

## Chapter #9

### HYBRIDIZING L2 LEARNING: AFFORDANCES OF THE INVERTED CLASS APPROACH WITH ONLINE TASKS

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#### ABSTRACT

Based on the assumption that both knowledge of English and digital literacy are important to access information online (Finardi, Prebianca, & Momm, 2013), the present study investigated the impact of a hybrid approach to English as a foreign language teaching in an intact class in Brazil. Hybrid approaches have been described as the combination of face-to-face classes with online instruction, (Graham, 2005), and in this study it was operationalized as an inverted class approach, that is, the combination of face-to-face classes with computer-mediated activities performed in an online environment, outside the class. Twenty male participants were recruited in an intact class in the Brazilian Navy Academy Boarding School to participate in the study. Data includes class observation, questionnaires and interviews, analyzed qualitatively to evaluate the impact of online tasks in L2 learning, as well as in the development of students' autonomy and digital literacy. Three tasks adapted from Finardi and Porcino (2013) using different sites on the internet were administered, followed by a questionnaire after each task. Overall results of the qualitative analysis of students' perceptions of the tasks performed in the online environment revealed that the L2 hybrid approach used may contribute to the development of students' autonomy, motivation, digital literacy and L2 development through extended contact with and in the target language.

*Keywords:* L2 teaching, hybrid approach, inverted class approach, L2 tasks, internet tools.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Technology in general and the internet in particular have a key role in connecting people and widening access to information. Yet, and despite the fact that most schools in Brazil are equipped with computers and computer labs, teachers do not seem to make the most of the pedagogical potential of technology in education (e.g. Prebianca, Cardoso, & Finardi, 2014; Finardi, Teixeira, Prebianca, & dos Santos Júnior, 2014; Finardi, 2012). According to Finardi et al. (2014), this is due to the fact that many teachers still believe that incorporating technology in education equals more work for teachers, many times inconsistent with the investment in the teaching profession in Brazil.

However, Finardi et al. (2014) showed that, contrary to what teachers may think regarding the use of new technologies in education, students believe that a technological approach, particularly for teaching English, allows greater interaction in the language and renders the learning experience more dynamic, authentic and motivating. In short, the study suggested that there is a gap between students' needs and expectations and teachers' beliefs regarding the use of technologies for additional language (hereafter L2) teaching-learning. Additional languages include all the languages except the first, native language (L1).

The search for new teaching methodologies that can meet teachers' and students' expectations is therefore a need in the current educational landscape. One possibility of enhancing the use of new technologies for educational purposes is to use hybrid approaches such as the one known as the inverted classroom or flipped classroom. The concept of inverted classroom was proposed by Lage, Platt and Treglia (2000) to counteract the negative effects of the gap between teachers' teaching styles and students' learning styles. Lage et al. (2000) proposed the inverted classroom as a teaching approach that uses a variety of teaching styles with the use of multimedia. The basic idea of this approach is that events traditionally made inside the classroom are made out of it and vice versa (Lage et al., 2000, p. 32).

Based on the assumptions of the inverted classroom approach to meet learners' and teachers' styles and expectations, this study sought to examine the possibility of developing L2 linguistic competence and autonomy by means of online tasks performed in a hybrid approach environment which combined face-to-face classes and online activities carried out in the lab in the inverted classroom approach. The main motivation for the study was to reflect about teaching methodologies which combined internet use in an inverted classroom format with traditional classroom activities so as to expand learners' contact with the target language while also solving some problems of traditional face-to-face teaching approaches, such as temporal and geographical limitations, expanding teaching/learning time and space (Hardagh, 2009).

Internet has been claimed to expand learners' access to information (Finardi, Prebianca, & Momm, 2013) and to have changed the way we use, teach and learn L2s (Finardi & Porcino, 2014) but the extent to which it has actually been used to access relevant L2 information is still unknown. What is known, in the case of Brazil where the study was conducted, is that internet is ubiquitous and very used in that context, but not necessarily for educational purposes. According to the Wall Street Journal and the Forbes magazine, Brazil is the capital and future of social networks. With a population of over 200 million people, in 2013 there were over 80 million web users, 78% of whom access some kind of social network on a daily basis. Yet, in a report carried out by Brazilian newspaper *Jornal da Globo*<sup>1</sup> we see that seven out of ten Brazilians did not read a single book in 2014. What these numbers seem to show is that Brazilians use the internet but mainly for entertainment, not to access relevant information and contents in L2, as suggested by Finardi, Prebianca and Momm (2013). Based on this evidence, the present study had a two-fold aim: 1) to reflect on L2 teaching approaches that could help Brazilians access relevant L2 information online while also developing autonomy and motivation to learn English as an L2 in an inverted classroom format, and 2) help Brazilians to develop L2 and digital literacy through an increased contact with the target language in and out of the class.

