

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad

© Luhema Santos Ueti, Michele de Araujo

The work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Volume 38, Issue 2, pp. 236-258

DOI: [10.36366/frontiers.v38i2.1172](https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v38i2.1172)

www.frontiersjournal.org



The construction of Brazil's image among exchange students: An intercultural analysis of the "third place"

Luhema Santos Ueti¹, Michele de Araujo²

Abstract

This article analyzes blog posts written by U.S. exchange students enrolled in Portuguese as an Additional Language (PAL) courses in Brazil, in which they reflect on their intercultural experiences. Drawing on the concept of the "third place" (Kramsch, 1993, 1998), the analysis identifies two main axes of discursive construction: (i) affective and cultural displacements and (ii) identity reconnections. Adopting a qualitative, interpretivist approach (Creswell, 2014), the study highlights blog writing as a pedagogical tool for fostering critical awareness and the re-signification of intercultural experience. The findings contribute to PAL teaching and learning by suggesting practices that promote intercultural competence beyond linguistic proficiency. Finally, the results engage with global debates on academic mobility and language education, pointing to the potential for replicating this pedagogical approach in other educational and international contexts.

Abstract in Portuguese

Este artigo analisa textos de um blog produzidos por estudantes estadunidenses em intercâmbio no Brasil, matriculados em aulas de Português como Língua Adicional (PLA), no qual eles escrevem sobre suas vivências interculturais. Com base no conceito de "terceiro lugar" (Kramsch, 1993, 1998), a análise identificou dois eixos principais de construção discursiva: (i) deslocamentos afetivos e culturais e (ii) reconexões identitárias. A pesquisa adota uma abordagem qualitativa interpretativista (Creswell, 2014) e destaca a prática escrita do blog como ferramenta pedagógica para promover consciência crítica e

¹ STATE UNIVERSITY OF CAMPINAS (UNICAMP), CAMPINAS, BRAZIL

² UNIVERSITY OF SÃO PAULO, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

Corresponding author: Luhema Santos Ueti, luh_u8@hotmail.com

Date of Acceptance: July 20th, 2026

ressignificação da experiência intercultural. Os achados contribuem para o ensino-aprendizagem de PLA, sugerindo práticas que desenvolvam competências interculturais para além da proficiência linguística. Por fim, os resultados dialogam com debates globais sobre mobilidade acadêmica e ensino-aprendizagem de línguas, indicando a possibilidade de replicação da proposta em outros contextos educacionais e programas internacionais.

Keywords

Brazilian culture; interculturality; Portuguese as an additional language; student mobility

Editorial note

This article is part of the Plurilingual Special Issue of *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* on Voices from Latin America. The Portuguese version of the article can be accessed [here](#).

1. Introduction

This article aims to analyze texts produced by exchange students from the United States enrolled in Portuguese as an Additional Language (PAL) courses offered by a university exchange program based in São Paulo, Brazil. These courses are part of an international education context designed to support participants' linguistic, cultural, and academic development. Their primary objective is to facilitate students' integration into the Brazilian academic and social environment, fostering intercultural understanding and the exchange of experiences across cultures.

At the end of the course, as part of both assessment and reflective practice, students produce blog posts for the Portuguese course blog. The purpose of this activity is to document and share their perceptions, experiences, and reflections throughout the exchange program, thereby promoting deeper cultural and academic integration within the context of international student mobility.

This study focuses specifically on the analysis of these texts, seeking to understand how students discursively construct their views of Brazil and Brazilian society. To this end, it adopts interculturality as its central theoretical framework, as discussed by Kramsch (1993, 1998) and Mendes (2011, 2015). According to these authors, interculturality can be understood as a "third place," situated between the individual's culture of origin (C1) and that of the host country (C2). This hybrid space is characterized by negotiations of meaning, re-significations of values, and the construction of new identities,

which manifest, among other ways, in the discourses produced by individuals in contexts of academic and cultural mobility.

From this theoretical perspective, the analysis of the texts allows for the identification of discursive markers that reveal how students construct their perceptions of Brazil by articulating references from their culture of origin with observations and lived experiences in the host country. The choice of the blog as a data source is justified by its relatively open writing format, even within a pedagogical context, allowing participants to express personal opinions, narrate events, and reflect on cultural differences and similarities.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist approach, aiming to understand and interpret meanings based on a textual corpus produced in an authentic teaching and learning context. The texts were anonymized to preserve participants' identities. The analysis is carried out through the identification of recurring discursive patterns, grouped into interpretive axes of intercultural experience as a "third place."

The reflections emerging from this analysis are expected to suggest concrete pedagogical pathways for the teaching of Portuguese as an Additional Language, particularly with regard to strengthening a critical intercultural approach. The identification of recurring dimensions in students' discourse—such as affective and cultural displacements and identity reconnections—may provide valuable insights for the development of practices that foster intercultural competence beyond linguistic acquisition.

2. Study context

2.1. Exchange programs in Brazil

The internationalization of universities has become an increasingly prominent trend in recent decades, accompanied by a significant rise in the number of students engaged in international mobility. In this section, we present data on global student mobility and, more specifically, on the Brazilian context, discussing key factors that influence students' adaptation as well as some of the reasons why they choose Brazil as a destination—particularly those enrolled in U.S. universities. Additionally, we outline the general characteristics of the blog and the program in which it is implemented, highlighting the profile of the participating students.

