Field diary and observation in contemporary language research

Diário de campo e observação na pesquisa contemporânea em linguagem

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Abstract
Observing the world around us is a social practice that most humans perform when they are young. Novel writers and songwriters constantly mention how crucial it is for them to be observers in order to find inspiration to write. Such an analogy helps us understand how decisive field diaries and observations might be in qualitative research once they demand attention, focus, and the liberty to think "outside the box". In light of that, this paper discusses the potential of providing opportunities for displaying and analyzing data from field diaries and observations in a research report. Such a movement could prevent scholars from approaching those elements only as scaffolding for interviews. We have also attempted to illustrate how the idea of writing field diaries has been revisited in the face of the contemporary technological affordances which have increasingly provided us with multimodal resources. This qualitative research was implemented through the Teacher-Research framework (Freeman, 1998; Boa Sorte *et al.*, 2023). As a result, issues with displaying observing data in a written report, dealing with ethical relations, and connecting observation with research instruments emerged during the discussion proposed herein.

Keywords: contemporary language research; field diary; observation.

Resumo
Observar o mundo ao nosso redor é uma prática social que a maioria dos seres humanos realiza desde a infância. Escritores de romances e compositores frequentemente mencionam o quão crucial é ser observador a

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fim de encontrar inspiração para escrever. Tal analogia nos ajuda a entender o quão decisivos os diários de campo e as observações podem ser na pesquisa qualitativa, uma vez que exigem atenção, foco e liberdade para pensar "fora da caixa". À luz disso, este artigo discute o potencial de fornecer oportunidades para exibir e analisar dados provenientes de diários de campo e observações em um relatório de pesquisa. Tal movimento poderia evitar que estudiosos abordassem esses elementos apenas como suporte para entrevistas. Além disso, tentamos ilustrar como a ação de escrever diários de campo tem sido revisitada diante das possibilidades tecnológicas contemporâneas, as quais nos têm proporcionado recursos multimodais cada vez mais amplos. Esta pesquisa qualitativa foi implementada por meio do método da Pesquisa Docente (Freeman, 1998; Boa Sorte et al., 2023). Como resultado, emergiram, ao longo da discussão proposta, pontos relacionados à exibição dos dados de observação em relatórios escritos, a como lidar com relações éticas e à conexão da observação com outros instrumentos de pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: *diário de campo; observação; pesquisa contemporânea em linguagem.*

Our argument

Observing is a recurrent practice in action movies where cops, detectives, and investigators rely on their senses to feel for the atmosphere around them. Most scenes report observing as a task that requires exercise, patience, and a showcase of self-knowledge and human interaction. We have come up with such an analogy to illustrate the argument for this paper, that is, the relevance of field diaries and observation in qualitative research, especially concerning technology change, and how they can be seen as potential data sources for display and analysis in a whole project instead of being used only as steps towards interviews.

Considerable attention has been paid to data emerging from field diaries and observations lately, especially when we think of those issues through subjective and technological approaches (Lucena; Santos, 2019). When we consider observing as a data source in qualitative research, we might take the idea of exercising our minds to perceive more than what we take for granted. Such a perspective pictures observation as a developed skill that goes from broad experience in the field to narrow research concerns.

This perspective poses challenges concerning how we manage requirements and protocols as we approach participants and inhabit spaces by considering that we are experiencing samples of social practices (Creswell, 2016). It is worth considering that, within the examination committees of master's and doctoral research, particularly in Brazil, it is commonplace for evaluators to question the utilization of observation in qualitative research. Such inquiries often stem from concerns regarding inherent biases or the perceived necessity of supplementing observational methods with other research instruments.

It is relevant to mention that observation is a critical phenomenon in qualitative research as it allows researchers to have informal conversations and analyze files and

documents. Observing may also vary depending on research concerns, presenting different types of observers and diverse data collection methods (Merriam, 2009). This is why we have confronted data discussed herein with the field diary and observation literature, especially concerning how data can be collected and which ethical issues should be considered while in the field and writing a research report.