In order to achieve these goals, three tasks (Ellis, 2003) adapted from Finardi and Porcino (2013) were tailored to be used by L2 students outside the class, in a hybrid approach to L2 teaching where students would carry out L2 tasks in a lab with the use of internet tools in addition to having L2 classes in the Navy School where the study was carried out. In what follows, the theoretical underpinnings of the study with the concepts of hybrid approaches, inverted class and task based language teaching will be reviewed before describing the methodology used to achieve these goals.

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<sup>1</sup>Available at <http://g1.globo.com/jornal-da-globo/noticia/2015/04/70-dos-brasileiros-nao-leram-em-2014-diz-pesquisa-da-fecomercio-rj.html>, accessed on May 1st, 2015

## **2. HYBRID APPROACHES**

The term hybrid approach (Graham, 2005) is usually associated with traditional face-to-face classes and instruction in a virtual learning environment. However, the term has evolved to define wider teaching dimensions, such as the combination of face-to-face classes with online classes, structured learning, that is, previously planned classes, and non-structured classes – classes planned according to the interest and need of learners, following the pace of each individual (Wilson, 2011).

Graham (2005) documented four levels of hybrid approaches, namely, the activity level, the course level, the program level and the institutional level. The inverted classroom approach can be considered a type of hybrid approach and was selected for this study based on the assumption that it could foster the development of student autonomy and motivation to learn English as an L2. Bishop and Verleger (2013) conceptualize the inverted classroom as including questions and answers and group-based/ open-ended problem solving inside class, and video lectures and closed-ended quizzes and practice exercises outside class, precisely the types of activities which were used in the present study.

## **3. TASK-BASED APPROACH**

Ellis (2003) defines a pedagogical task as a plan that forces learners to process language in a way that resembles the use of language outside the class, in the real world. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), the Task-Based Approach (TBA) aims at providing learners with a natural context for L2 learning. In this approach, learners have several opportunities to develop communicative skills that will allow them to participate in real world situations, as they need to interact with others while they work to accomplish a task, as in Task Two presented in the fifth section of this chapter, where learners have to decide on a present to buy for the family. During these interactions, the focus is on meaning and not on form, and learners receive L2 input that will help them perceive gaps in their L2 language system. The fact that the focus of tasks is on meaning and tasks do not demand a specific structure or form from the participants renders the interaction during tasks more authentic as they resemble real interactions. The tasks allow participants to use their creativity and imagination and provide them with guidance to solve real world tasks.

Ellis (2003) draws some relevant distinctions between unfocused and focused tasks. Whereas unfocused tasks do not demand any specific grammatical structure from the learner, focused tasks “aim to induce learners to process, receptively or productively, some particular linguistic feature, for example, a grammatical structure” (p. 16). Both unfocused and focused tasks aim to stimulate the use of communicative language, but only focused tasks have the objective of inducing learners to implicitly use a predetermined grammatical form. In this study, both kinds of tasks were used in the methodology created for the inverted classroom approach.