According to UNESCO, the number of internationally mobile students increased from just over 2 million in 2000 to more than 6 million in 2019 (UNESCO, 2022). In Brazil, although the internationalization of universities is still considered less developed compared to other countries, including those in

Latin America, there has been a notable expansion of initiatives aimed at promoting internationalization since the 2000s. This is partly due to the fact that Brazil currently has one of the strongest higher education systems in Latin America (Carvalho & Moraes, 2024).

Data from the Central Bank of Brazil (2022) indicate that the growing influx of international students, motivated by both professional development and personal enrichment, has had a measurable impact on the educational tourism sector (Brasil, 2015).

In this context, understanding the factors that influence students' adaptation becomes essential. A study examining the adaptation of international university students in Brazil highlighted aspects such as friendships with peers from the same country, support networks involving students of other nationalities, relationships with Brazilian students, faculty members, and even neighbors—all of which contribute to integration into the local community (Zembrzusi, Santos, & Nihei, 2021).

Beyond adaptation, it is also important to understand the motivations underlying the choice of a particular destination country. Such decisions are shaped by multidimensional factors, including objective aspects such as infrastructure, the socioeconomic environment, atmosphere, and the physical environment, as well as subjective dimensions such as affective image and the cultural environment (Lameira *et al.*, 2025). The authors also highlight satisfaction, the intention to repeat the experience, and communication among exchange students as elements that contribute to a positive image of the destination.

In this same vein, a 2024 study conducted with 67 U.S. exchange students affiliated with four major Brazilian higher education institutions investigated their motivations for studying in Brazil. The results indicated that students are concerned with their development as global citizens and seek greater openness to future international engagement as a result of globalization. Additionally, a specific interest was observed in studies related to Latin America and Brazil, as well as in the development of behavioral competencies such as adaptability, flexibility, and multicultural communication, among others (Carvalho & Moraes, 2024).

This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, which analyzes texts published on a pedagogically oriented blog within an international exchange program based in São Paulo. The program hosts students from U.S. higher education institutions—whether U.S. citizens or international students enrolled in those institutions—and is further characterized in the following section.

2.2. Characterization of the program

The program that provides the context for this study hosts students from the United States who come to Brazil to enroll in courses both at a partner university and within the program's own institutional structure.

The institution was established in the 1980s and initially focused on a single destination country. In 2001, it expanded to three additional countries, and in 2015 it began operating in Latin America, with the establishment of a headquarters in São Paulo, the city that hosts the activities of the program examined in this study.

Exchange students are accommodated in shared housing with Brazilian peers and other international students, located near both the program's headquarters and the partner university. Classes are generally held at both the partner university and the exchange program.

Students select courses according to their individual interests from the curricula offered by both the partner university and the institution. These courses cover a range of topics, including race, cinema, economics, and social justice, among others. Instruction is generally conducted in Portuguese, although some courses may also be offered in English depending on student demand.

Portuguese language classes and the core courses that constitute the program's essential curriculum are mandatory. Throughout the semester, these core courses are offered in both English and Portuguese, depending on students' level of proficiency in Portuguese, which is determined through a written and oral placement test administered prior to the start of classes. Based on this assessment, students are placed into Beginner, Intermediate, or Advanced levels¹.

The program offers two formats, following the U.S. academic calendar: semester-long (Fall and Spring) and intensive (Summer). In the semester-long format, Portuguese classes are held twice a week and last 100 minutes. In the intensive format, classes take place from Monday to Thursday and last 160 minutes.

The Portuguese course also includes extracurricular activities such as field trips, guided museum visits, and cultural events (e.g., poetry slams), which

¹ This classification is the most basic; however, when necessary, further subdivisions are made into sublevels such as Beginner level for Spanish-speakers, Intermediate I and II, and Advanced I and II.

are counted as assignments. The blog, which constitutes the object of analysis in this study, serves as the course's final project.

Based on our experience as instructors in the Portuguese courses, we have observed that many students come from multiracial backgrounds, including Afro-descendant and/or migrant families, particularly of Latin American origin. Given this profile, as well as the widespread offering of Spanish as a second language in the United States, proficiency in Spanish is very common among participants. Additionally, there is a significant presence of students who are children or grandchildren of Brazilians and who have Portuguese as a heritage language².

Among the various student profiles, some are in Brazil due to academic research related to the country or to Latin America more broadly; others are interested in themes present in both U.S. and Brazilian societies, such as racial issues; and there are also those seeking to reconnect with their Brazilian heritage.

The characterization of the program and its student body provides insight into the pedagogical and sociocultural context in which this study is situated. Considering the diversity of student profiles, as well as the program's educational objectives, it becomes relevant to investigate how the experiences lived during the program and reflected upon in Portuguese classes—particularly through blog writing—reveal intercultural discursive constructions.

3. Interculturality in Portuguese language classes

In order to understand how students of Portuguese as an Additional Language (PAL) discursively construct intercultural experiences during their academic stay in Brazil, this study draws on theoretical frameworks that articulate the fields of interculturality and academic mobility within additional language teaching and learning contexts. This section presents the main theoretical contributions that underpin the analysis, with particular emphasis on studies on interculturality (Kramsch, 1993, 1998; Mendes, 2011, 2015).

Among the conceptual pillars supporting this analysis, the relationship between language and culture stands out as a central axis in Applied Linguistics and in the teaching of additional languages, being widely recognized as inseparable (Kramsch, 1993, 1998; Almeida Filho, 2011; Mendes,

² According to Alvarez (2016, p. 64), Heritage Language (HL) “refers to the acquisition of a minority language in a migration context. It is learned within the family from an early age.”

