



Musing over the role of emotions to promote the exodus from the Comfort Zone in English language teaching and learning at a state university in Brazil

Um olhar atento ao papel das emoções para promover o êxodo da Zona de Conforto no ensino-aprendizagem de inglês em uma universidade estadual no Brasil

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the development of an empirical study over the Comfort Zone (2004; 2006; 2018), shedding light on the role played by emotions in empowering learners to confidently interact in English classes at a public university in Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil. The theoretical framework was based on the concept of the Comfort Zone (2004; 2006; 2018); and that of emotions (ARAGÃO, 2004; 2011; BARCELOS, 2018; MATURANA, 2002; ZEMBYLAS 2004; 2018). This qualitative and interpretive study (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006; LINCOLN; GUBA, 2006) used an individual questionnaire, field observations, individual participants' reports of observation of classes and peers' performance, individual exploratory conversations and an ethnographic group interview (ERICKSON, 1986) for debriefing, and a final individual diary of participants as tools for data collection. Results display a range of emotions impacting learners' performance in interaction.¹

KEYWORDS: Comfort Zone; emotions; teaching-learning; English

RESUMO: Este artigo se concentra no desenvolvimento de um estudo empírico sobre a Zona de Conforto (2004; 2006; 2018), lançando luz sobre o papel desempenhado pelas emoções em capacitar os alunos a interagirem com confiança nas aulas de inglês de uma universidade pública do Rio de Janeiro, em Brasil. O referencial teórico baseou-se

1 The study here reported is part of a postdoctoral study, which was conducted in the Institute of Languages at the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV), in Brazil.

no conceito de Zona de Conforto (2004; 2006; 2018); e o de emoções (ARAGÃO, 2004; 2011; BARCELOS, 2018; MATURANA, 2002; ZEMBYLAS 2004; 2018). Este estudo qualitativo e interpretativo (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006; LINCOLN; GUBA, 2006) utilizou um questionário individual; observações de campo; relatos individuais de observação de aulas e desempenho de colegas, conversas exploratórias individuais; uma entrevista etnográfica em grupo (ÉRICKSON, 1986) para debriefing; e um diário final individual dos participantes como ferramentas de coleta de dados. Os resultados mostram uma série de emoções que afetam o desempenho dos alunos na interação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Zona de Conforto; emoções; ensino-aprendizagem; inglês

1. Introduction

According to Cook (1989, p.41), there is no novelty in the fact that meaning is not constructed from the formal language of the message alone. Thus, it is crucial in explaining what it is that makes people perceive some stretches of language as coherent and others as disconnected jumbles. Besides being essential to real life communication and interaction, being aware of this essentiality may be even more important for teaching and learning a foreign language, particularly English. Cook (op. cit.) states that foreign language learners, in general, are familiar with the disturbing sensation of understanding every word and their literal meanings, but somehow missing the point.

What I am calling a “disturbing sensation” can sometimes be described as the sort of emotions one may feel in learning a language, such as anxiety and fear, as mentioned by authors such as Nascente & Monteiro (2003), Seliger (1983), Tsui (1996), and McIntyre & Gregersen (2012). This concern with uncomfortable emotions has often been present in Applied Linguistics (see Arnold, 1999); after all, actions and reactions that learners frequently experience may contribute to generate and alter their emotions and, as a consequence, they may affect learners’ fluency and interaction in a classroom.

In this paper, I address a specific phenomenon related to learners’ fear of speaking. Some learners, taken by some of these uncomfortable emotions, decide to remain silent or avoid interaction in class, even though they know the language, which is what has been defined as Comfort Zone (2004, 2006, 2018). This paper presents one of the stages of a broader research project, which started in 2004, with the main goal of understanding why some university students, future English teachers to be, in spite of displaying proficiency and mastery of the use of English, decide to use the strategy of avoidance (GOFFMAN, 1967; 1974; 1981; 2011) to prevent any exposure to face-work.

The reason to do this study is related to two aspects. First, as suggested by Aragão & Barcelos (2018, p. 507), there is still a need for further research on language teacher emotions. Secondly, the affective turn (PAVLENKO, 2013) and the affective turn in education (ZEMBYLAS, 2021) might contribute to the expansion of our reflexivity and ability to research by attempting to enrich our understanding of how teachers in English education programs are moved, what inspires or makes them uncomfortable, and how feelings and memories play into their development when it comes to either save their faces or achieve their goals of interacting in their target language – English. Thus, in this paper, I aim to answer this question: In what ways can emotions promote stagnation or exodus from the Comfort Zone, and why?

The paper is organized into four sections. Firstly, I present a general view of the studies on CZ and on emotions. Secondly, I explain the methodology, describing the setting, participants, data collection instruments, and analysis procedures. Next, I discuss the findings and conclude with remarks about the study and its challenges and difficulties.

2. Theoretical background

My experience as a teacher always led me to observe issues closely related to my daily routine in my classrooms, namely: provoking and maintaining interest in learning the language; involving everyone and seeking mutual development; fostering responsibility for taking a learner's stance; dealing with students who are resistant to or fearful of expressing themselves in the classroom. The teaching/learning process is a social activity and I advocate that, as a consequence of being engaged in a social activity, different individuals interact with their groups in different ways and the influence of their groups acts on each individual. Thus, in this section, I define the concept of Comfort Zone and emotions, aspects that are related to each other and to learners' fluency.

2.1 The Comfort Zone

The concept of the Comfort Zone in foreign language teaching and learning has been the theme of three previous studies (2004, 2006, 2018). It refers to students' awareness of a condition of being proficient and fluent, but using a very narrow range of vocabulary in order to protect their face (GOFFMAN, 1967; 1974; 1981; 2011), or rather, to use the strategy of avoidance (BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987). Learners act in this way, so that, once the speaker offers a

positive self-image of him – or herself to others, he/she feels a need to maintain and live up to that image. As a result of the ongoing interest and the theories added to the previous studies and investigations, the concept was refined as it follows:

Comfort Zone in foreign language teaching-learning contexts is the conscious state in which the speaker, whose use of this language is different from the basic one, makes minimal use of structures, does not run the risk of making mistakes and can save his face (GOFFMAN, 1974) when communicating in the target language.² (2018)

2.2 Emotions

Emotions have played a relevant role in several areas such as Psychology, Social Psychology, and Applied Linguistics. In past year there has been a neglect of emotions and overemphasis on the rational dimension of language, language learning and teaching Barcelos (2015, p. 306), but this has changed in recent years with many publications on the theme (MARTINEZ AGUDO, 2018; GKONOU; DEWAELE; KING, 2020; ZEMBYLAS, 2004, to cite just a few). Barcelos also claims that there are as many definitions of emotions as there are different emotions and their combinations as we feel. As the author (2015, p. 308) states, “emotions color our perceptions and influence how we choose to act in the future.” To Barcelos and Ruohotie-Lyhty (2018, p. 113), “emotions are seen as dynamic constructs, a complex network which colors our perceptions and influences how we choose to act in the future.”