Contemporary digital cultures have also impacted how scholars observe and develop field diaries. Technology change has provided us with emerging affordances to record, type, capture, and transcribe data from observations. We emphasize that field diaries are relevant nowadays, especially when approaching them through multimodal perspectives. On the other hand, varied diaries also pose different challenges concerning ethical issues, mainly regarding privacy protocols and institutional property.

This paper reports on qualitative research focused on field diaries and observations. It is a methodological discussion of an instrument, observation, and diverse ways of implementing it through field diaries. We adopted the Teacher-Research framework (Freeman, 1998; Boa Sorte *et al.*, 2023) for organizing and analyzing data. By discussing the affordances of field diaries and observations, we point out prior concerns a scholar could consider before getting into the field, elements that could be observed, and the diverse relationships between observer and observed. In addition, we suggest ways through which researchers might develop their field diaries and how they can take notes of the observations to describe in the analysis.

We aim to discuss the potential of providing opportunities for displaying and analyzing data from field diaries and observations in a whole dissertation. This approach could prevent scholars from approaching those elements only as scaffolding for interviews. This article derives from Santos (2021), where digital literacy practices were observed in English language classes at the Integrated High School level at a Federal Institute of Education, Science, and Technology in Northeast Brazil. This study was financed in part by the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – Brasil* (Capes). As for this paper, though, we have expanded the scope of theories about field diaries and observations. At the same time, we have taken another look at the emerging themes from previous data.

Research methodology

Field diary and observation represented the first phase of our fieldwork, and we collected substantial data from them. We approached the practice of taking field notes and

observing the field by setting prior open-ended questions and being open to getting aspects that could cross our experience. While planning our structured observation sessions, we considered the significant aims of our research project alongside the theories we had adopted for the upcoming data analysis (Laville; Dionne, 1999). By considering the context of English language classes at two campuses of a Federal Institute of Education, we adopted the theories of digital literacies as the primary way of collecting and discussing data.

Ethically speaking, we decided, from the very beginning, that our participants would not be identified by their actual names. We also agreed that we would not record them or take any pictures. Every aspect of data collection was geared towards taking notes, recording audio of relevant information, and taking pictures of places to help us feed our diaries and describe the activities observed in detail. Our participants were two English teachers who work on campuses of a Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology in Northeast Brazil. We have named them Vanusa and Djavan.

As technology issues were the main elements to be observed during the field observation, our prior concerns focused on setting questions about which devices were used and how they were integrated into classroom activities. Thus, our observation framework was mainly based on the following aspects: institution; schedule details such as date and time; description of the classroom or other places observed; platforms and devices; topics discussed during classes; teaching practices; free notes or descriptions. Taking notes and recording short audios of what we were observing helped us describe and discuss the data collected during the field observation in detail. This attitude significantly influenced the overall impact of the instrument within the entire dissertation.

As for data analysis, we collected, gathered, and organized field transcriptions so readers could understand what we experienced during our observations. We used the Teacher-Research framework (Freeman, 1998; Boa Sorte *et al.*, 2023), which consists of four steps to organize and explore data: coding, grouping, finding relationships, and displaying. Coding and grouping aim mainly at organizing data initially; finding relationships and displaying are the steps where we effectively analyze data.

The four data analysis steps were implemented after notes from the field diary and images and audio from the digital diary were described in a Word file. We first coded the terms that highlighted the primary contexts of the paragraphs resulting from the data description. Secondly, we grouped codes according to similarities and those that were relevant but did not join any group. We then established relationships among the groups to

find similarities and divergences. Finally, we displayed the groups in themes by showcasing connections and significant ideas that linked the whole analysis.

