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English Language Teaching and Learning in Brazilian (De) Colonial Context

Ensino e aprendizagem de língua Inglesa em Contexto (De) Colonial Brasileiro

Elaine Pereira Daróz

ABSTRACT

Considering that the insertion of language at school context is relevant to the relation established between learners and language learning, we aim in this paper to understand the effects of the process of the disciplinarization of the English language in Brazilian public schools to the learners. The devices of Discourse Analysis (Pêcheux) will constitute the theoretical and analytical support of this work, taking into account the socio-historical, and ideological, conditions in which speeches were produced. Besides, we seek an interface with the History of Linguistic Ideas, since it allows us to better understand this relationship in its social dimension, in view of its effects, especially with regard to the relationship between Brazilians and their mother tongue.

Keywords: teaching; learning; english language; (De) colonial context; discourse analysis.

I. INITIAL WORDS

... the language deserves to be fought over¹

Numerous statements say that learning the English language is the key to the insertion of the contemporary subject in the globalized society. In Brazil, English language is often signified as the language in which we can achieve professional and personal success. In this context, the institutionalization process of that language was

based on a relationship between the foreign language and the mother tongue (Brazilian Portuguese), associated with the cultural aspects of this learning.

Considering that the school, as institution, occupies a representative place in the society, I propose in this paper a reflection on the process of disciplinarization of the English language in Brazil, promulgated by the law that manages Brazilian National Education – Laws of guidelines and bases of National Education², as told LDBEN (BRASIL, 1996) – as well as the National Curriculum Parameters³, known as PCN (BRASIL, 1999). Moreover, I propose an analysis about the teaching-learning process of the English language, considering the implications of the insertion of this language in Brazilian public schools to the learners.

For that, the devices of Discourse Analysis, discipline founded by Michel Pêcheux (1969; 1975; 1983) – CNRS, France – will constitute the theoretical and analytical support of this work, taking into account the socio-historical, and ideological, conditions in which speeches were produced. In addition, considering that the question of historicity in the production and transmission of knowledge produces its effects on subjects learners, we also seek an interface with the History of Linguistic Ideas, since it allows us to better understand this relationship in its social dimension, in view of its effects in the constitutive relationship that is established between learners

¹ Extracted from the article of Medeiros (2012) titled "A contemporary glossary: The language deserves that we fight for it", about her glossary studies. In native language, Brazilian Portuguese: "Um glossário contemporâneo: a língua merece que se lute por ela". Available at: <https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/rua/artic/e/view/8638283/5905>. Retrieved in 07 Apr 2020

² In the original language, Brazilian Portuguese: Lei de diretrizes e bases da Educação Nacional (LDBEN)

³ In the original language, Brazilian Portuguese: Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (PCN)

and the language in learning, especially with regard to the Brazilians and their mother tongue⁴.

II. THE ISSUE OF DISCIPLINARIZATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: AN ANALYTICAL-DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE LAWS OF NATIONAL EDUCATION

The disciplinarization of knowledge is far from being a simple and neutral process, since it includes aspects related to the laws that manage its rules, as it implies a hierarchical relationship between certain aspects, such as the content to be transmitted, the number of hours by discipline to be taught and so on.

According to Auroux (2009), the institutionalization of knowledge allows different modes of significance of it, insofar as it formalizes and legitimizes it through an effect of evidence of these senses. Thus, the process of institutionalization/disciplinarization of the language is part of a movement to regularize a memory about this language in the society. It's not simple in a global society considering that there are cultural factors involved in. Considering the effects of globalization, the teaching of the English language enters the Brazilian educational scenario under an urgent character, in order to allow the insertion of subjects in the new society. In this context, the diffusion of the language becomes a matter of the State, which provides its regulation and standardization through its laws.

⁴ These questions are part of my reflections in my doctoral thesis, guided by Professor Silmara Dela Silva at the Federal University Fluminense / Brazil, supported by the Brazilian organization Capes, as well as under the doctoral supervision of Professor Christian Puech at Sorbonne Nouvelle University / Paris III. This investigative work was presented on Feb / 2018 under the title, in Brazilian Portuguese, "Do silêncio ao eco: uma análise dos dizeres sobre a língua inglesa e o seu ensino que ressoam no discurso do aluno" (*From silence to echo: an analysis of the sayings on the English language and its teaching which resonate in the pupil's speech*). Such questions about the relationship between subject and language persist in my post-doctoral internship research, carried out at the University of São Paulo/ Brazil, under the financial support of the funding agency FAPESP (Process nº 2018 / 13017-2).

According to the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education – LDBEN – (BRASIL, 1996), the insertion of a modern foreign language is mandatory in the school program and it's at the discretion of the school community, as we can see in the article 26, fifth paragraph of this law:

In the diversified part of the curriculum, it will be mandatory, from the fifth grade⁵ onwards, to teach at least one modern foreign language, the choice of which will be the responsibility of the school community, within the possibilities of the institution⁶.

Despite the aforementioned document - LDBEN - guaranteeing the mandatory teaching of this language could be decided by the school community, English is systematically offered in the educational system as the only possibility to learn a foreign language, especially in Brazilian public schools, considering its relevance in the contemporary scenario. In this context, the process of disciplinarization of the foreign language in Brazilian schools is established through a hierarchical relationship between the English language and the other languages.

