-assisted TBL, this study argues that the COIL initiative has to some extent achieved its intercultural agenda. Given the centrality of the latter to the increasing interconnectedness of students' cultural backgrounds and educational systems, developing intercultural skills and competence has become a priority for universities. The omnipresence of technological tools and students' positive attitudes to them can substitute for the dire unaffordability of physical mobility in trying to attain intercultural skills. Situating this study within similar quantitative and qualitative research context, it is easy to notice that previous research on COIL internationalized partnerships has often touched on the significance and achievability of intercultural awareness among students who are experientially involved in COIL-mediated instruction. Asojo et al. (2019, p. 15), for instance, confirmed that "COIL can be one of the best tools for bridging the gaps between different parts of the world and improving understanding of cultural differences, developing cultural sensitivity, and ensuring cultural transmission and exchange." Likewise, Hildeblando and Finardi (2017, p. 30) concluded their investigation of the impact of COIL experience on their collaborating students by stating that "COIL may foster more balanced and sustainable internationalization processes as well as the development of intercultural competence and the preservation of multilingualism."

5   Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to bring together both the theory and practice of technology-assisted TBL geared towards boosting intercultural responsiveness. In the researcher's experience of observing and monitoring the COIL interaction of students at different stages during the completion of their joint tasks, he has become convinced that the traditional mode of teaching about global cultural awareness and the functioning of media-generated content seem to lack the authenticity required by the teaching pedagogy of these scholarly areas. When students look at these global cultural subjects through their localized perspectives, an aura of ethnocentrism and bias pervades their critical assessment of how knowledge and cultural discourses create meaning. They tend to either posit the unconditional validity of their mind-sets in understanding global issues of media-oriented worldviews and other various cultural forms, or occasionally become alienated from their cultural standpoints on the assumption that they are unsuited to modern universal notions of progress. Either consequence is at loggerheads with the latest view of education as breeding

a paradigm that looks at knowledge as product and reflection of intertwined sources and contexts. Escrigas (2016) corroborates such a new and vital trend in education. She believes that this view of higher education can help graduates promote an inclusive, just, and fair social systems, cultivating in them a critical consciousness of the interconnected world they inhabit and preparing them to act in a framework and spirit of trust and collaboration. Such a mindset is essential to articulating processes for building societies attuned to the interdependence of the Planetary Phase of Civilization (para. 26).

Based on this miniature analysis of COIL project, it can be implied that the collaboration had positive impacts on students. First, they had a genuine chance to activate their academic knowledge of critical abilities in authentic situations. Most of them had been introduced to critical thinking skills in secondary schools and early years of university. However, this theoretical acquaintance was sharpened by their actual and experiential real-life tasks of presenting local cultural spaces, responding to others, and demonstrating critical media literacy not only about how global and local media shape people's mind, but also about how to react in reducing its damaging effects. Second, unlike the offline classes which are very limited in time, the partnering students displayed a rich liveliness and a continuous real engagement during their COIL exchanges. Their favourable attitudes to these online interchanges and the cultural nature of the subject matter were conducive to actual intercultural interaction and hence to the promotion of their intercultural sensitivity. Third, another outcome of such intercultural sensitivity is the possible enhancement of students' communicative language use in English. Moroccan students had a chance to enrich their linguistic and cultural fluency. Mulling over their participations in the closed Facebook group and in the Blackboard platform, one can see the sense of linguistic appropriateness and cultural adequacy they had developed over the course of joint class. Generally, the significance of COIL initiative has become clearer when students had to deal with the physical confinement imposed by COVID-19 government quarantine. Online learning skills emerged as a prerequisite for schooling in general, and instrumental tools for developing intercultural competence when international mobility had been restricted.

This chapter has tried to illustrate the feasibility of intercultural learning through technology-mediated TBL. This approach proves very useful in structuring the class content and organizing students' activities. Yet, more research is needed in the field of technology-assisted TBL to optimize effective instructional procedures of combining pedagogy and technology and customize their implications to include all subjects in the university English studies. Indeed, humanities today need digitisation to achieve a kind of connectivity with students' technological needs and the requirement of the international education and global economic markets.