Freeman (1998) proposes the Teacher-Research framework, which focuses on two central realms: research where the investigator is external to the reality being studied, and research where the investigator is officially part of the environment, especially acting as a teacher, which characterizes an autoethnography. It is argued that teacher-research, especially when it is an autoethnography, becomes complex because it involves an investigative process where subjectivity is welcome but also required to be conscious and balanced. Accordingly, the teacher-researcher must embrace their subjectivity while simultaneously adopting a scientific perspective towards what is being investigated. This entails considering personal experiences but also recognizing that the research must adhere to a level of rigor.

The research reported herein relates to the first domain of the teacher-research framework, as we did not conduct the scientific investigation in an environment to which we were institutionally connected. Therefore, it was crucial to avoid the pitfall of anticipating the theorization during the data collection process, as such a tendency assumes that we know what is being observed; that is, we avoided rushing into reflecting on what we saw in the field during the data collection phase. Based on Freeman (1998) and Boa Sorte *et al.* (2023), we understand that the initial stages of research, characterized by the application of instruments in the field, such as structured observations, are not stages primarily intended for theorization. The practice of observing, listening to the participants, and being in the field must be performed while avoiding theoretical expectations and prior analysis.

Field diary in contemporary research

Capturing situations and contexts while observing has always been critical in empirical research. Even though each researcher has a way of recording information, it is mainly noticed that taking notes is one of the most used forms of storing data. It might be considered that emerging devices have kept resources such as notebooks and pencils in the past, but that is not always the truth. Lately, we have seen the emergence of multimodal data collection forms in observation, which has updated the concept of field diary. We can see some examples of devices used both for collecting and archiving data from field observation in the following figure:

Figure 1 - Field diary throughout the decades

Source: elaborated by the authors (2024).

Technology change has brought about affordances that potentialize the collection and organization of data. Audio recorders, cell phones, tablets, and computers, as shown in Figure 1, have been shaped in diverse ways, making it convenient for scholars to capture moments, events, and contexts while experiencing the field (Lucena; Santos, 2019). Somehow, though, that was already possible in the past through typing and handwriting diaries. In addition, computers and recorders were also available but were relatively expensive or inaccessible to many people, depending on where they lived.

When researchers observe the field, it is not a simple task to capture those moments at the same time for some reasons: they can make participants uncomfortable by thinking their actions are being closely watched and archived; they can miss subsequent events while taking notes of previous ones; they can feel overwhelmed by the amount of information and get indecisive on what they should capture. On the other hand, such issues would always rely on researchers' role in the field and the aims they set for their investigation.

Field notes can be fully transcribed and explored after the researcher leaves the field. They should be assertive about the topics they capture while observing and describe data as accurately as possible once they return to the office. Field notes can vary considerably but typically cover descriptions of the environment, the people and the activities observed, verbal

quotes, and the gist of conversations (Merriam, 2009). It is relevant to mention that cameras and audio recorders pose delicate ethical issues in contemporary research. That happens mainly because classic field diaries will always be a matter of a researcher's interpretation, while those devices capture moments that tend to be taken as facts.

Displaying and discussing data

Both the data collection and the analysis were detailed and profound due to the digital affordances used throughout such processes. Information gathering was performed through notes on a notebook, through pictures of the teaching scenarios, elements such as the whiteboard and textbook units, as well as through WhatsApp audio recording. We created a WhatsApp group where we could record audio files of what was being observed and, as we returned to the office, we could transcribe the recordings and get an accurate description of the field. This is an example of how digital technologies have potentialized the work with data collection in contemporary language research, as we can capture moments and record experiences in diverse and time-saving ways (Lucena; Santos, 2019).

The following topics include describing and analyzing field notes from observations in English language classes in two Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology in Northeast Brazil. We have named Vanusa and Djavan as the teachers. The campuses have been called Paralelas and Pétala to preserve the participants' privacy [UFS Institutional Ethical committee allowance number: 3.680.472]. This report resulted from the following analytical procedures: we described the notes we took in the field right after we returned to the office; then we named the principal codes from those descriptions, and we grouped the codes into themes; we compared the themes in order to find relationships among them, and finally displayed them in a map.