Gkonou, Dewaele and King (2020) contrast emotions versus feeling and the fact that many people use the words interchangeably to mean the same thing. As these authors assert, emotions and feelings should, however, be seen as two distinct but highly interrelated concepts. According to them, emotions are considered a reference to physical manifestations or responses to an event, whereas feelings are a factor that depicts mental associations and reactions to an emotion. By following their perspective, it might be understood that emotions lead to feelings. Also, in their recent studies, Gkonou, Dewaele and King’s (2020) claimed that biological

² From the original: Zona de conforto em contextos de ensino-aprendizagem de língua estrangeira é o estado consciente no qual o falante, cujo uso dessa língua é diferente do básico, faz uso mínimo de estruturas, não corre o risco de cometer erros e possa proteger sua face (cf. GOFFMAN, 1974) ao se comunicar na língua em questão. (2018)

approaches to emotions suggest emotions are innate, universally shared, common among all people and experienced the same way, without any consideration to context-related specificities or individual cultures and histories.

Aragão & Barcelos (2018, p. 508) recognize at least three main theoretical frameworks³ that have been used in studies in Brazil to investigate teachers' emotions: (i) the post-structuralist, in which emotions are seen as "embedded in discursive and ideological practices" (ZEMBYLAS, 2004; 2005); (:) the biology of cognition, which considers emotions to be dynamic bodily dispositions for situated actions (ARAGÃO, 2005; 2007; MATURANA, 1998, 2002); and (:i) sociocultural theory, within which emotions are understood as they relate to human behavior and activity. I believe, as do Araújo & Barcelos (2018, p. 508), that in spite of using different theories to look at emotions, these approaches are related to each other in terms of their perspective on emotions, since in all of them emotions are action-based and grounded in socio-historical contexts.

Taking this into account, I assume that the study of emotions and the domains of human actions might be a productive way to understand how individuals act and feel when they are in a CZ in a certain community or social group of teachers in pre-service education. Thus, in this study I align with Maturana's view of language and emotion. Maturana (1998, 2002) emphasizes that what is biologically distinguished when talking about different emotions is the different dynamic bodily dispositions that specify the different domains of actions where we, the animals, move. It is assumed, according to this author, that different emotions constitute domains of different actions. Maturana adds that there will be different types of human relationships depending on the emotion that sustains them. Moreover, it will be necessary to observe emotions to distinguish the different types of human relationships, since these define them (MATURANA, 2002, p. 68). Thus, from this author's biological point of view, what is meant when talking about emotions is:

dynamic bodily dispositions that define the different domains of action in which we move. When we change emotions, we change the domain of action. In fact, we all know this in the praxis of everyday life, but we deny it because we insist that what defines our behaviors

³ The authors recognize in the notes of their article that there are other theoretical frameworks being used to investigate emotions, such as the discursive (Prior, 2015), critical (Benesch (2012), and positive psychology (Dwaele, 2018; McIntyre, Gregersen, Mercer, 2016) – found in Araújo & Barcelos, 2018.

as human is that we are rational. At the same time, we all know that when we are under a certain emotion, there are things we can do and things we cannot do, and that we accept as valid certain arguments that we would not accept under another emotion. (MATURANA, 2002, p.15)⁴

Moreover, following Maturana's view, I see that the importance of raising learners' awareness of how emotions may impact their use of target language lies in the fact that being aware of their own emotions during interactions in English classes may contribute to learners' rethinking their actions and prevent them from stagnating in a CZ.

3. Methodology

Given the motivation of the present study to examine how emotions can promote stagnation or exodus from the CZ, I decided to use qualitative research, since it is well known for being endlessly creative and interpretive. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 2), the multiple methodologies of qualitative research may be viewed as a bricolage and the researcher as bricoleur. The product of a bricoleur's labor is a bricolage: a complex, reflexive, collagelike creation that represents the researcher's understandings and interpretation of the world or the phenomenon under analysis. This study is understood as a bricolage, since it is the result of the performance of different tasks ranging from observing to collecting notes, to interpreting personal discourse in interaction, to self-reflection and group discussion.

According to Cresswell (1998; 2003) there are eight practical ways of 'verification' for the reliability and validity of an investigation⁵, of which he

⁴ From the original: As emoções não são o que correntemente chamamos de sentimento. Do ponto de vista biológico, o que conotamos quando falamos de emoções são disposições corporais dinâmicas que definem os diferentes domínios de ação em que nos movemos. Quando mudamos de emoção, mudamos de domínio de ação. Na verdade, todos sabemos isso na práxis da vida cotidiana, mas o negamos porque insistimos que o que define nossas condutas como humanas é elas serem racionais. Ao mesmo tempo todos sabemos que, quando estamos sob determinada emoção, há coisas que podemos fazer e coisas que não podemos fazer, e que aceitamos como válidos certos argumentos que não aceitaríamos sob outra emoção. (MATURANA, 2002, p. 15)

⁵ Cresswell's eight practical ways of 'verification': 1- prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field; 2- triangulation; 3- peer review or debriefing; 4- negative case analysis; 5- clarifying; 6- member checking; 7- right thick description; 8- external auditing.

recommends the use of at least two. Thus, member checking and peer debriefing were the methods chosen to be used in the present study.

When looking at the data, there was no single interpretive truth; I sought to create multiple spaces for every participant to thoroughly contribute to the analysis with their views and opinions. In addition, it was not my intention to generalize from this study to the role of emotions in promoting the exodus or stagnation in the CZ in any other context. My aim was to find ways to help to better understand the impact of emotions on some participants of a specific English language teaching-learning process.