2011, 2016). According to Kramsch (1998), language is deeply embedded in social and cultural practices, functioning as a symbolic system that expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural realities. When expressing ideas, feelings, or perceptions, speakers draw on shared repertoires of meaning; when selecting styles, modes, and forms of expression, they construct culturally situated meanings; and, in using language, they assert identities and affiliations with particular social groups. Thus, teaching and learning an additional language involves not only the mastery of linguistic structures but also engagement in cultural practices and the re-signification of worldviews.

Still according to the author, language is intertwined with culture in three ways: it expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural realities. When expressing facts, ideas, or feelings, linguistic utterances are grounded in a shared repertoire of social and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, members of a community not only communicate their experiences but also produce culturally situated meanings through their choice of modes and styles of expression. Moreover, language also functions as a marker of identity, being perceived by speakers as an expression of belonging to a particular social group. Therefore, the teaching and learning of an additional language cannot be separated from the cultural dimension, since it is through language that learners access, experience, and re-signify different worldviews.

This conception is also discussed by Mendes (2015), who understands language not merely as a means of communication, but as a way of being in the world, mediating our experiences and structuring how we perceive and interact with others. From this perspective, Mendes (2015, p. 219) argues that:

More than an instrument, language is a symbol, a mode of identification, a system for producing individual, social, and cultural meanings, and a lens through which we perceive the reality that surrounds us. By structuring our thoughts and actions, it mediates between our experiences and those of others with whom we interact socially through language, helping us to organize the world around us.

This inseparability between language and culture becomes even more evident in contexts of international academic mobility, in which learners come into direct contact with different cultures. To account for this complexity, Kramsch (1993) proposes the notions of C1 and C2 as symbolic representations of the learner's culture of origin and the target culture, respectively. In the context of this study, C1 refers to the U.S. culture of exchange students, while

C2 corresponds to Brazilian culture, as experienced during the period of academic mobility³.

According to Kramsch (1993), and as applied to the context of this study, four types of cultural perceptions may emerge in this encounter: C1': the learner's perception of their own culture; C1'': the learner's perception of the target culture; C2': the target culture individual's perception of their own culture; C2'': the target culture individual's perception of the learner's culture.

This multiplicity of perspectives demonstrates that learners do not merely observe but critically reinterpret both their own culture and the target culture as they engage in intercultural discursive practices.

In this sense, Kramsch further argues that, as students move between these two cultures, they develop a range of intersecting perceptions: about their own culture and that of others, as well as perspectives shaped by their position as outsiders. This may lead, for example, to situations in which learners not only reflect on Brazilian culture but also revisit their own cultural identity in a new light, thus generating a reflective process that goes beyond a simple comparison of cultural differences and similarities.

This dynamic movement between cultures relates directly to the concept of interculturality, understood in this study as a process of meaning-making that emerges from the encounter between different language-cultures. Interculturality involves negotiation of meanings, the recognition of otherness, and the ability to critically reflect on both one's culture of origin and the target culture (Kramsch, 1993; Mendes, 2011). In academic mobility contexts such as the one analyzed here, interculturality manifests in how learners interpret and (re)construct their experiences, often shaped by cultural tensions, identity re-significations, and affective discoveries.

Complementing this perspective, Kramsch (1998) identifies three dimensions for understanding culture: the social dimension, which emphasizes the shared repertoire of behaviors, values, and norms of a group; the historical dimension, which refers to the symbolic production accumulated over time, such as art, monuments, traditions, and technologies; and the metaphorical or imaginative dimension, which encompasses the subjective and affective meanings individuals attribute to the world. This last dimension is particularly

³ The terms "U.S. culture" and "Brazilian culture" are used in the singular for analytical convenience; however, we acknowledge that both countries exhibit considerable cultural diversity and heterogeneity. Furthermore, some of the students whose texts were selected are either U.S. nationals from multiethnic backgrounds or international students living and studying in the United States – factors that broaden the scope of what may be defined as C1 (culture of origin).

relevant to this study, as it relates to how learners construct symbolic images of the target culture based on both direct experiences and pre-existing social imaginaries, mediated by discourse, media, and cultural representations.

It is at this intersection of lived experiences and symbolic perceptions that the concept of the “third place,” proposed by Kramsch (1993), emerges as a pedagogical and identity-related space. This intermediate space is situated neither fully within C1 nor within C2, but in the movement between them, allowing learners to reconfigure their discursive and identity positions through engagement with otherness. The “third place” thus constitutes a space of cultural mediation, in which worldviews are re-signified and new forms of belonging may emerge (Kramsch, 1993). In language teaching and learning contexts such as the one examined in this study, this space represents an opportunity to foster not only linguistic competence, but also critical awareness of the cultural relations involved in the learning process.

Based on these theoretical frameworks, the following section presents the methodology adopted for the analysis of the texts produced by the students, describing the corpus, the selection criteria, and the categorization procedures.

4. Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2014), grounded in the textual analysis of posts published on a blog created by Portuguese language instructors as part of an assessment activity within Portuguese courses offered in the context of an academic program for U.S. university students participating in an exchange program in Brazil. The primary aim of the blog is to provide a space for sharing intercultural experiences, fostering written production in an additional language from the students’ personal perspectives during their stay in the country.

This medium, whose origins date back to the late 1990s and whose popularization intensified in the 2000s with the expansion of internet access (Karhawi, 2018), has become established as a form of both personal and collective expression, particularly through genres such as narratives, chronicles, and reflective diaries. Although blogs can serve multiple purposes, ranging from institutional communication to personal records (Primo, 2010), this study focuses specifically on posts produced for the Portuguese language course, in which students share their cultural perceptions, linguistic challenges, and significant moments experienced during the exchange program.