Observing classes at Campus Paralelas

During three visits, we observed 12 classes taught by Vanusa for students at the integrated high school level, both in the morning and afternoon shifts. Based on what we observed, the environment was organized and conducive to the classes' progress. Air conditioning, good lighting, and relatively adequate acoustics provided a comfortable temperature. Projectors, sound systems, laptops, and cell phones were the most frequently used electronic and digital devices.

On the first day of observation, which took place in the morning shift, the classes were taught to first-year students. The main topic was Valentine's Day, a celebration that originated in the Roman Empire and is known in the United States as the day of friendship, love, or Saint Valentine's Day. The class was predominantly conducted in Portuguese and focused on the meaning of the holiday. Subsequently, some listening skills were exercised by playing an audio recording where friends talked about Valentine's Day. Afterward, the audio was played twice, and the students were handed a script about the dialogue and some vocabulary questions. Finally, the students translated the text.

In the following class, although the same theme was covered, other aspects of the audio were explored due to questions posed by the students during classes. After playing the audio for the first time, some students asked why an audio with an emotional theme symbolizing a celebration had begun with such a sad sound. The teacher mentioned that she had also noticed that element and took advantage of that to provide listening comprehension tips by explaining that the format and other audio factors might influence what we understand. The main language points were the colors and days of the week in English, explained in the previous class.

As the multimodal aspects of the language caught students' attention, that is, how the audio was created, we considered it a relevant topic when language classes are based on literacy perspectives. Critical framing was a significant path during the observed classes, as students were encouraged to reflect on the text design and media for meaning-making (Kalantzis; Cope; Pinheiro, 2020). As Kress (2000) points out, reflection on design is one of the ways of addressing multimodality, a theoretical approach in which reading is a meaning-making process intersected and influenced by rhizomatic relationships among texts of diverse formats.

On the second day of observation, some questions assigned as homework were revisited. Those questions revolved around constructing a wall that would divide the United States and Mexico, which happened to be an act proposed by former President Donald Trump and that generated international repercussions. The teacher emphasized the relevance of the images used in the questions as scaffolding for text comprehension and tips for decoding texts in English. The class was then developed based on a video clip of the song *Somewhere Only We Know*, which was part of the soundtrack of the movie The Little Prince (2015). After watching the video clip, students were asked about the song and if the

characters portrayed were familiar. Most students responded that they knew the characters because they had already watched the movie.

It was mentioned that the version was a cover featured in the movie and TV commercials for Coca-Cola and Vivo. That activity reminded us of the appropriations of artistic works made by large companies to strengthen their markets. By using references from a movie soundtrack, those big companies reach diverse audiences and bolster their financial bases, aspects that we can problematize through literacy lenses, especially concerning digital literacies.

Digital literacies (Lankshear; Knobel, 2015) are sociocultural practices that consider language producers embedded in digital cultures and recognize the specific forms of meaning-making in different media supports. Therefore, it is developed through questioning the use of technological supports, the technology market, and our perceptions in a critical approach. This is why we understand that thinking about the impacts of neoliberal logic in various spheres of human life symbolizes digital literacy practices (Zacchi, 2016; Nascimento, 2017).

English language classes, which we understand as opportunities for the interplay of various languages, can be designed to problematize the increasingly pronounced commodification of art in contemporary society. What we refer to as the commodification of art, seen from a post-digital perspective, is the constant dissemination of streaming platforms, including the offering of musical albums, TV series, and movies. We do not mean to imply that such a race for selling art has started with the internet and digital technologies, but we consider that those factors have amplified it. Among the factors contributing to the strengthening of platforms, we point to artificial intelligence, which leads to choices and navigation routes through algorithms based on users' search histories (Santaella, 2019). Therefore, even though the primary purpose of the class was not focused on the use of digital technologies, it would be possible to propose digital literacy practices by pondering and reflecting on daily practices.