3.1 Setting

The research site is a study group on the CZ carried out in a public state university⁶, which aims to build a community where a diversity of people from various social, cultural, and ethnic background gathers together. UERJ, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, is well-known for adopting the policy of racial quotas⁷, where the first language of instruction in the English teaching education course is predominantly the mother tongue of the country, Portuguese; nevertheless, subjects such as English Language and English Literatures (both American and British) are taught in English. The main focus of the program is to prepare prospective teachers to be transformative intellectuals as suggested by Giroux (1988), which means that teachers will possess knowledge and values to act as change agents of inequities in their future place of employment.

3.2 The CZ and emotions – a project and a study group

As mentioned before, the CZ study group is a stage of a research project which has been carried out at the UERJ. It investigates the aspects that affect

⁶ Since its foundation, this university stands out for its pioneering spirit: it was the first public university in Brazil to offer higher education at night, enabling the qualification of working students; it is a Brazilian university with one of the largest number of projects for interaction with society (university extension), and it was the first to implement the quota system. For over six decades, it has been responsible for training qualified human resources for the State of Rio de Janeiro and for the country.

⁷ Racial quotas are affirmative actions applied in Brazil, in order to reduce economic, social and educational disparities between people of different racial ethnicities. It is a type of affirmative action whose obligation is more noticeable in the public sector – such as admission to universities and public examinations. In order to take advantage of the quotas, people must sign a term declaring themselves black, indigenous or brown, which will then be the documental guarantee for the use of this affirmative policy.

learners in developing their speaking skills: stagnation in the CZ, face work, and emotions. The group holds weekly meetings in order to discuss theoretical texts and attempts to analyze, in the light of the readings assigned, other students' interactions and fluency in different subjects taught in English, and also if and/or how emotions interfere in their performance in class. Due to the social distancing program to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in Brazil, weekly reunions started to be online.

Among the theories the group studies are the following themes: the Comfort Zone (2004; 2006; 2018), face work (GOFFMAN, 1967; 1974; 2011), threatening face acts (BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987), the avoidance theory (GOFFMAN, 1955; 1967; 1981; 20011; BROWN & LEVINSON, 1987), and emotions (MATURANA, 1998; 2002; BARCELOS, 2016; 2019; ARAGÃO 2005; 2008; ZEMBYLAS; CHUBBUCK, 2009). This specific stage of project involves active participation of undergraduate scientific research volunteers since the academic year of 2020 and the product of their observation/perceptions on interactions during classes of subjects I taught.

One of the recent goals of the research group was the organization of a Brazilian Framework of Reference for Oral Fluency of English Language Teachers in Initial Education (see Appendix 2). Still under refinement, the framework helps participants to assess oral performance of Brazilian learners in interactions in academic contexts. It also leads participants to reflect over self-assessment and self-awareness. During the academic year of 2020⁸, in order to establish parameters to reorganize the framework based on the performance of students who belonged to groups I taught, in addition to reading theoretical texts, participants were instructed to watch three lectures⁹ and two videos¹⁰ exploring the use of different accents, and read one movie review, a text from a popular website of a multinational retailer of personal care and beauty products, and the introduction of the Grammar Book – An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course (CELCE-MURCIA; LARSEN-FREEMAN, 1999). The explanation for the choice of videos and

⁸ Due to COVID-19, the academic year of 2020 at the UERJ ended in June, 2021.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGg-2MQVReQ> – David Crystal (On standard vs non-standard English);

<https://youtu.be/-Q3u3YQtrNo> - TESOL Convention in 2013 – Suresh Canagarajah;

<https://youtu.be/5OLySXzZY-4> - Rod Ellis on task-based language teaching.

¹⁰ <https://youtu.be/vpcG-xqPgRM> - Different nationalities speaking English;

<https://youtu.be/riwKuKSbFDs> - The English language in 67 accents & random voices

texts lies in the fact that I wanted to expose participants to different genres and verify how varied language uses of English affected their performance in group discussions and their emotions. Participants were assigned to watch the videos and read the texts in order to contribute to develop their speaking and writing summary skills, and then, there would be sessions just for them to present the main points of the videos and written texts.

3.3 Participants¹¹

The participants of this stage of the investigation were four students, who joined the Comfort Zone study group by volunteering for undergraduate scientific research, in the first semester of the academic year 2020. These students had attended the first two English language subjects in the previous year and were willing to deepen their knowledge on aspects and reasons for some peers to be resistant to class interaction, or even, uncomfortable during English classes. All of them are from the state of Rio de Janeiro, a southeastern state in Brazil; nonetheless, they come from different social layers and had access to learning English in different ways. In order to protect their anonymity, they were asked to choose a particular pseudonym. Thus, they will be referred to as Atena, Machado, Aurora, and Totoro.

The first participant, Atena, comes from a low-middle class family and began learning English as foreign language (EFL) at the age of seven/eight in a private language institute. She went to a local primary school and, later on, to a private secondary school where English was taught in all levels, which might have strongly contributed to her performance and fluency in the language taught. The second participant, Machado, comes from a low-middle class family and began learning English as foreign language (EFL) at the age of twelve in a private language institute. Similarly to the first participant, she went to a local primary school and later to an English-medium secondary school.

The next participants share the characteristic of being self-taught, that is, both had little or no theoretical English language schooling. The third one, Aurora, always had an outstanding ability to express ideas and views in the target language during classes and in group discussions. The fourth participant, Totoro, often showed interest in the subject, but rarely did she interact in class. She had her first contact with English at the age of fourteen – a single year of English instruction. However, she acquired knowledge mostly by herself.

¹¹ Written and verbal informed consent was obtained from all subjects before the study.

All participants were admitted to a four-year program in the university after taking the entrance test and choosing to major in English studies in the academic year of 2019¹² None of them had taken part in exchange programs for an immersion experience. They performed consistently well in both subjects¹³ I taught in that year.