Ellis (2006) provides two basic types of activities for the tasks: a) the teacher plans how the task will be accomplished, considering the number of participants; and b) the teacher and learners are involved in the decisions made throughout the task execution. In this study, the former option was chosen, as the tasks were previously planned by the teacher and were divided in steps which learners had to follow strictly, within their own pace, accessing the internet and tools, out of class, in the inverted class approach.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in the study was that of action research (Dörnyei, 2007) and aimed at reflecting about the potential of internet tools to develop learners' autonomy, L2 skills and digital literacy in an inverted class approach. Twenty male participants aged between 18 and 22 years old were recruited from an intact English (L2) class in the Brazilian Navy Boarding School for Seamen Apprentices (Escola de Aprendizes-Marinheiros do Espírito Santo), by the researcher-teacher. Participants performed three tasks with the use of online tools in a hybrid environment, as described in the following paragraph, during their regular English classes. They had face-to-face traditional classes as part of the school curriculum and performed the three pedagogical tasks with internet tools after class, without the researcher-teacher's presence and interference, in a computer lab, in the school premises, once learners are only allowed to leave school on weekends. The purpose of these tasks was to involve learners in the class topic by means of making them responsible for preparing discussions and using the grammar situations of each task so as to be prepared to explain the grammar rule through the inductive method, eventually, in face-to-face classes. In essence, learners would function as the instructor during the corresponding face-to-face classes. This way, the researcher-teacher would analyze the responses and provide immediate feedback and perspective on their discussions and grammar rule explanations.

The three pedagogical tasks were adapted from Finardi and Porcino (2013). The first task (Table 1) involved the reading of a journalistic text, chosen by each participant from the site [www.newsmap.jp](http://www.newsmap.jp). Participants read the text in English with the help of a journalistic text in Portuguese (the participants' L1), also chosen by each participant and which contained the same theme as the English one. The online tool [www.translate.google.com](http://www.translate.google.com) was suggested for the translation of words and parts of the reading. The second task (Table 2) presented a more interactive focus once it had the objective of stimulating participants to qualify and select products found online for shopping. Participants had to access the site [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) with the aim of purchasing three presents for friends or family, using the online dictionary [www.pt.bab.la](http://www.pt.bab.la) to check for unknown L2 words. The third task (Table 3) consisted of using a social relationship site, the [www.hipenpal.com](http://www.hipenpal.com) to make friends (pen pals) with a foreigner. The task required participants to read the texts presented on the site home page using the suggested translation tool [www.linguee.com](http://www.linguee.com) as a support for translation. Participants had to write a short paragraph in English (L2) about them to be posted in the site to contact a possible pen pal match.

It is important to emphasize that participants had to follow the tasks instructions, using the suggested translation tools and online dictionaries, but they had the freedom to use other tools in case they wished to. A time limit was not set so that the participants could do the tasks in their own time, giving more emphasis to accuracy when performing the tasks (Ellis, 2006). The three tasks were performed throughout the academic semester, on varied days, following the school syllabus content.

## 5. DATA COLLECTION

Three questionnaires and interviews were administered after each pedagogical task so as to gather data regarding participants' perceptions on the tasks and the hybrid approach used in the inverted class mode. A researcher-teacher's diary was also used to record observations made during participants' performance in class. The data presented comprises questionnaires and interviews carried out with participants after each task execution and the researcher-teacher's diary.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of Task 1 was to check participants' skill in interpreting a journalistic text prior to the corresponding face-to-face class. The participants' understanding of the basic concepts of the reading task was assessed by the researcher-teacher as they mediated a discussion on the topic and new vocabulary in the face-to-face class. The researcher-teacher invited answers from the participants, analyzed them and provided immediate feedback.

The task authenticity was highlighted by means of allowing participants to choose the text they thought that would interest them the most. Once the inverted class mode shifts instruction to a more learner-centered approach, these participants' discretion in choosing their own text paves the way for the learners to be more actively involved in knowledge construction as they participate in and evaluate their learning in a manner that is personally meaningful. The fact that the learners prepared their text discussion out of class allowed more in-class time dedicated to exploring the topic in greater depth, creating rich interaction opportunities, as well as a means of involving learners in a critical discussion. As an example of an activity to be developed in class would be to invite learners to draw a graphic about the violence rate in their country according to an official site and demonstrate it to their peers, or read and tell their peers about what has been done to reduce crime in certain regions.

The task used in this study was characterized as unfocused (Ellis, 2003), since it did not demand any specific grammatical structure from the participants. Analyzing the first part of Task 1 performed by participant A, we observe that he was able to use the association strategies for the task execution. Despite the difficulties in finding a similar piece of news, since the piece of news chosen by him was local and not international, participant A was able to complete the task, as can be seen in Table 1 below with the transcription of this participant's performance.