By considering digital literacy theories and the elements observed, we could reflect on the current emerging market through questions such as: What are the social outcomes when we sign up for a streaming service? Have platforms changed the way art is produced and spread? Have platforms shaped artists' identities? Have streaming services influenced people's perceptions of what it means to be an artist? Are there differences between current platforms and classical media from a market perspective? Has art been reduced to profit and

market molds? Can we take for granted that streaming services have expanded access to cultural products to the general population? Questions like those can be explored by analyzing platforms and not only by reflecting on experiences outside the school environment.

By thinking about content creation through a digital literacy perspective, students could be encouraged to plan their streaming platforms and consider their possible impacts on society. They could consider both currently considered classic media, such as records and tapes, and recent streaming platforms, which all have market foundations. From the copyright perspective, streaming services are a remedy for reducing piracy. Regarding democratizing access to cultural products, these platforms reach more people. On the other hand, believing that these services promote social equity might inadvertently obscure underlying social conflicts and reinforce neoliberal ideals, thereby contradicting the principles of social justice.

Vanusa finally explored well-known quotes from the novel The Little Prince, such as *what is essential is invisible to the eye* and *you become responsible forever for what you have tamed* (Saint-Exupéry, 1989). The teacher used the second quote to problematize the importance people give to images in contemporary times. She mentioned that many people always try to capture the best angle for a photograph to show that they are well and happy. We believe that the aspects raised by Vanusa relate to memes as units of meaning, reinterpreting social themes and historical events. Boa Sorte and Santos (2020) pointed out that famous sayings, excerpts from literary works, and catchphrases from soap operas and movies, for example, are linked to images and videos to represent social issues. Despite the humorous appeal of internet memes, political, economic, and linguistic aspects can be consistently explored through them.

The teacher worked on the song *Somewhere Only We Know* once again as a listening activity in the third class. The song was first played with Portuguese subtitles and then with English ones. Afterward, she handed out the song lyrics and asked students to unscramble them based on what they had listened to. Kalantzis, Cope and Pinheiro (2020) point out that activities like this can address redesign practices, where meaning-making is considered from the perspective of authorship. In this sense, students could have been encouraged to rethink the order of the lyrics or even represent the composition through drawings or images available on the internet.

The possibilities mentioned above also encompass the notion of remixes. Burwell (2013) emphasizes that remixing enhances work with authorship and intellectual property in

the classroom. Students can (re)think about the concept of copyright through these activities, which raises questions on who owns various types of text in contemporary times as access to information has expanded. Furthermore, when working with meaning-making, teachers can problematize that each text, in written or visual domains, impacts people differently. Textual production can also be analyzed from a multimodal perspective, as advocated by Kress (2000), who highlights that writing classes can explore varied textual genres and platforms to expand our understanding of a text.

Throughout the observed classes over those three days, the teacher commented on the relevance of reading and having access to information and the significance of cautiously using the available information sources. She frequently mentioned that some students take pictures of the board but never return to that photo. Those teaching moments allowed students to reflect on their behaviors. In this sense, reflection represents establishing a critical analysis.

When discussing grade entry and task posting, the teacher mentioned Sigaa, the institutional academic system. She often mentioned that Sigaa is relevant to her practice but primarily sees it as a tool for formalizing pedagogical activities. When making meanings about the system, we recalled Lankshear and Knobel (2015), who point out the ability to recognize social practices that best fit different media and platforms as part of digital literacies.

Observing classes at Campus Pétala

Eight classes were observed on two occasions at this campus, both in the morning and focused on integrated high school students. On the first day, Djavan discussed technology use in rural and urban life and its effects on individual and collective freedom. Then, he used historical events, such as the forced labor camps in the former Soviet Union, and contemporary themes, such as digital maps, to discuss the topic of freedom in global society. The activities took place using a projector and laptops to play videos and showcase pictures. Texts and discussions were carried out mainly in English.