3.4 Data collection

Data, collected between March 2020 and May 2021, come from: (i) a questionnaire, (i) my field notes written on classes/meetings (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006; LINCOLN; GUBA, 2006); (ii) participants' reports; (iv) recorded and transcribed individual exploratory conversation (IEC) following the guidelines of Exploratory Practice (ALLWRIGHT, 1991; 2003; 2012; MILLER, 2012; 2014)¹⁴; (v) an ethnographic group interview (ERICKSON, 1986) held on April 17th, 2021, and (vi) a final diary of each participant. All data contributed to the analysis and findings in this study. However, in this paper, I focus specially on my field notes, participants' reports, and the last diary.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts (appendix 1). In Part I, there were seven questions about their identification and personal information. In Part II, participants answered four questions about their awareness of their speaking competence and command of English language. In Part III, participants first described an episode in which they observed the emotions emerged in the interaction among peers from a subject I taught; then they narrated an experience they had had using English to explain any point of the lesson in which they had succeeded or not and pointed out their perceptions about their own emotions. Since the very first beginning of the investigation, I had concerns about building a friendly atmosphere, getting acquainted with participants, gathering some of their personal information and demonstrating interest in subjects of their own

¹² At that time, in the first classes, I introduced my concerns about the field of research I am interested in, and informed participants that I needed their consent to register my perceptions and grasp of their use of English, and emotions they expressed while interacting in class. All students gave me formal written consent.

¹³ The subjects are in the program curriculum under the codes FFP01-095261 (English Language 1) and FFP01-095262 (English Language 2).

¹⁴ Exploratory Conversation – member **interviews** following the principles of EXPLORATORY PRACTICE (ALLWRIGHT, 1993; 200; Rio Exploratory Practice Group Studies)

interest. Getting to know about participants by means of this questionnaire was also a way to lay foundation of trust and acquire a context to more sensitively talk about their emotions in future steps. They were e-mailed the questionnaire on the first day of class and e-mailed it back to me on different dates in about 10-12 days. Data generated from the questionnaire were immediately used to organize the information on participants, at the very beginning of the study.

Participants' reports were written about the connections they had made between the theory studied and discussed in the group meetings. They were asked to write about the emotions felt or expressed by peers in classes. There were an average of 14-16 reports of each participant; altogether there were 58 reports.

The individual exploratory conversations, whose purpose was my capturing what participants emoted while orally summarizing texts and videos of different genres, were held on February 4th, 9th, 18th, 23rd. On February 4th, participants would start individually presenting the oral report of texts and videos previously assigned. I tried to build a lively and friendly atmosphere so that participants could perform under no pressure or anxiety to feel well in their individual task, individual feedback would be given after all presentations. Each one was recorded and lasted about 22-38 minutes and were later transcribed.

During the ethnographic group interview (held on April 17th, 2021), questions like "How do emotions influence your performance when speaking English?" or "Do you think there was fear, confidence, (un)easiness or anxiety expressed in your peers' discourse?" were used to identify the way they had emoted in their reports and exploratory conversation.

In the last instrument used, a final diary (due to two weeks' time after the group interview), I endeavored to enrich the data previously collected by asking participants to write about a self-relevant experience they had concerning the impact of emotions on stagnation or exodus from the CZ. Participants were straightforwardly asked about their own experience with the impact of emotions on stagnation or exodus from the CZ. At that time, they were aware of my interest, as a researcher, which may explain the assertiveness in their last diaries.

3.5 Data analysis

Although reports were immediately read when received, an initial detailed reading in search of expressions of emotions in the reports occurred only in January 2021. It demanded looking for commonalities in participants' reports on how students¹⁵ in different classes interacted and used the language. The first step was to read all instruments repeatedly, looking for the emotions expressed by the participants, related to their experiences when using or reporting about the use of their target language. Theme¹⁶ analysis (VAN MANEN, 1990), thus, was adopted here because it is understood "as an unambiguous as fairly mechanical application of some frequency count or coding of selected terms in transcripts or texts, or some break-down of the content of protocol or document material" (VAN MANEN, 1990, p. 78).

The second step consisted of contrasting participants' different instruments from each other. Participants' questionnaire answers were contrasted to daily field notes I compiled at the time in order to know the strategies they used to self-development in language use and also to verify the types of emotion expressed. Reports were compared to my field notes produced during the group meetings and excerpts of participants' reports, and later to the transcripts of their individual exploratory conversations. Member checking (CRESSWELL, 1998) was secured by analyzing and interpreting participants at different stages of the investigation to elicit their opinions and comments.

I devoted the last step to documenting the frequency of occurrence of each segment. The theme analysis consisted of summarizing the reoccurrence of emotions, comparing the relationship between them, and attempting to interpret the categories that emerged in relation to the research question. Four assertions were drawn to guide the discussion presented in the next section.

¹⁵ Participants were required to observe different peers in classes. As teacher and researcher, I had the permissions of all students enrolled in my subjects to record my classes and use it for academic research purposes.

¹⁶ Thematic analysis – based on the idea that a theme is a form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand. Themes describe of the structure of lived experience. [...] Theme is the sense we are able to make of something (VAN MANEN, 1990, p. 87-88).

4 Findings and discussion

Barcelos (2015) points out that studies in ecological linguistics and social psychology have suggested the interrelationship between emotions, beliefs and identities. Also, as the author asserts, “to believe is to ascribe meaning to the world and to ourselves, and when we do this, we are constructing our identities in the world” (2015, p. 311); with mixed emotions.

Rereading the data, I found about 92 occurrences of emotion-related nouns, noun phrases, and adjectives. Similar to studies that show anxiety as a tool to hinder student progress (KRASHEN, 1981; HORWITZ, 1981; 2001; 2010; TSUI, 1996; MACINTYRE; LIU, ZHANG, 2013; DEWAELE, 2017; WILSON & DEWAELE, 2010; PARK, 2014; KRUK, 2018), in this investigation, anxiety also played a negative role in chaining pre-service teachers to their CZ. Other emotions such as fear, shyness, and embarrassment were also often reported by participants as emotions that promote uneasiness, discomfort, and distress during interactions as observed in English Language classes.

Shyness and embarrassment, reported in Aragão (2005) and Barcelos (2006) and highlighted in Aragão & Barcelos (2018, p. 509) as “feelings that can be related to beliefs one has about him-herself and how he or she perceives the surrounding environment,” are here portrayed as components of the belief that, in a classroom, one might feel superior or inferior according to their discourse competence and, in order to shield their positive public image or faces, processes of avoidance are frequently used. Emotions like fear, embarrassment, and shyness are intrinsically related to face work and stagnation in the CZ, whereas pride, self-confidence, satisfaction, curiosity, and empathy are clear signs of perspective exodus from the comfort zone. Participants’ previous experiences or life episodes might have contributed to their understanding that some emotions involving face work contribute to stagnation in the CZ.