The *corpus* of this research consists of 148 texts produced and published on the blog as part of the Final Project of the Portuguese language courses offered by the program, beginning with its implementation in the second academic semester of 2022⁴.

Initially introduced as a writing activity developed by two instructors teaching advanced-level courses, the blog was subsequently incorporated as a regular assessment component across all proficiency levels, from beginner to advanced, with the aim of providing students with a more reflective space for textual production. The texts were written in Portuguese on topics freely chosen by the students, without any predefined thematic constraints imposed by the instructors.

The introduction of the blog as an assessment component stemmed from the teaching staff's perception that traditional course genres—such as assignments, midterms, and final exams — tended to prioritize more formal, academically oriented writing, offering limited opportunities for subjective or self-reflective expression. In contrast, blog writing functions as an alternative space for textual production centered on individual experience and intercultural reflection, allowing learners to explore topics of personal interest, thereby fostering both linguistic development and authorial agency in the use of the additional language.

In this sense, the blog proposal, centered on students' lived experiences, is intentionally open and inclusive, accommodating diverse cultural perspectives and respecting the heterogeneity of participant profiles. As a hybrid and multimodal genre, blog writing enables the integration of verbal and visual language, supporting the construction of personal narratives that combine text and image. Within this format, students produce authorial texts that highlight intercultural aspects of their experiences while selecting images that interact with the written content, thereby enhancing the expressive and communicative potential of the posts. Given this multimodal nature, it is important to note that the present study focuses exclusively on the textual dimension of the posts, without addressing their visual components.

The choice of a free and easily accessible platform for publishing the texts was guided by considerations of accessibility, usability, and pedagogical autonomy. The intuitive interface and available editing tools enabled students to publish their texts independently, thereby increasing engagement with the writing process.

⁴ The blog texts were produced by students from nine different cohorts, corresponding to the following terms: Fall 2022, Spring 2023, Summer 2023, Fall 2023, Spring 2024, Summer 2024, Fall 2024, Spring 2025, and Summer 2025.

It is also important to note that the writing task varies according to students' proficiency levels, particularly in terms of text length (as shown in Table 1) and the time allocated for the oral presentation of the content to peers on the day of final submission. This in-person component, integrated into the blog activity, expands opportunities for interaction and for the sharing of intercultural experiences among participants.

TABLE (1)

PROFICIENCY LEVELS AND WORD COUNT REQUIREMENTS FOR BLOG TEXTS

Level	Word count
Beginner	350 - 450 words
Intermediate	450 - 550 words
Advanced	550-650 words

Assessment criteria vary according to each instructor but generally include aspects related to the blog genre (e.g., title, use of images, organization), linguistic features (e.g., grammar and vocabulary), and themes associated with the students' exchange experiences.

For analytical purposes, the 148 texts were organized into eight thematic categories that emerged from the data: (i) Visual arts and cultural heritage; (ii) Nature, landscapes, and mobility; (iii) Food culture and gastronomic practices; (iv) Urban spaces and architectural landscapes; (v) Everyday life, leisure, and cultural expressions; (vi) Society, politics, and religiosity; (vii) Language and communication; and (viii) Intercultural reflections and trajectories of transformation.

The definition of these categories followed a two-step process. First, the titles of the texts were examined to identify preliminary thematic groupings. Subsequently, a second round of analysis was conducted, considering both titles and the full content of the texts, in order to verify the adequacy of each post within the initial categories, adjusting whenever necessary.

For the purposes of this article, the analysis focuses on the eighth category, entitled *Intercultural Reflections and Transformational Trajectories*, which comprises 17 texts. These texts include narratives in which students engage in processes of identity displacement, cultural comparison, meaning-making, and subjective re-signification. They reveal deeper dimensions of intercultural experience, going beyond descriptive accounts and offering critical reflections on lived experiences during the exchange.

The selection of this category is primarily grounded in the centrality of the metaphorical or imaginative dimension of culture, as outlined by Kramsch (1998), which refers to the subjective and affective meanings attributed to cultural experiences. This perspective allows for the examination of how

students construct symbolic discourses that reveal internal transformations, identity negotiations, and re-significations of cultural belonging. Thus, the choice of this corpus is directly aligned with the objective of this study: to investigate how interculturality is experienced and discursively represented by students in academic mobility contexts.

Regarding ethical considerations, it is important to note that the texts analyzed are publicly accessible, as they are available on a blog, and that students consented to their publication at the time of writing. Nevertheless, in order to preserve participants' confidentiality, the names of authors and any third parties mentioned have been omitted or replaced whenever necessary, thereby ensuring anonymity.

As noted, the category *Intercultural Reflections and Transformational Trajectories* comprises 17 texts whose titles often signal the subjective, identity-related, and intercultural nature of the experiences described. These titles function as anticipatory frames for the meanings developed in the texts, highlighting recurring identity and intercultural themes that emerge strongly in the narratives. Among them, 11 explicitly mention or clearly develop the notion of the “third place” (Kramsch, 1993, 1998), a central concept for the analysis undertaken in this article, and were therefore selected as the analytical corpus. Table (2) below presents the titles of the posts included in this category:

TABLE (2)

TITLES OF THE CORPUS TEXTS

TEXT	TITLE
1	<i>Guia descomplicado da Maria para estudar no exterior no Brasil</i> ⁵ – Maria's ⁶ Declassified Guide to Study Abroad in Brazil
2	<i>Encontros nas ruas brasileiras</i> – Encounters on Brazilian Streets
3	<i>Brasil através dos meus olhos: vistas e estranhos</i> – Brazil Through My Eyes: Sights and Strangers
4	<i>Minha experiência (ótima!) com o lado acolhedor dos brasileiros</i> – My (Amazing!) Experience with the Welcoming Side of Brazilians
5	<i>Descobrimo o Brasil: ajustes, cultura e experiências incríveis</i> – Discovering Brazil: Adjustments, Culture, and Incredible Experiences
6	<i>Que chiqueeee</i> – So Chic!
7	<i>Entre dois mundos: Por que quero me mudar para o Brasil</i> – Between Two Worlds: Why I Want to Move to Brazil
8	<i>Dizendo sim ao momento: lições do Brasil</i> – Saying Yes to the Moment: Lessons from Brazil

⁵ The original titles of the blog posts will be maintained in Portuguese and accompanied by their translations into English, except for the first post, which was originally written in English.