However, one of the perceived limitations of the present study is its retrospective nature. It took the author about three years to come up with a theoretical synergy that allows for reflecting on the COIL experience of his class. More effective undertaking is provided by action research which would diagnose the involved students' intercultural skills before the start of the program; then a follow up examination of the same targeted skills after the end of program to measure their progress. A

pre-planned variety of this research permits administering questionnaires, surveys and interviews whose triangulation may augment the validity of the findings. Besides, investigating and comparing a good number of COIL projects can yield more comprehensive results. Moreover, exploring COIL's impacts on the involved teachers is under-researched. It is not discerned yet if students can reach COIL's goals if the involved teachers lack intercultural critical competence and online collaborative skills.

References

Alderson, J. C. (Ed.). (2002). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Case studies*. Council of Europe.

Arnold, N. (2007). Reducing foreign language communication apprehension with computer-mediated communication: A preliminary study. *System, 35*, 469–486. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2007.07.002

Asojo, A., Jaiyeoba, B., & Amole, D. (2019). Multicultural learning and experiences in design through the collaborative online international learning (COIL) framework. *Journal of Teaching and Learning with Technology, 8*(1), 5–16. https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/jotlt/article/view/26748

Bellefeuille, G. L. (2006). Rethinking reflective practice education in social work education: A blended constructivist and objectivist instructional design strategy for web-based child welfare practice course. *Journal of Social Work Education, 42*(1), 85–103.

Branden, V. (Ed.). (2006). *Task-based language education: From theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800410251

Canto, S., Graaff, R., & Kristi, J. (2014). Collaborative tasks for negotiation of intercultural meaning in virtual worlds and video-web communication. In M. González-Lloret & O. Lourdes (Eds.), *Technology-mediated TBLT: Researching technology and tasks* (pp. 183–212). John Benjamins.

Chen, X. (2018). A literature review of task-based language teaching in college reading comprehension – Exploration of tasks design to foster reading strategies. *International Journal of English Language Teaching, 5*(3), 90–106.

Chen, K. (2019). The effects of technology-mediated TBLT on enhancing the speaking abilities of university students in a collaborative EFL learning environment. *Applied Linguistics Review, 12*(2), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2018-0126

Chen, J. J., & Yang, S. C. (2014). Fostering foreign language learning through technology-enhanced intercultural projects. *Language Learning & Technology, 18*(1), 57–75. Retrieved from http://llt.msu.edu/issues/february2014/chenyang.pdf

Corbett, J. (2003). *An intercultural approach to English language teaching*. Multilingual Matters.

Crookes, G., & Gass, S. M. (Eds.). (1993). *Tasks in a pedagogical context*. Multilingual Matters.

Custer, L. (2016). Using technology to promote intercultural competence. An exchange between Japanese and U.S. college students. *Journal of studies in English and American Literature, 51*, 49–67.

East, M. (2012). Addressing the intercultural via task-based language teaching: Possibility or problem? *Language and Intercultural Communication, 12*(1), 56–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2011.626861

El Boubekri, A. (2017). The intercultural communicative competence and digital education: The case of Moroccan university students of English in Oujda. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 45*(4), 520–545. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239516670994

Ellis, R. (2013). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford Applied Linguistics.

Ellis, R. (2019). *Introducing task-based language teaching*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Escrigas, C. (2016). *A higher calling for higher education*. The Great Transition Initiative forum. https://greattransition.org/publication/a-higher-calling-for-higher-education.

Evans, M. (Ed.). (2009). *Foreign language learning with digital technology*. Continuum.