Data analysis suggested four assertions about students’ emotions, which are described below in each subsection:

4.1. Assertion 1: Machado’s emotions involve other people’s assessment, need of positive feedback or encouragement and group involvement

Machado, who highlighted the importance of my assessment on her performance, mentioned how insecure and uneasy she was at the beginning of her presentation, but everything changed as the presentation went on and the group smiled and nodded in agreement with her speech. She affirmed that, as

a result of the group's reaction, she projected herself as someone who would be worth listening to and showed reliance and confidence. She stated that her initial uneasiness faded away during her performance; I believed it remained hidden somehow, since, as Ekman (2004, p. 128-129) points out, emotions form a complex network, an open system in which new emotions get added, but nothing gets out easily. Machado affirmed her self-evaluation was not accurate; however, she showed genuine happiness in claiming to be within stages 8 and 9 (the highest level) of the fluency framework. At the end of our exploratory conversation, she added that the outcome of our conversation made her feel more encouraged to confidently interact on any other occasion.

Although the disappointment caused by peers' attitude in class was not reported as a cause of stagnation in the CZ, Machado claimed to feel stressed and disappointed by some students' lack of interaction in the classes she observed. As she was keen to talk about the themes presented in class and often tried to develop her speaking skills, she thought her goals were not shared with some particular students as seen in excerpts 5 and 6:

Excerpt 5

[...] those girls pay very little attention to classes. They have no sense of commitment to learning; I guess they don't have what it takes to be a teacher. If they want to simply know how to use the language for online chatting with friends, why don't they quit the subject? (Machado, September 27th, 2020)

Excerpt 6

[...] Soon it will be the end of the semester and the girls have shown no improvement or interest in improving... (Machado, October 8th, 2020)

Besides Machado's eagerness to interact and her criticism about other students lack of interest in classes, I noticed that confidence promoted by group involvement is emoted in Machado's last diary when she claims to be secure to talk (lines 7-8, excerpt 7). The participant states her awareness of the way emotions impacted her to interact in order to succeed and leave the CZ. Furthermore, we come across her curiosity and willingness to learn in her, as illustrated in excerpt 7:

Excerpt 7

1 *After our debriefing I could see that in many moments*
2 *during the classes I had emotions that motivated me to talk and come off*
3 *my Comfort Zone. There was this time when I disagreed with the teachers'*
4 *explanation and when I talked to her about it, I could see that she enjoyed that*
5 *discussion because it was a good way to talk about the subject, so after that, every*
6 *time I did not understand the explanation, instead of being awkward of asking*
7 *and talking about it, I wanted even more to know about the subjects, and I felt very*
8 *secure to do it, curious to answer my questions and with desire to learn and speak.*

Freire (1998, p. 48) claims the process of awareness to be an essential critical principle of pedagogy, in which curiosity becomes epistemological. Her being curious (line 7, excerpt 7) allows us to uncover her process of satisfaction filled with the desire to learn, which promotes her actions in service of transformation and freedom from the CZ.

4.2. Assertion 2: Totoro's emotions hold her back and prevent her from the exodus from the CZ

Studies of authors like Krashen (1981), Horwitz (1981; 2001; 2010), Tsui (1996), Macintyre et al. (2013), Dewaele (2017), Park (2014), and Kruk (2018) show that anxiety can hinder student progress. I argue that emotions as anxiety and fear can prevent student progress from happening and cause a foreign language learner to remain in the CZ. In spite of self-evaluating stage 4, Totoro is able to defend her ideas, understand more complex and extensive speeches such as lectures, seminars and different written genres, as long as the topic is previously known in her mother tongue, Portuguese.

It appears that the remarks emerged in Totoro's IEC corroborated what I had written in several field notes: defacement or shameface negatively impacted her performance not only in class, but whenever she used the target language. Studies show that whenever individuals have a face work (GOFFMAN, 1967; 1981; 2011), they tend to save their positive face (BROWN; LEVINSON; 1987) from defacement or shameface (GOFFMAN, 1967; 1981); they act and react moved by their lived experiences and emotions. In fact, in most of my field notes, I had comments on Totoro, who frequently gave me verbal or non-verbal signals of her emotions in face work: she avoided eye-contact with her peers, lowered her voice when answering my questions and used to blush every time I addressed

her. That was to me a way she emoted discomfort, anxiety, and insecurity to speak English, despite her well written papers, e-mails and formal messages to me.

Totoro's perceptions, in a report written on September 25th, 2020, revealed she sympathized with a student who showed difficulties in interacting during classes. When I inquired Totoro about the reason for her sympathy for the student, she soon wrote me back. Her message (excerpt 9) was filled with a primary emotion, fear. I do believe that as Totoro experienced fear, she changed the domain of action; she could barely say a few basic words, nod or shake her head to interact. As Maturana (2002) and Aragão (2011) point out, our mutual coordination of actions that we take in language and in sense-making is what makes the process of learning possible. In line with these authors, I understand that it was through intrapersonal languaging that Toronto was reflexively led to raise her own awareness of how emotions may have kept her in the CZ. Fear (line 1, excerpt 9) and anxiety (line 5, excerpt 9) noticeably disabled Totoro to verbally express ideas or opinions about texts being discussed and, consequently, restrained her practice by deeming her to little evolution in the use of the language and stuck her in the CZ.

Excerpt 9

-
- 1 I ALWAYS feel nervousness and *fear* and even *lose* strength to talk to the teacher.
 - 2 Although, I know the answer I am asked, I feel I am blank to answer, I guess
 - 3 everybody will judge me. [...] I guess it was due to this all, I feel more
 - 4 *uncomfortable* and scared and prefer to lower my voice in classroom [...] That
 - 5 student, D, knows English, but his *anxiety* [...] I can 't say he is in any stage ...
 - 6 I can say I feel like this.