⁶ As previously mentioned, to preserve the anonymity of the participants, the students' names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

9	<i>Brasil ensinou-me que o tempo não é real: o conceito de tempo circular</i> – Brazil Taught Me That Time Is Not Real: The Concept of Circular Time
10	<i>Uma comunidade que me deu comida para duas semanas</i> – A Community That Fed Me for Two Weeks
11	<i>Latinidade em trânsito: encontrando a América Latina dentro do Brasil</i> – Latinity in Motion: Finding Latin America Within Brazil

Based on this *corpus*, the following section presents a qualitative analysis of the narratives, seeking to understand how students elaborate their intercultural experiences, construct senses of belonging, and re-signify cultural references in contexts of academic mobility.

We chose to retain excerpts from the texts in their original form, without linguistic correction, in order to preserve the students' voices, expressive choices, and markers of subjectivity.

For analytical purposes, the discussion is organized into two interpretive dimensions of the “third place,” defined based on recurring patterns observed in the posts.

5. Results

5.1. Dimensions of the “third place”

Following the concepts proposed by Kramsch (1993, 1998), we identified 11 texts that address aspects related to C1', that is, the students' perceptions of their own culture, generally U.S. culture, and C1'', which refers to their perceptions of Brazilian culture.

Considering these two dimensions, C1' and C1'', we selected texts that employ both perspectives in a contrastive and comparative effort. In the former, these texts highlight more negative traits regarding the students' home country and more positive aspects in relation to Brazil, a pattern that remains consistent throughout the text. In the latter, there is an initial perception that students would face difficulties adapting to Brazil or encounter issues related to safety, for example. However, this initial image, often shaped by common stereotypes and preconceived notions, proves to be unfounded during the exchange period, leading students to develop new perceptions.

Among the selected texts, as previously mentioned, we identified 11 in which the concept of the “third place” emerges. In this context, perceptions of Brazil and/or Brazilians are re-signified, and students also report a shift in their relationship with the country and with themselves, in a dialectical process.

To make this process of symbolic displacement more visible, we present below a table with information on the 11 texts in which the “third place” is at

play. The first column indicates the text number, the second summarizes the contrast perceived by the students between their culture of origin (C1') and Brazilian culture (C1''). We then indicate how this contrast generates a symbolic transformation, that is, the construction of an intermediate space in which identities, values, or habits are negotiated and re-signified.

Finally, we selected an illustrative excerpt from each text that demonstrates this process of displacement and reconstruction, as shown in Table (3).

TABLE (3)

CULTURAL CONTRASTS AND THE SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE "THIRD PLACE" IN BLOG TEXTS

Text	Cultural contrast (C1' versus C1'')	Symbolic transformation of the "third place"	Illustrative excerpt from the blog⁷
1	Concern about culture shock and initial discomfort	Use of initial discomfort as a catalyst for active adaptation through well-being strategies and openness to the local culture	The transition is important, and culture shock is real, so it is important to create spaces, things, etc., that support your mental health and well-being.
2	In the U.S., buying from street vendors is rare; in Brazil, it is common	Unexpected interpersonal connections through conversations and negotiations with street vendors	I will really miss the convenience of street vendors when I return to the United States.
3	U.S.: avoiding strangers; Brazil: openness to others	Transformation in ways of relating to others, seeing them as sources of learning	My experience with strangers made me more open to other people and helped me understand the importance of talking to one another. This is definitely something I will take back to the U.S.
4	France: emotional distance in interactions; Brazil: affective warmth	Formation of affective bonds with local vendors as an expression of Brazilian hospitality	I will certainly return with only good things to say about Brazilian people. In my experience, the welcoming nature of Brazilians is not a myth, and Parisians have much to learn!
5	Fast-paced life in the U.S.; valuing the present in Brazil	Reconfiguration of lifestyle and reconnection with Latin American identity (Ecuador)	I also learned something valuable from Brazilians: the importance of living in the present. [...] Today, I am grateful for this experience, which allowed me not only to grow personally and professionally but also to feel more connected to my Latin American identity.

⁷ All excerpts originally written in Portuguese have been translated by the authors, with efforts to preserve the students' original wording, stylistic choices, and linguistic particularities.