Fantini, A. (2005). *About intercultural communicative competence: A construct*. Retrieved April 17, 2022, from http://www.sit.edu/SITOccasionalPapers/feil_appendix_e.pdf

Fowler, J. (2014). Connecting classrooms across the border with technology. *Profweb*. Nov 2. Retrieved March 30, 2022, from https://www.profweb.ca/en/publications/articles/connecting-classrooms-across-the-border-with-technology

Gläsel, A. (2018). *6 reasons why teachers don't use technology in the classroom – What can EdTech companies learn? The EdTech World*. Retrieved October 17, 2021, from. https://medium.com/the-edtech-world/resistance-tech-classrooms-981b86d862fc.

Godwin-Jones, R. (2018). *Using mobile devices in the language classroom: Part of the Cambridge papers in ELT series*. Cambridge University Press.

González-Lloret, M., & Ortega, L. (Eds.). (2014). *Technology-mediated TBLT: Researching technology and tasks*. John Benjamins.

Hildeblando, C, & Finardi, K. (2017). *Internationalization and virtual collaboration: Insights from coil experiences*. Retrieved December 10, 2021, from https://www.academia.edu/Documents/in/Coil

Hoat, T. (2016). *Developing intercultural competence with web 2.0 technologies in an EFL context*. The University of Queensland.

Howard, S. K. (2013). Risk-aversion: Understanding teachers' resistance to technology integration. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 22*(3), 357–372. https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2013.802995

Howard, S. K., & Mozejko, A. (2015). Teachers: Technology, change and resistance. In M. Henderson & G. Romeo (Eds.), *Teaching and digital technologies: Big issues and critical questions* (pp. 307–317). Cambridge University Press.

Ji, Y. (2018). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) in Asian EFL classes: Challenges and strategies. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, 120*, 152–164.

Khatib, M., Derakhshan, A., & Rezaei, S. (2011). Why and why not literature: A task-based approach to teaching literature. *International Journal of English Linguistics., 1*(1), 213–218. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v1n1p213

Kiswaga, G., & Triastuti, A. (2019). *The application of technology in intercultural language learning: International students program at a University in Yogyakarta* (pp. 121–125). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/icille-18.2019.26

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.

Kung, T., & Eslami, Z. (2019). Learners of different language proficiency levels and incidentals focus on form in synchronous text-based discussion. In *Computer-assisted language learning: Concepts, methodologies, tools, and applications* (pp. 1521–1539). Edited by Information Resources Management Association. https://doi.org/10.4018/IJCALLT.2015070103.

Lai, C., & Li, G. (2011). Technology and task-based language teaching: A critical review. *CALICO Journal, 28*(2), 498–521.

Lantolf, P. (2004). Sociocultural theory and second and foreign language learning: An overview of sociocultural theory. In K. van Esch & S. Oliver (Eds.), *New insights into foreign language learning and teaching* (pp. 13–84). Peter Lang.

Lawrence, G. (2013). A working model for intercultural learning and engagement in collaborative online language learning environments. *Intercultural Education, 24*(4), 303–304. https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2013.809247

Liddicoat, A., & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural language teaching and learning*. Blackwell Publishing.

Lingling, C., & Lv, J. (2019). Task-based approach to develop intercultural communicative competence in college English education. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 10*(6), 1279–1287. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1006.17

Marczak, M. (2013). *Communication and information technology in (intercultural) language teaching*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Mezger-Wedlandt, G. (2010). Developing intercultural competence: Task based learning. *StudyLib*. Retrieved April 21, 2022, from https://studylib.net/doc/7465058/developing-intercultural-competence%2D%2Dtask-based-learning

Mezger-Wedlandt, G. (2013). Developing intercultural competence: Task based learning. *Arts & Humanities Communications*. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from https://studylib.net/doc/7465058/developing-intercultural-competence%2D%2Dtask-based-learning

Mofareh, A. (2019). The use of technology in English language teaching. *Frontiers in Education Technology, 2*(3), 168–180. https://doi.org/10.22158/fet.v2n3p168

Müller-Hartmann, A. (2000). The role of tasks in promoting intercultural learning in electronic learning networks. *Language Learning & Technology, 2*, 129–147.