The teacher started the class off by projecting a video about the history of the Gulags, the forced labor camps for those who violated the laws of the dictatorial regime of the former Soviet Union. The video was in Russian with English subtitles, which allowed the teacher to work with other aspects of language beyond the verbal input. After that, he asked the students if they had seen those camps as spaces of freedom deprivation before that class. In general, students indicated that they had, as people were imprisoned for challenging the laws

of a dictatorial regime. Afterward, some historical aspects were mentioned to explain briefly what the Soviet Union was. Then, a video was shown where Russian citizens pointed out situations they considered positive during that time.

Many students showed surprise towards such positive comments about a regime that imprisoned people for thinking differently from the cruel government, mainly because we are already experiencing the 21st Century. They reported on a similar scenario in Brazil, as news reports had mentioned that Brazilians were calling for the return of the dictatorial regime in social media posts. We understand that digital technologies, such as computers, speakers, and projectors, were based on recalled perspectives of digital literacies, even though the primary objective was only content exposure. By revisiting historical facts and relating them to contemporary social experiences, students were provided with critical analysis through situated practice, as Kalantzis, Cope and Pinheiro (2020) indicated.

Furthermore, the teacher redefines what has historically been understood as an English language class by using historical events and materials not necessarily aimed at decoding written texts. Such an approach resembles Critical Applied Linguistics with an interdisciplinary foundation, where language classes are seen as spaces for problematizing social issues from the past and the present, and not only for the appreciation of canonical works and decoding verbal inputs (Moita Lopes, 2006). The topic addressed exemplifies that language classes can be spaces for problematizing issues related to social justice, in this case, the legitimization of cruelty and suffering as a matter of social development.

Next, the class was based on discussing a web article entitled "Tradwives: A choice for unfreedom" as well as a related YouTube video called "The Darling Academy with Alena Kate", where predominantly white women from economically advantaged backgrounds claim to have chosen to be housewives. For those women, being subservient to their husbands, not working formally, and dedicating themselves to full-time domestic chores can bring happiness and satisfaction. We then noticed similarities with what Menezes de Souza (1995) names as conflicts of interpretations or arenas of conflicts, where people make meanings on social issues only based on their social contexts and identities, in this case, of what it means to be a woman in society.

The topic above was covered on various websites, such as The New York Times and Independent, when it was argued that the tradwives movement is a reinforcement of white male supremacy. Despite the discourse being directed towards the representation of choice, articles criticizing the movement argued that such choice was ideologically influenced and

based on the identities those women have been exposed to over time. Therefore, the fact that they had chosen to be housewives does not erase the social structures marked by gender inequity in women's lives. By taking digital activism discussions into account, the English language class can discuss that not all activist cultures are libertarian, as there has been an increasing emergence of antidemocratic movements on digital media platforms (Castells, 2003; Pretto, 2017).

The web article entitled *Fans are pissed after a famous vegan YouTuber was allegedly caught eating fish in another person's vlog* was read and discussed in class. That article portrays a situation where a vegan digital influencer was heavily criticized on digital platforms for consuming fish during interactions on a friend's channel. Such a situation was used to question the extremist positions reported on social media, such as Facebook and Instagram. The situation described above can make us wonder how positions are currently being developed, as authors like Santaella (2018) argue that we live in a post-truth era. By enabling students to reflect on social practices in digital environments, the teacher worked with what McLuhan (1974) calls people's ability to relate to the impacts of technology use on society.

By considering freedom in individual and collective dimensions, the teacher played a video called *Man tricked Google Maps into reporting a traffic jam*. In the video, a driver reported a false congestion alert on a city road, altering traffic patterns. The discussion was initiated by discussing how the various forms of language work in physical and virtual maps and how those maps influence our daily decisions. For instance, he emphasized that Google Maps can influence our perceptions about places. We noticed a connection between such discussions and the problematization of the meaning of the word *hacker*. As Pretto (2017) highlights, hacktivism aims to democratize information and not necessarily engage in criminal activities, which characterizes what he calls *crackers*. Therefore, causing a traffic jam disrupts the reputation of hacker communities, which means a break of group ethics.