*Table 1. Excerpt of participant A's first task.*

<b>Instructions for Task 1</b>	<b>Participant A's answers</b>
1) On this page, select and read a piece of news that you find interesting; copy and paste it here.	Gunman arrested in Dallas after standoff with police
2) Go to the news section about Brazil and try to find a similar piece of news to the one you have just read. If you find it, read, copy and paste the news headline here.	Man confesses having raped and killed 9 year old girl, says police
3) After you read the piece of news again, answer the following question in Portuguese. What's the news about?	A man in his forties, hidden in an apartment downtown Dallas was arrested
4) Did you find a similar piece of news on the Brazilian page? Did the piece of news helped you understand the selected one in English?	Yes. It kind of helped me because it's about a man who was arrested too, but for another reason, for having raped and killed a 9 year old girl.

As it can be observed in Table 1, the task had a learner-centered approach and active learning strategies, being the kind of material learners should explore on their own, with the help of the internet tools, out of class, in order to maximize classroom time, enabling the inverted classroom approach to occur.

Table 1 shows that Participant A was able to perform the task by using the strategy of cognate words association and translation with the use of the Google Translator, the tool suggested for this task. It is possible that Participant A associated the word ‘police’ with ‘polícia’ (in Portuguese), and translated the word ‘arrested’ so as to find a similar piece of news in Brazil.

The following excerpt offers an example of the stimulus that the online environment offered participants to provide structured and well-thought-out answers prior to the following face-to-face class, according to their report in the questionnaires and recorded interviews. The aim of Task 2 was to encourage participants to use adjectives to describe products to be purchased online and also to learn about adjective order. The task was considered focused (Ellis, 2003), as it had the purpose to induce participants to process a specific grammatical form. It can be observed that learners were able to produce the right order of adjectives, such as “favorite songs” and “rubber sole”. It was expected from them to prepare the grammar rule explanation to be presented and discussed in the next face-to-face class, with the researcher-teacher’s aide and feedback.

*Table 2. Excerpt of participant B in Task 2.*

Write the price and two characteristics of the selected products, in Portuguese and English			
Product	Price	Characteristics in English	Characteristics in Portuguese
Nokia Lumia 521 (T-Mobile) (my mother)	R\$69,99	Dual Core (1GHz) Processor Listen to your favorite songs with Nokia Music	Possui dois processadores Ouvir suas músicas favoritas no Nokia música
Nintendo 3DS XL – Blue/Black (my brother)	R\$180,99	Supported Flash Memory Cards: Secure Digital (SD). Graphic Quality: 240 p	Suporta cartões memória: Seguro Digital (SD). Qualidade de Gráfico: 240p
Reef Men's Leather Smoothy Sandal (my father)	R\$57,00	Leather Rubber sole	Couro Sola de borracha

The excerpt also illustrates Participant B’s interest in completing the online task whose purpose was to choose presents online to give to people who were important for him. Participant B described the main characteristics of each product he chose, the cell phone for his mother, the Nintendo game for his brother and sandals for his father. Participant B performed the task completely, mentioning all the necessary characteristics to justify his choice for the product. The task develops not only the L2, but also motivates participants to develop their autonomy, by means of providing an authentic context and online tools to help them learn and use the L2 as this is a context in which they will probably use the L2 in real life interactions. As a result of the success in the this task implementation, it was expected that the face-to-face class content could be offloaded, and, as a result, learners would be equipped with more opportunities to engage their class time in more learner-centered activities, such as problem-based learning.

The promotion of a more contextualized teaching which addresses the internet users' daily routine corroborates the description of the importance of online tools for the learning process in an inverted class mode. According to Kern, Ware and Warschauer (2008), so as to render the internet mediated teaching successful, teachers and researchers have to assure that new habits develop autonomy, creativity and critical view of language, technology and culture being stimulated in learners.

It is important to highlight that the answers required in the task do not depend on a stereotyped view, such as those found in pedagogic books. The task provides myriads of options that may be adjusted by the digital natives, or "globalized generation" as put by participant B, "[...] it cannot be denied that my generation is the generation of globalization". This view is also shared by the inverted class approach, which allows for a variety of learning methods, with the help of technologies. Teachers create flexible tasks, which provide learners the opportunity to choose, thus exercising their autonomy.

Although the internet tool suggested for the third task, the *linguee.com* was not enjoyed by most participants, they were able to perform the task as can be seen in the excerpt of Participant C below. In the third task, participants had to choose a pen pal in the designed site for the task and justify their choice. In this excerpt, the participant performs a previous step to choose his pen pal. The third task was also considered a focused task (Ellis, 2003), as its execution would lead participants to use the simple present tense.