Müller-Hartmann, A., & Ditfurth, S. (2011). *Teaching English: Task-supported language learning*. Schöningh UTB.

Norris, M. (2009). Task-based teaching and testing. In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 578–594). Blackwell.

Nunan, D. (1998). *Designing tasks, for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

O'Dowd, R., & Ware, P. (2009). Critical issues in telecollaborative task design. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 22*(2), 173–188.

O'Toole, C. (2018). Technology enhanced learning (TEL) intercultural competence: A phenomenological exploration of trainees' experiences within global virtual training environments. *Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning, 3*(1), 12–29. https://doi.org/10.22554/ijtel.v3i1.23

Perren, M. (2018). Intercultural communication through technology. *Teaching and Technology*. Retrieved December 14, 2021, from https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0415

Pica, T. (2005). Classroom learning, teaching, and research: A task-based perspective. *Modern Language Journal, 89*(3), 339–352.

Purdam, K. (2016). Task-based learning approaches for supporting the development of social science researchers' critical data skills. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 19*(2), 257–267. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1102453

Qin, J. (2017). *Introduction to sociocultural theory in second language acquisition*. Peking University Press.

Ramirez, C. (2019). Global citizenship education through collaborative online international learning in the borderlands: A case of the Arizona–Sonora megaregion. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 25*(1), 83–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315319888886

Saba, N. (2016). Telecollaboration and intercultural competence. *International journal of language and applied linguistics, 2*(special issue intercultural and 21st school), 96–122.

Samuda, V., & Bygate, M. (2008). *Tasks in second language learning*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Schenker, T. (2012). Intercultural competence and cultural learning through telecollaboration. *CALICO Journal, 29*(3), 449–470.

Siemens, G. (2005). Connectivism: A learning theory for the digital age. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning, 2*(1), 3–10. http://www.itdl.org/Journal/Jan_05/Jan_05.pdf

Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford University Press.

Taskiran, A. (2020). Telecollaboration: Fostering foreign language learning at a distance. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning, 22*(2), 87–97.

Thomas, M., & Reinders, H. (Eds.). (2010). *Task-based language learning and teaching with technology*. Continuum International.

Thorne, K. (2003). *Blended learning. How to integrate online and traditional learning*. Kogan Page.

UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education. (2006). Retrieved March 5, 2021, from http://www.ugr.es/~javera/pdf/DB2.pdf

Ur, P. (2016). *100 teaching tips*. Cambridge University Press.

Uzun, L. (2014). Utilizing technology for intercultural communication in virtual environments and the role of English. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 116*, 2407–2411.

Wahl, L., & Duffield, J. (2005). *Using flexible technology to meet the needs of diverse learners: What teachers can do*. Wested. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from https://www.wested.org/online_pubs/kn-05-01.pdf

Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Longman Limited.

Willis, J. (1998). Task-based learning: What kind of adventure? *The Language Teacher, 22*(7). Retrieved December 23, 2021, from https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/issues/1998-07_22.7

Ziegler, N. (2016). Taking technology to task: Technology-mediated TBLT, performance, and production. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 36*, 136–163. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190516000039

Zyngier, D. (2008). (Re)conceptualising student engagement: Doing education not doing time. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(7), 1765–1776.

Abdellah El Boubekri is an Associate Professor of Cultural Studies at Mohamed First University, Faculty of Humanities, Department of English Studies, where he is the leader of a research group (Cross Cultural Communication Studies). He is a member of an MA program in Communication and Translation. He is also a Board member of a research unit in Cultural Studies (CERHSO). He is a former teacher trainer at the Education Centre (CRMEF) Oujda. He is a former Fulbright scholar (Missouri State 2007/2008). Currently, he is a coordinator and trainer in a national educational program (English Teaching Internship Initiative). He has published several books and articles in national and international journals. Email: aelboubekri@hotmail.com