In the second block of classes, the teacher worked with the theme of indigenous tribes and the construction of dams based on an online magazine article entitled *Brazil's indigenous tribes go online in their struggle to be heard*. He used a projector for those classes to display the reference text and related images. Since the text had been sent to the class's email address, many students read it on their phones. The activities proposed were geared towards applying reading strategies in English and analyzing the meanings made by the students about indigenous tribes.

The teacher questioned breaking the romanticized view of Indigenous people and their proximity to digital technologies. There was room for working with image analysis, even though it was not the lesson's focus. We noticed the potential for the analysis and the editing of headlines, similar to what Luke (2001) calls "editing as meaning-making". From this perspective, editing headlines not only represents the modification of content and form but also implies a variation in the meaning people make out of edited texts, which unbalances canon ideas of authorship.

Data overview

The emerging codes from the observations are related to recurring statements and materials during the classes. Some words related to analog and digital devices were prominent, such as cell phones, computers, speakers, the internet, Sigaa, books, laptops, and chalkboards. Those codes were central but primarily used for the work with language issues and discussions on the effects of social practices mediated by such technologies. Citizenship, awareness, critique, reflection, language, imagery, text, reading, skill, and Education were other frequent emerging codes.

The following map summarizes the themes from the observed classes at the two campuses. Four themes emerged from the observations: technologies, learning, reflection, and technology use. We noticed that such themes were targeted in two main directions: discussions on the diverse effects of technologies on society and the work with language issues. We have envisioned technologies as resources for teaching language skills and digital literacy practices based on social critique as the factors interconnecting the four themes.

Figure 2 – Field overview
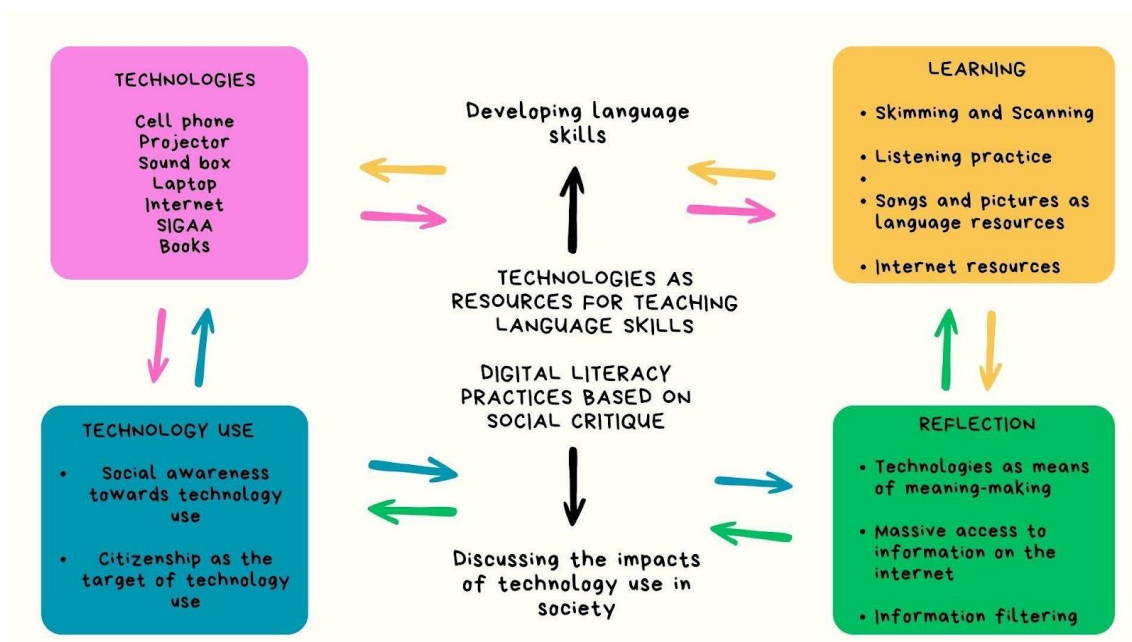
Source: elaborated by the authors based on Santos (2021).