(Totoro, September 27th, 2020)

Intertwined with the fear clearly expressed by Totoro (line 1, excerpt 10), there are other emotions observed in Totoro's report: uneasiness and frustration. The participant claimed she feared being judged or reprimanded for her performance in class. She states, in excerpt 10, how these emotions flow in her actions:

Excerpt 10

-
- 1 I **feel more pressure**, because I always feel **fear and uneasiness** in the English
 - 2 language class and it **frustrates** me to think that it may be understood as lack
 - 3 of interest and motivation. I think that boy feels like me, I see the way he avoids
 - 4 expressing what his REAL opinion is. [...] Sorry, teacher.

(Totoro, September 27th, 2020)

Reading excerpt 10, I could understand that the fear (lines 1-2, excerpt 10) of defacement and face threatening (GOFFMAN, 1967; BROWN; LEVINSON 1987) triggered Totoro's concern about being seen as an uninterested or demotivated student (lines 2-3, excerpt 10). This may have probably caused her emotional distress and led her to remain in the CZ. Furthermore, her searching for aplomb (GOFFMAN, 1967) in an attempt to save her positive face (BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987) might have contributed to her uneasiness as well.

We could initially interpret, in line with Goffman's (1967; 1974) and Brown & Levinson's (1987) assertions, that the easiest way of saving someone's positive face is by avoiding contacts in which face threats might occur and that would possibly be what Totoro understood. Nevertheless, at the same time, we all know that "when we are under a certain emotion, there are things we can do and things we cannot do, and that we accept as valid certain arguments that we would not accept under another emotion" (MATURANA, 2002, p. 15). Thus, when requested to explain grammar points or make comments on a statement, Totoro would be able to express her opinions and views depending on the dominating emotion she was under at the moment.

I found, in Totoro's last diary, illustrated in excerpt 11, summarized in a few lines, what I found in most of participants' reports and my field notes: fear of judgment is the emotion that unbalances learners the most, even more than anxiety or language.

Excerpt 11

-
- 1 *For me, fear is the emotion that can promote my stagnation in the Comfort*
 - 2 *Zone. My fear of losing face and being judged for it is what, sometimes, keeps*
 - 3 *me from speaking and interacting in the target language. Fear and anxiety are*
 - 4 *obstacles that I must face in my process of exodus from the Comfort Zone.*
-

In this excerpt I also found fragments of her last diary that validates what she had privately told me many times: "fear of losing face and being judged for it is what, sometimes, keeps me from speaking and interacting in the target language" (lines 2-3, excerpt 11).

4.3. Assertion 3: Atena's emotions are involved with her awareness of her language skills and self-evaluations based on her beliefs of what is required to shield her public image

Data analysis showed that Atena, who is quite talkative during classes, usually feared being judged when making a mistake. She attributes to anxiety the fear of being judged as a reaction to her being responsive to the interaction in class (Even with my shyness and my fear of judgment from other students... I felt a little anxious, I have faced it before – Atena's repeated discourse). As mentioned before, according to Aragão (2011), if we change emotions, we change the domain of action and, unfortunately, sometimes the domain of action may restrict fluency as well as grammatical, discursive, and interactional competences expected from a pre-service teacher. This participant demonstrated willingness to take part in the class discussion. By doing so, she noticed the possibility of being judged, as she foresaw possible judgment threatening her public image, she experienced fear.

In the individual exploratory conversation, Atena affirmed that she knew how to regulate her emotions not to block her from being successful in any type of interaction in English. Our conversation was short, but completely controlled by her: she stated point-blank she could be placed stage 8, since she had difficulties to understand varieties of English and that she attributed it to the fact of being largely influenced by American movies, series, literature, music, and the pedagogical material adopted in the schools she attended. She added that her ultimate goal was to have great command of different uses of English and to be able to adapt it to different contexts fluently and accurately, even in cases of high complexity. I asked her to explain to me how she felt when she faced difficulties to understand the lecture delivered by the Sri Lankan professor; she said she felt scared, but not defeated. She mentioned that she had watched the video over three times because she also felt challenged to report it successfully. I saw her strength and determination as propulsive factors for a speaker to never remain in the CZ.

Reviewing my field notes, I spotted my observation on Atena's discomfort about students' nonchalance during classes. I had not pictured how much their behavior had disturbed her. However, her impatience with other students' demonstration of lack of interest (seen in excerpts 12 and 13) was controlled and did not compromise her performance in classes.

Excerpt 12

I can't understand the purpose of those girls in being at university [...] they are childish, speak Portuguese (they know English!). I wish I could tell them to leave the classroom. If I were the teacher, I wouldn't be patient enough to put up with their lack of politeness and disrespect. (Atena, September 27th, 2020)

Excerpt 13

[...] *I learned from my mother and grandmother that respect and politeness are practiced at home, if they don't know at least these two things, they should not be among us* (Atena, October 07th, 2020)

Atena's last diary also corroborates Barcelos' assertion that fear is one of the most used words in books on emotions. However confident Atena might be as a student, she emoted fear of being judged by classmates, as seen in excerpt 14:

Excerpt 14

1 *One of the feelings that surrounded me during my English Language classes*
2 *(1 and 2) was the fear. I was afraid of judgement but this didn't impede me of*
3 *speaking and interacting in class. That's why I'm calling this, feeling, because in*
4 *this case the fear didn't interfere in my actions. But there was another thing*
5 *which surrounded interfered in my actions, empathy. This emotion surpassed*
6 *the fear and gave me a big push to participate in classes. Being in an interactive*
7 *class gives you the opportunity to speak, show your points of view and knowledge.*
8 *And for me, seeing that the students didn't enjoy these opportunities*
9 *was terrible. Even when I didn't know the correct answer, I tried to interact*
10 *with the professor. How can the students let the professor talking by herself? For*
11 *me, this fact affected me more than speaking wrong or lose/ expose my face.*
12 *I'm still trying to understand this dynamic, but for me the main feelings and*
13 *emotions which are shown are, respectively, fear, empathy and guilt.*

Citing MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), Miyahara (2019, p. 84) asserts that as studies on emotions expand, the focus on simplistic binary division between positive and negative is replaced with a more holistic view where positive and negative emotions each have a role to play: “the positive broadening and negative narrowing power of emotions” (MacIntyre and Gregersen, 2012, p. 197). I therefore believe that what we see in Atena's diary is her awareness of the positive broadening power of her emotions as a contribution to humanistic discourse practices, which reflects her concern about the way students sometimes do not realize that wasting learning opportunities provided in a class may affect both the teacher and peers. There is also an instance of narrowing the role the fear of making mistakes plays in risking someone's face in the excerpt. For her, empathy plays a much more important role in the exodus from the CZ than fear does in placing learners in a cast, plastered in the CZ, as we see in “How can the students let the professor talking by herself? For me, this fact affected me more

than speaking wrong” (lines 9-11, excerpt 11). Empathy, the thrilling of success and pride, emotions expressed particularly by Atena, were viewed in this study as a positive broadening power of emotions. Besides being a noble emotion, empathy can make us better human beings.