6	Differences in the experience of Afro hair braiding in the U.S. and Brazil	Sense of belonging fostered by the Afro-Brazilian community through hair braiding as an Afro-diasporic connection	It was not just a hairstyle; it was a connection to a community I will never forget.
7	In the U.S., identity is questioned; in Brazil, identity is re-signified	Cultural integration and identity search through connection with parents' Brazil	I met people who struggle daily to transform their reality and who value their roots with courage and creativity. This social awareness made me want to be part of something bigger, to contribute to this movement, and to keep learning. [...] Living this experience was like putting together pieces of my identity and realizing they had always been connected.
8	New York: productivity and pressure; Brazil: presence and sensitivity	Openness to new experiences through a shift in mindset toward living in the present	Here, I have learned to slow down and truly experience life as it unfolds. Not just to see, but to feel. [...] Being in Brazil and being present has taken me out of my comfort zone in the best possible way. I found myself doing things I never imagined: riding motorcycles through the hills of Bahia, hang gliding over the coast in Rio, dancing until sunrise to the vibrant rhythm of Brazilian nightlife, and having long conversations with Uber drivers—simply because that is normal in Brazil.
9	U.S.: linear time and productivity demands; Brazil: circular time	Resignification of time as lived experience and well-being	But the best thing I learned was that time is not something to be used. I had many days when I never looked at the clock or slept the whole day. While someone might think I wasted the day, I learned the importance of rest, reflection, and being present.
10	Jewish holidays in the U.S. vs. Brazil	Integration of new religious practices and construction of a transnational community	Because of my experiences with Jewish holidays in Brazil, I will return with new traditions to share with my family. I chose São Paulo because of my religious identity.
11	Preconceived idea that Brazil is isolated from Latin identity	Redefinition of Brazilian identity and perception of fluid cultural borders within Latin America	Being here as a Latina student made me reflect on what it means to be Latin American. In Brazil, I found unexpected answers—not in stereotypes, but in festivals, food, music, and everyday moments that cross borders. At every corner, I realized that Latin identity is in motion, and that Brazil, in all its complexity, is—and has always been—part of Latin America.

Based on the analysis presented in Table 3, we identified two groups of texts. In the first group (5.1.1), the experiences described involve, to some extent, cultural shock followed by adaptation, which creates space for new ways of relating to the world and to the local culture. In these texts, the “third place” is perceived as an embodied experience—one that can be felt in the body and through time—and that allows new cultural practices to be experienced authentically.

In the second group (5.1.2), the selected texts show that the “third place” is experienced as a symbolic space of negotiation and identity reconstruction, in which students move beyond merely comparing cultures and begin to integrate diverse references in the construction of a new sense of self. In the following subsection, we present an analysis of each of these groups, seeking to highlight how these different forms of intercultural experience are manifested in the students’ narratives.

5.1.1. Affective and cultural displacements: The body, time, and openness to everyday life in the construction of the “third place”

As discussed by Kramsch, the “third place” can be understood as a symbolic space of subjective reinvention, characterized by openness to the other. This pattern is evident in T1, T2, T4, T6, T8, and T9 (T refers to text). The texts in this group present situations in which students experience shifts in everyday practices—such as ways of purchasing goods, perceptions of time, or social interactions—that lead to a distancing from the internalized values of their culture of origin (C1’) and, consequently, a closer engagement with what they encounter in C1”. This process reflects change, personal transformation, and learning. These displacements manifest through the body, as in T6; through emotions, as in T1; through sensory experience, as seen in T8 and T9; and through urban interactions, as in T2 and T4.

In T1, the student reflects on culture shock as a central element of the intercultural experience, recognizing discomfort as an essential part of the transformation process. The idea of “creating spaces” that support emotional well-being demonstrates an effort to adapt to and embrace the unfamiliar: “The transition is important, and culture shock is real, so it is important to create spaces, things, etc., that support your mental health and well-being.” The text reveals an awareness that displacement is a constitutive part of intercultural learning and of the construction of a new subjective positioning.

In T2, the narrative of interactions with street vendors highlights a more practical and relational shift. Coming from a context in which this type of commerce is uncommon, the student begins to value these exchanges as part of everyday Brazilian life, describing them as something they will miss upon

returning home. Here, a local habit is incorporated through the affective dimension of spontaneous interactions and through the disruption of prior expectations regarding what is considered “safe” or “appropriate.”

T4, written by a French student, explicitly contrasts their culture of origin with Brazilian culture. The student describes French people as reserved and, in contrast, Brazilians as warm and open. This perception goes beyond mere description, leading to the formation of concrete bonds with local vendors, with whom the student becomes acquainted. Although the transformation is only implicitly suggested, the tone of the text indicates a shift in perspective: “I will certainly return with only good things to say about Brazilian people.” Here, the “third place” is constructed through urban coexistence and a critical reassessment of one’s own culture.

In T6, displacement occurs not only in social relations but also through the body and aesthetics. The student recounts the experience of getting braids in São Paulo, something that had been marked by difficulty in the United States. Upon being welcomed into a salon frequented by members of the Afro-Brazilian community, the student experiences a sense of belonging and identification: “It was not just a hairstyle; it was a connection to a community I will never forget.” The language of the text highlights the body as a symbolic site of intercultural exchange and identity (re)affirmation.

In both T8 and T9, temporality emerges as a central dimension of the intercultural experience — a subjective and cultural aspect that deeply shapes one’s way of being in the world. In T8, the student describes a transition from a fast-paced lifestyle to a more present and sensitive experience of time. Their experiences in Brazil teach them to slow down and “simply be,” thereby reshaping their relationship with time and their mode of existence.

Similarly, in T9, where time is also central, the student reports feeling constantly pressured by productivity in the United States. In Brazil, however, they learn to value rest, in a clear inversion of values: “While someone might think I wasted the entire day, I learned the importance of rest, reflection, and being present.” Time thus becomes a space of freedom and connection with both the body and the surrounding environment, reinforcing the construction of a “third place” that is more attuned to affect and presence.

Taken together, these experiences suggest that the “third place” is not constructed in an immediate or linear manner, but rather shaped by multiple layers of interaction involving time, the body, others, and the urban environment.