*Table 3. Excerpt of participant C's in Task 3.*

Using the site <i>linguee.com</i> , select two parts of each pen pal's text (maximum of five words to make the translation easier) that you did not understand, and try to find a better translation	
PARTS IN ENGLISH	TRANSLATION (PORTUGUESE)
I'm not very good at speaking English	Eu não sou muito bom em falar inglês
I need to practice more	Preciso praticar mais

According to participant C's report, he did not like the site *linguee.com*. As reported by all the participants, the Google Translator tool was the internet tool most frequently used by them. The analysis of the data suggests that the use of internet resources promotes not only digital literacy, but also autonomy in the case of L2 access since learners would be able to read L2 contents of their choice and in their own time with the help of internet translation tools used for the inverted class mode proposed in this study.

According to the instructions of the third task, participants had to write a paragraph to send to a virtual friend in the future. The task had the objective of encouraging participants to use simple present sentences, so that they would be presented in the corresponding face-to-face class. This task reinforced the idea that participants could explore language creatively knowing that the researcher-teacher would provide correction and feedback in class. This way, it can be observed in the analysis of their paragraphs which shows that they were worried about the originality of their texts and used the translation tools efficiently to carry out this task as can be seen in the following excerpts: (<participant C> *I also really want to learn to speak English.*; < participant D> *I currently live in the city of Vila Velha. The reason for this allocation is due to my military career*; < participant E> *I have many curiosities about foreign languages. I would like to make friends with a pen pal to learn more about...*; <participant F> *...wish to meet new people.*). In this sense, one can perceive the positive impact of tasks with online tools on the participants' performance, in lexical terms (< participant D> *currently*; *due*; *curiosities*; < participant E> *foreign*, *make friends*),

grammatical terms (< participant G> *I'm in the Navy*; < participant H> *I would like to make...I'm curious about...*; < participant E> *I have many curiosities...*), L2 discursive terms (< participant H> *...make new friends.*; < participant D> *...is due to my military career*), and also in the development of digital literacy since participants used the internet tools well.

The analysis of the data suggests that participants in this study see the hybrid approach used as being relevant and useful. The use of online tasks to develop participants' L2 skills and digital literacy proved to be positive and overall relevant in the flipped classroom approach. The participants in the study were able to use the internet tools to develop autonomy, thus, minimizing their out-of-class preparation effort and obstacles and maximizing the contact with the target language and authentic materials. Also, the analysis of the online tasks administered in the study in the flipped classroom approach can be said to have helped participants to access relevant online contents in L2 both in the class and out of the class, in a more autonomous search for information and education.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The analysis of data in the study reported here showed that the use of pedagogical tasks with online tools was important to develop learners' autonomy, L2 skills and digital literacy, in an inverted class approach. The analysis of participants' reports suggests that hybrid approaches, such as the inverted classroom, have a positive impact on learners' autonomy and L2 development, corroborating suggestions of Finardi (2012) and Finardi, Prebianca and Schmitt (2015). In the case of Brazil, where the study was conducted, it is important to bear in mind that English has the status of an optional foreign language in basic education (Finardi, 2014). The inclusion of one modern foreign language after 5th grade in the curriculum is mandatory but the choice of which language to teach is made by each school community. Thus, the teaching of English as a foreign language in Brazil is optional. Given the status of English in the globalized world (for example Graddol, 2006; Finardi, Prebianca and Momm, 2013), on the one hand, and its status in Brazil (Finardi, 2014), on the other, it is important to think about internet tools, especially in the form of internet translation tools so as to enable Brazilians to access information in English online in an autonomous way.

The use of internet translation tools can help minimize negative effects associated with the lack of a curricular obligation to learn English as a foreign language in Brazil (for example Porcino & Finardi, 2014) such as the social gap created by the abundant (and often costly) offer of English as a foreign language classes in the private sector. Moreover, given the fact that most Brazilians are online but use the internet mainly to access social networks in Portuguese, perhaps the use of internet translation tools can help Brazilians to actually access relevant contents and information online in English, thus using the internet not only for entertainment but also for information, education and to build social capital (Warschauer, 2003).

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