4.4. Assertion 4: Aurora’s emotions (empathy and resilience) promoted her strength to avoid stagnation in the CZ.

During Aurora’s IEC, I noticed an unusual pitch in her voice; she claimed to be extremely curious to know the theme of our conversation. She also stated she had problems with her Internet connection and, because of that, she would keep her camera off. The way Aurora behaved signaled her insecurity and embarrassment in talking about her performance. After all, she was one of the most competent speakers and dedicated students in the subjects I taught in 2019, which was the reason I was really surprised when she aligned with her colleagues showing concern about my approval of their oral reports. The participant demonstrated sheer awareness of her discourse competence. Yet, she believed that, by saving her face and only answering when directly addressed by a teacher, she would forge an identity of a ‘formidable student’¹⁷. I could see that, in her belief of competence, there was a conflict in the network of emotions that revealed confidence in her competence mingled with fear of risking her public image and strength to face a challenge to perform well in a group.

Analyzing Aurora’s last diary, in which she narrates the experience she had when she went to university, I understood Aurora realized her remarks on the subjects taught in my classes were valuable contributions. Yet, she remained silent in order to avoid embarrassment (What I avoided was really giving answers that I was not sure of to avoid embarrassment – line 14-15, excerpt 15).

Excerpt 15

-
- 1 *“An experience I had with the use of English was when I started*
 - 2 *to have English class in the first semester. It was only the beginning of*
 - 3 *the study of the language, so I was aware of several subjects of the class, mainly*
 - 4 *about grammar, which I always liked. Even with my shyness and my fear of*
 - 5 *judgment from other students, I tried to answer the questions. First because*
 - 6 *I knew the answers and it gave me confidence, and second because I wanted to*

¹⁷ Using the participant’s own words.

7 *show that I knew that subject to everyone. I felt and feel really proud of the*
8 *knowledge I acquired, so pride would be one of the most present feelings in that*
9 *moment. I have the impression that I was successful because the teacher even*
10 *called my attention when I did not answer out loud. Sometimes I just wanted to*
11 *know the response from the other students to make sure that my answer*
12 *was correct. I felt a little anxious to show that I knew the content of the lesson,*
13 *but also afraid to give a wrong answer. My confidence was not something*
14 *I tried to show, it was really a thing of mine, due to my pride. What I avoided*
15 *was really giving answers that I was not sure of to avoid embarrassment.”*

Pride is considered a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from a person's own achievements from qualities or possessions that are widely admired. In this study, pride may be understood through the perspective of strength of character as a lever to lift participants' self-confidence. Aurora's words, "I felt and feel really proud of the knowledge I acquired" (lines 7-8, excerpt 15), are sheer pride. Efforts on profiting from classes should be spread as a positive contagious disease among learners; hence, more people would be willing to interact and improve their fluency in EFL classrooms and in pre-service English Language Teacher education classes.

In excerpt 15, Aurora shows the importance of fighting against emotions that could diminish her discourse competence and fluency when she claims (lines 4-5, excerpt 15) that, in spite of shyness and fear of judgment from other students, she tried to answer the teacher's questions. I observed that her self-esteem and self-confidence expressed in "I knew the answers and it gave me confidence, and second because I wanted to show that I knew that subject to everyone." (lines 6-7, excerpt 15) empowered her to not stagnate in the CZ. Anxiety turned out to be a positive emotion to Aurora, since she expressed it to show the pride (line 14, excerpt 15) she had in knowing the subject she studied. As for fear, it may be seen as an emotion that could threaten her positive public image. Thus, through the process of avoidance (GOFFMAN, 1964; 1974; BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987), Aurora just answered questions in her domain of knowledge (line 11, excerpt 15) in attempting to control fear and leave the CZ.

As discussed here, many emotions are involved in the CZ. Nevertheless, participants in this study correlate emotions such as fear, anxiety, embarrassment, discomfort and uneasiness with the stagnation in the CZ; whereas empathy, pride, curiosity, self-confidence and self-awareness of emotions are reported as leading steps to the exodus from the CZ.

Conclusion

The goal of this article was to provide a picture of the role played by emotions in empowering learners to confidently interact in English classes from a public university in Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil. Zembylas (2004, p. 186) states that “emotions in education are by no means new terrain for researchers”, but to the study on the CZ, they turned out to be a renewed interest. While carrying out this investigation, I found out that, to understand how emotions could empower participants to move out of the CZ, I should also figure out the opposite: what weakened participants by preventing them from freely developing their fluency, discursive, and interactional competence. I concluded from my analysis that the emotions that promoted stagnation in the CZ to students observed by participants and participants themselves were: fear, anxiety, distress, discomfort, insecurity, uncertainty, and embarrassment. Fear and anxiety stood out among the emotions reported.

Barcelos (2016) asserts that fear is one of the most used words in books on emotions. In the data gathered, besides the word fear, there were correlated occurrences, such as insecurity, uneasiness, and frustration. In this study, fear – defined as an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, terrifying, threatening and, certainly, likely to cause pain – seems to have played a leading role in keeping students and participants in the CZ. Besides fear, anxiety was the second main emotion that caused stagnation in the CZ. In this study participants reported anxiety arousal as a weakening emotion that caused apathy and embarrassment during class interaction, and, in fact, it was.

Opposed to the emotions that barred the exodus from the CZ, I found willingness to learn and succeed, pride, self-confidence, satisfaction, curiosity, and empathy as emotions that helped students to not feel stagnant in their CZ. It is very exhilarating to learn that there still might be enough room for empathy, respect, and love in language teaching as it was seen in one of the participants’ diary. “Being in the other shoes” is something not teachable; it demands empathy. And, if learners are filled with generosity, there would be less fear of mistakes and fewer mute students in a language classroom, stagnant in the CZ.