It is important to emphasize that, throughout the exchange experience, these very aspects are re-signified, giving rise to new forms of presence and

interaction with others that are more open, affective, and relational. This is precisely the “third place”: a space for intercultural interaction that also plays a fundamental role in facilitating the learning of an additional language.

5.1.2. Identity reconnection: Re-signifying one's own origins through the other

In the previous group of texts, the “third place” appears as a lived, sensory experience of everyday life and openness to the new; here, it emerges as a symbolic space of identity negotiation. In texts T3, T5, T7, T10, and T11, students not only adopt practices from Brazilian culture but also reinterpret who they are, reclaiming aspects of their personal, religious, or cultural trajectories that had previously been silenced.

In T3, the student begins with a typical warning from U.S. culture — “do not talk to strangers” — and finds themselves transformed through the contrast with Brazilian sociability. Their experience in São Paulo leads them to state: “My experience with strangers made me more open to other people and helped me understand the importance of talking to one another.” The relationship with others, previously marked by fear or distrust, becomes a source of learning and openness.

T5 presents the account of a student born in Ecuador but raised in the United States who, in Brazil, experiences a reconnection with their Latin identity: “I learned something valuable from Brazilians: the importance of living in the present [...] I felt more connected to my Latin American identity.” Here, the intercultural experience enables the recovery of an origin that had, to some extent, been overshadowed.

In T7, a student who is the child of Brazilian parents feels “between two worlds” and finds in Brazil a symbolic space capable of integrating her fragmented cultural references. She writes: “Living this experience was like putting together pieces of my identity and realizing they had always been connected.” The exchange thus becomes a process of reconstructing a sense of belonging to her heritage language-culture.

T10 illustrates a similar movement through religious experience. An Orthodox Jewish student initially faces challenges in maintaining a kosher diet but finds transformative support within the Jewish community in São Paulo. By the end of her stay, she states that she will take with her new traditions learned in Brazil, demonstrating that the “third place” can also function as a transnational space of faith and cultural continuity.

Finally, T11 highlights the shift from an initial view of Brazil as separate from Latin America. By participating in Latin festivals, visiting Colombian restaurants, and engaging with Latin American music alongside Brazilians, the

student comes to realize that “Latinity is in motion, and that Brazil is, and has always been, part of Latin America.” Her identity as a “Latin American” is thus reconstructed through engagement with Brazil’s cultural diversity.

In all these cases, the “third place” emerges as a symbolic territory for the rearticulation of the self — a space in which different cultural references, once perceived as conflicting, become integrated in a reflective and dynamic manner. Within this site of encounter and negotiation, students construct composite identities shaped by multiple layers of belonging. The intercultural experiences lived in Brazil not only challenge values and stereotypes associated with their culture of origin (C1’) but also generate new meanings— affective and ethical—through interaction with others. In this sense, the “third place” reveals itself as a privileged space for the creation of hybrid and more complex forms of subjectivity, marked by fluidity and the expansion of one’s identity repertoire.

Considering these analyses, it is possible to observe that the “third place” is configured, in the students’ narratives, as a symbolic space constructed through affective, temporal, and identity-based displacements. Whether through the sensory experience of everyday life or through the reconfiguration of belonging, these intercultural experiences reveal how academic mobility can trigger profound processes of subjective reinvention. Although grounded in the Brazilian context, these experiences resonate with broader discussions in the field of internationalization of higher education, particularly regarding openness to the other, cultural negotiation, and the construction of hybrid identities. Thus, the findings presented here contribute to expanding the debate on the symbolic impacts of international mobility, connecting the Brazilian case to broader global reflections on alterity, cultural representation, and learning in mobility contexts.

6. Conclusion

This article analyzed narratives produced by U.S. university students participating in an academic exchange program in Brazil, focusing on the discursive construction of intercultural experiences within the context of teaching and learning Portuguese as an additional language. Drawing on the concept of the “third place” (Kramsch, 1993, 1998), we examined how affective, cultural, and identity-based displacements expressed in blog posts reveal subjective processes of transformation mediated by interaction with others and immersion in social practices distinct from those of their culture of origin (C1’).

We identified two main dimensions of these experiences: on the one hand, sensory experiences of everyday life involving the body, time, and the city as axes of re-signification; on the other, trajectories of identity reconnection, in which students reinterpret their own cultural or religious origins through their contact with Brazil. In both cases, the “third place” emerges as a symbolic space of openness, negotiation, and intercultural learning.

From a pedagogical perspective, the analyzed blog texts prove to be powerful tools for critical reflection and meaning-making, allowing learners to articulate their experiences in an authorial and creative manner. By writing about their experiences, students not only recount events but also construct identity positions and develop a more complex perspective on themselves and others—a process that is essential for intercultural education in contexts of academic mobility.

Although this study is situated within the context of academic mobility in Brazil, its findings engage with global debates on language teaching and learning, the internationalization of higher education, and student mobility. In a context in which contact between cultures is increasingly mediated by discourse, media, and mobility, understanding how learners make meaning of these experiences is crucial for fostering more inclusive, critical, and interculturally aware pedagogical practices.

This educational practice, therefore, can be expanded and replicated in other contexts or institutions to promote the development of plural, ethical subjects capable of navigating across languages, cultures, and worlds with critical awareness and intercultural sensitivity.

We argue that this tool can support teachers of Portuguese as an additional language in diverse contexts, as this type of activity can function as an effective pedagogical strategy to stimulate reflective writing among learners of different proficiency levels and age groups. To this end, teachers should consider and respect the characteristics of the groups they work with, either proposing open-ended themes or guiding the activity toward topics that are relevant to students' lives. In this sense, the most important aspect is to invite students to produce personal narratives that articulate lived experiences with the use of the target language, fostering a more meaningful learning process.