The theme of *technologies* encompasses the devices commonly utilized or frequently referenced by teachers. As we could observe, these technologies were not used in isolation but as teaching practices involving various supports. Although Vanusa highlighted the benefits of using digital devices during classes, she primarily directed her in-class activities towards group activities using the chalkboard and printed materials. Sometimes, cell phones were used to access information or as a repository for activities. Djavan also used digital devices to access information, but he tended to address topics concerned with conflicting aspects that arise from using the internet.

The theme of *learning* symbolizes the uses directed towards working with language points; as such, uses emphasized reading strategies towards written, visual, and auditory texts. Computers, projectors, and speakers were exclusively in the possession of the teachers in the observed contexts. We labeled this theme learning, for we understood that the observed teaching practices involved a classical approach to language teaching, using technological resources to explore language skills. In this sense, the teachers used the mentioned devices for reading strategies and the practice of listening and pronunciation in English.

The theme of *reflection* represents classroom discussions on the impacts of technologies on producing, accessing, and spreading information. Teaching practices within this theme led to reflections on the power that communication processes can have on the meanings we make. In this regard, we noticed the constant presence of perspectives from

Critical Pedagogy, where interpretation acknowledges that readers and writers have their ideologies. We consider that the observed classes offered room for unveiling possible intentions employed by the authors of the texts analyzed (Jordão, 2017). When discussing challenges commonly posed on the internet that set young people into dangerous situations, Vanusa emphasized the relevance of paying attention to the details of that discourse. When discussing online newspaper headlines, Djavan also stressed the flagrant attitude of paying attention to word organization.

The theme of *technology use* highlights moments when both teachers emphasized the importance of analyzing our actions in life. In this regard, we noticed similarities with the practice of "reading ourselves while reading something", as proposed by Menezes de Souza (2011). Although discussions on the social effects of technology use were present in the previously mentioned theme, both teachers now encouraged students to reflect on their attitudes, for instance: why do we pay attention to specific details while neglecting others? In this direction, the notion of literacy as social critique, which starts from an individual sphere and extends to a collective one, gains prominence (Monte Mór, 2013). Therefore, we believe that the exchange between reflections on the use of technology in local and global domains and towards individual and collective contexts gave students room for interpretation as meaning-making during the classes.

Final remarks

This article reported a qualitative study exploring data collected through field diary and observation. We proposed to showcase how observation has the potential to be an independent instrument in a dissertation instead of only being considered as scaffolding for interviews. We suggest that researchers carefully study what it means to observe and develop field diaries. After being aware of what observation is as to the whole research, they could potentialize this activity, which provides us with many insights. However, that is easily put aside when researchers get overwhelmed after the amount of data collected through interviews.

Before, while, and after observing, we tried to guide our writing, not only as to the whole dissertation but also in writing articles out of it, through an ethical perspective. That means we talked to our participants as we wanted every aspect of our field experience to be clear and agreed between us. This is why we considered it relevant to preserve their identity once that seemed to make sense to us. We understand that anonymity does not guarantee

safety and is not applied to every research project. However, our focus was on the practices instead of the participant's identification, which gave us the liberty to decide on preserving such information.

In this regard, researchers must follow ethical rules in all their studies. Researchers can be clear and respectful by talking openly with participants and reaching agreements. In our study, we kept participants' identities private. We understand that hiding identities might not work for every study, but it helped us choose to share personal details. This way of doing qualitative research builds trust between researchers and participants and keeps the research honest.

We encourage researchers to capture as much as possible from their observations, take notes in descriptive ways, and consider including pictures and audio as resources for data collection. We also suggest they find a method for describing, organizing, and analyzing data from diaries since that makes it easier for them to envision codes and themes emerging from data. In addition, we encourage researchers to constantly triangulate data from observations and field diaries with other instruments and report those themes in subsequent papers after the research is officially done.

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