Emotions are dynamic constructs in a complex network which colors our perceptions and influences how we choose to act in the future (cf. BARCELOS; RUOHOTIE-LYHTY 2018, p. 113). In this study, different emotions, on distinct occasions, overlapped. Participants reported feeling either anxious and afraid, but happy for succeeding in expressing their views and opinions, or sorry

for fearing to disappoint their teacher and strong enough to defeat the fear that haunted their performance.

Understanding the role of emotions over the search of exodus from the CZ was not undertaken as an easy task, since it demanded thinking over for a long time to know the degree of appropriateness I could address this phenomenon with learners. Moreover, it demanded highlighting the fine line of complex (sometimes opponent) relations among awareness of fluency and culture, anxiety, fear, success, judgment, and embarrassment, so that boundaries between learning and the threatening of someone's face (GOFFMAN, 1964; 1974; BROWN; LEVINSON, 1987) are broken. As observed in this study, learners' awareness of how actions can alter their emotions can be raised at any point of their learning.

In conclusion, I hope this study may contribute to increase the interest in the field of emotions, but also be a way to disclose the studies on the Comfort Zone and the implicatures of emotions in it.

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Appendix 1



Individual Questionnaire 1

Dear student,

As you have been part of the study on the Comfort Zone for almost two years, many of your comments in our research group over the classes you attended, either as a student member or as an observer in other subjects, are registered as data to be analyzed. Thus, we decided to use this hybrid questionnaire, with open-ended and close-ended questions, as a means to enrich our qualitative research with relevant data for the present study you are part of.

You will notice that many of the questions found here have already been discussed in our official meetings. However, it might be quite important to have your individual answers in written form, so that any doubt about previous understandings maybe be here clarified. Therefore, please, freely share your personal views and experiences, especially if the topic is sensitive or concerns personal matters.

I really appreciate your participation! Thanks a billion!

Part I – Identification

Choose a nickname to be identified with: _____

Age: _____

Favorite tv series: _____

Music preference: _____

Year you started studying at university: _____

Favorite subject at high school: _____

Which do you prefer to do during a class: taking notes, listening or interacting with peers and/or the teacher?

Part 3 – About you and the English Language

1. How did you learn English?
 - a. By your yourself, by listening to music, watching movies with subtitles
 - b. At regular school
 - c. At a language institute
 - d. From private teacher
 - e. Being an exchange student
 - f. Living abroad

2. As an ordinary speaker (not a language teacher) and based on the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**, what would your level be? A, B or C:

Comments _____

3. **Circle the letters in which your abilities are described:**
 - a. I can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read.
 - b. I can summarize information from different spoken and written sources
 - c. I can reconstruct arguments and accounts in a coherent interaction in class.
 - d. I can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning to discuss in language classes.
 - e. I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions.

Appendix 2

Brazilian Framework of Reference for Oral Fluency of English Language Teachers in Initial Education

BASIC STAGE

Stage 1

- Learner can understand and use familiar everyday expressions by assimilation, understanding only a few words and associating them in the sense of the sentence.
- Learner has the ability to participate in a conversation in a simple way, whenever the other person is willing to repeat what you said or at a slower speed.
- Learner can introduce him/herself and answer basic questions about details of his/her personal life using simple expressions and not developing complete syntactic structures. (Eg: “Where do you live?” “São Gonçalo” or “Describe your house, please” – “Big, white”).

Stage 2

- Learner can formulate basic phrases and questions related to daily tasks and to satisfy concrete needs and, from there, develop simple dialogues, developing basic syntactic structures.
- Learner can speak briefly and superficially on topics of interest and aspects of your knowledge, and immediate needs such as geographic location, food and shopping.

Stage 3

- Learner has the ability to orally answer questions related to short texts and simple searching for specific information (by means of scanning technique), showing enough vocabulary to describe, with simple terms, personal information, lived experiences, his/her origin and other more topics related to his/her routine.
- Learner can interact with speakers from the countries belonging to the “Inner Circle” (KACHRU, 1985) as long as they speak slowly.

INTERMEDIATE STAGE

Stage 4

- Learner can build short narratives and report areas of interest and professional routine.
- Learner is able to produce meaningful descriptions of long texts with usual language
- Learner can deal with everyday situations and develop dialogs based on cultural aspects of the target language.
- Learner is aware of speech acts (SEARLE, 1981) and language acts in discourse (KERBRAT-ORIOCCIONI), and can identify these acts.

Stage 5

- Learner is able to consume content in the target language with good understanding as long as the manner of articulation is clear and the pronunciation belongs to “Inner Circle” – countries (KACHRU, 1985).
- Learner can easily express his/her opinion and defend his/her views in discussions with general topics and/or of his/her interest.
- Learner can share information and knowledge clearly.

Stage 6

- Learner can understand more complex and extensive speeches such as lectures, seminars, television news as long as the topic is previously known.
- Learner is able to actively interact in more developed debates by arguing and defending points of view so that conversation flows spontaneously.
- Learner is able to maintain more complex interactions with third parties, in addition to, he/she encourages peers’ participation.

ADVANCED STAGE

Stage 7

- Learner can effectively use the language for professional, social and academic purposes.
- Learner uses more complex structures and has greater mastery and knowledge of the formal language established by the group belonging to “Inner Circle” – countries (KACHRU, 1985).
- Learner has a more critical view of language as an instrument of power and may use it as a possible determinant of social behavior.

Stage 8

- Learner is able to express him/herself fluently and spontaneously displaying a good range of vocabulary, in a way that there is no hesitation in his/her speech.
- Learner has wider understanding of long speeches even when they seem to lack cohesion and coherence
- Learner manages to have a better perception of illocutionary speech acts (SEARLE, 1981) coming from third parties.

Stage 9

- Learner can understand the target language even outside the standards of the “Inner Circle” (KACHRU, 1985) by interacting and consuming content from these speakers.
 - Learner can produce and present seminars, lectures and classes in creative and diverse ways and themes.
 - Learner has a great command of different uses of the language being able to adapt it to different contexts fluently and accurately even in cases of high complexity.
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