Furthermore, activities of this nature contribute to the development of vocabulary in Portuguese, particularly in its Brazilian variety. By writing about everyday situations, intercultural encounters, or aspects of social life in Brazil, students tend to mobilize and expand their lexical repertoire based on real contexts of use. Writing, in this sense, moves beyond a purely formal exercise

and becomes a space for linguistic experimentation, in which new words, expressions, and structures can be progressively incorporated into discourse. This process enhances students' linguistic awareness and enables a deeper engagement with the local culture.

Another relevant aspect is the potential of such practices to foster critical thinking. As students reflect on differences and similarities between Brazil and their countries of origin, they are encouraged to problematize stereotypes, question initial perceptions, and construct more complex interpretations of the cultural contexts with which they engage. Through this process, teachers promote the development of an intercultural stance in which language learning is closely linked to processes of meaning-making and negotiation across different cultural references.

Finally, initiatives such as this also make it possible to integrate social experiences lived outside the classroom, often insufficiently addressed in formal instruction, whether due to rigid curricula or limited class time. In this way, students become protagonists of their own learning, as the linguistic and cultural contexts emerging from their personal experiences are transformed into pedagogical materials that can be shared with peers and even with a broader audience.

The production of blog texts, in this sense, not only documents progress in learning Portuguese but also offers students a symbolic space for subjective and cultural elaboration. These texts subsequently become a means of accessing their own trajectories of displacement, allowing learners to revisit their intercultural experiences, as well as those of their peers — not as fixed accounts, but as part of an ongoing process of re-signification.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the students who participated in this study and generously shared their experiences through the course blog. We also acknowledge the institutional support provided by the exchange program through which the data were collected.

Ethical review and approval

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research guidelines. The data analyzed consist of publicly available blog posts produced as part of a course activity. All identifying information was removed to ensure participants' anonymity. Formal ethical approval was not required under institutional guidelines for research using publicly available data.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are publicly available on the course blog. However, due to ethical considerations and the need to preserve participants' anonymity, direct access to the dataset is restricted. Excerpts are available within the article.

CRedit author statement

Luhema Santos Ueti: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration.
Michele de Araújo: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration.

References

- Almeida Filho, J. C. P. (2002). Língua além de cultura ou além de cultura, língua? Aspectos do ensino da interculturalidade. In M. J. Cunha & P. Santos (Orgs.), *Tópicos em português língua estrangeira* (pp. 210–215). Editora da UnB.
- Alvarez, M. L. O. (2016). O falante de herança: à procura de sua identidade. In M. L. O. Alvarez & L. Gonçalves (Orgs.), *O mundo do português e o português no mundo afora: especificidades, implicações e ações* (pp. 59–85). Pontes Editores.
- Carvalho, R. P. L., & Moraes, M. C. B. (2024). Internacionalização e ensino superior: Um estudo comparativo entre as percepções de estudantes brasileiros e norte-americanos sobre a realidade das instituições de ensino superior brasileiras. *Revista Internacional de Educação Superior*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.20396/riesup.v10i00.8664364>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Investigação qualitativa e projeto de pesquisa: Escolhendo entre cinco abordagens* (3ª ed.). Penso.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Karhawi, I. S. (2018). *De blogueira à influenciadora: motivações, ethos e etapas profissionais na blogosfera de moda brasileira* [Tese de doutorado, Universidade de São Paulo]. Biblioteca Digital de Teses e Dissertações da USP.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Lameira, I. L., Gosling, M. S., Campos, A. F. D., & Gosling, I. T. S. (2025). Turismo de intercâmbio: Antecedentes do apego, satisfação e recomendação. *Turismo: Visão e Ação*, 27. <https://doi.org/10.14210/tva.v27.20497>
- Mendes, E. (2015). A ideia de cultura e sua atualidade para o ensino-aprendizagem de LE/L2. *Revista EntreLinguas*, 1(2), 203–222. <https://doi.org/10.29051/el.v1i2.8060>

- Mendes, E. (Org.). (2011). *Diálogos interculturais: Ensino e formação em português língua estrangeira*. Pontes Editores.
- Primo, A. (2011). Blogs e seus gêneros: avaliação estatística de 50 blogs em língua portuguesa. *MATRIZES*, 4(1), 129-147. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v4i1p129-147>
- Unesco. (2022). *Moving minds: Opportunities and challenges for virtual student mobility in a post-pandemic world [Relatório técnico]*.
- Zembrzuski, L. J. P., Santos, C. M. R. C., & Nihei, O. K. (2021). Adaptação de estudantes universitários estrangeiros no Brasil: Revisão de escopo. *Pleiade*, 15(33), 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.32915/pleiade.v15i33.697>

Author biography

Luhema Santos Ueti holds a degree in Language and Literature (Portuguese, English, and Spanish), as well as an MA and a PhD from the University of São Paulo. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher in Portuguese as an Additional Language at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), with a FAPESP fellowship. Her research focuses on Portuguese as an Additional Language, teacher education, academic mobility, and migration. She is also involved in the Celpe-Bras examination.

Michele de Araújo has a BA degree in Portuguese and Italian, an MA in Brazilian Literature, and is a PhD candidate in African Literature, all from the University of São Paulo (USP), Brazil. Since 2011, she has been dedicated to teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language. She has taught students from more than 30 different countries, from beginner to advanced levels, and currently teaches exchange students. She also prepares students for the Celpe-Bras exam (Portuguese proficiency exam in Brazil).