The disciplinarization of language is constitutively ideological, considering that it encompasses the practical aspects of the structure of knowledge to be learned, as well as the question of historicity in which this language is regularized (CHISS; PUECH, 2010). In this context, we can observe the ideological character of the emergency character of disciplinarization of the English in the Brazilian educational system, taking into account the "hegemonic role of the USA through international exchanges in relation to culture, education, science, the world of work [...]"⁷ as

⁵ Due to the changes in the Basic Education organization chart in Brazil, the fifth grade currently corresponds to the sixth year of Elementary Education.

⁶ In the original language, in Brazilian Portuguese: "na parte diversificada do currículo será incluído, obrigatoriamente, a partir da quinta série, o ensino de pelo menos uma língua estrangeira moderna, cuja escolha ficará a cargo da comunidade escolar, dentro das possibilidades da instituição".

⁷ In the original language, in Brazilian Portuguese: "[...] papel hegemônico dos Estados Unidos da América nas trocas internacionais em relação à cultura, educação, ciência, mundo do trabalho [...]" (BRASIL, 1999, 22).

asserted the PCN National Curriculum Parameters (BRASIL, 1999, 22). In this scenario, the Anglo-Saxon language is often signified as the language of success that allows the subjects the entrance in the professional world, giving to them new personal possibilities also. Despite the relevance of this language, the process of English teaching-learning is often based on minimum standards of teaching quality. Specially in public schools, in which are over than 40 students per classroom and different level of understanding of the idiom. Besides, the teaching process is guided by decontextualized textbooks, mostly focused on methods of memorizing isolated verbs and phrases, teachers have lack of opportunities to improve their practices by means of specialized courses, since they do not receive incentives – both financial and time available – of the institutions to which they are affiliated. As we can also see on the PCN aforementioned, the transmission of the English language in the school context takes place *pari passu* to reproduction of Anglo-Saxon culture⁸ often signified as universal.

As stated by Auroux (1992), linguistic instruments are responsible for modifying the constitutive relationship between speakers and the language, insofar as they contribute to an identification of the learners to the language being learned. In this context, the socio-historical conditions of transmission of a language are a part of a political linguistic, assuming then its ideological character. Faced with evidence about a hierarchical relationship between English language over our native one (Brazilian Portuguese), the discourse materialized in the laws that manage Brazilian Education legitimizes an overvaluation of English in our society. In this context, the process of disciplinarization of the English language in Brazil is largely part of a hegemonic configuration already inscribed in the colonization of the country through language and culture, producing

their effects in the relationship between Brazilians and mother-tongue.

III. THE EFFECTS OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN BRAZILIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

As we can see so far, the process of forming a people does not take place outside of ideology, since it is intrinsically linked to the policy of languages that pre-determine the spaces of enunciation, and circulation, of this language in a given social formation. This is the case of the Portuguese language that prevailed in formal contexts, such as schools, present in the laws and disseminated by Jesuit missionaries, while the native language, called by the colonizer as a general language, circulated in restricted spaces and, more commonly, in family contexts. Since the learning of the Portuguese language was restricted, above all, to the nobles and elites, the language of the colonizer (the Portuguese language) became the language of the ascension while the general language remained on the margins. Under the discourse of speaking right or wrong, of a prestigious language to the detriment of another, there is an increasing tension constituting the process of linguistic colonization in national territory, which contributed to an inaccessible Portuguese language imagery that resonates in Portuguese language classes in schools even today.

As we have seen so far, it is also due to the functioning of a game of images (or representations) about the English language, nation and people, that the disciplinary/institutionalization processes of the language have taken place in Brazilian territory. According to Pêcheux (1988 [1975]), the images – as representations that the subject makes of himself, of what he says and to whom he says – as well as the conditions of production of the speeches are constitutive of the discursive process.

In attention to studies on the ideology and apparatus of the State (ALTHUSSER, 1970), Pêcheux also states that the functioning of ideology is inherent to the discursive process, whose function is to direct the subjects to respond

⁸ The spread of this lifestyle is very often noticed by the very name of the company, as in the case of the famous CCAA - Anglo-American Cultural Center; or English Culture whose avowed mission is: The intellectual and cultural development of people learning in the same form as their teams. We can also observe it during the spread of gastronomy in the “fast food” style in Brazil.

to the demands of the dominant ideology. Thus, the speeches are apparently evident by the naturalization of the senses. The evidence of senses about the English language – understood as a successful language – linked to the transmission of a supposedly universal culture produces a memory about a place for this foreign language in society, directing the subjects' practices.

Under the effect of evidence of these senses, the Anglo-Saxon language occupies a privileged place in our society, being largely present in sports products, symbol of status in pieces of decoration and Brazilian fashion magazines. Speeches by leading characters in soap operas who usually use the English language to promote an illusion of refinement. In the gastronomic sector, the franchises of major brands, in turn, disseminate not only the language (English) that identifies the dishes but also the different eating habits, promoting, then, the reproduction of an exogenous lifestyle.

Pêcheux (1999 [1983]) states that discourses are not structured randomly, but aim at the regularization of a memory, producing in the social heart remembrance or forgetting, reiteration or silencing of certain senses related to the interests of current ideology. In this bias, as the author states, memory is the structural element of discourse. Conceived as “mobile space of disjunction, displacement and resumption, of conflicts of regularization, a space of unfolding, replication, controversy and counter-discourse”, it updates the senses, making them others insofar they are in different socio-historical and ideological contexts (PÊCHEUX, 1999 [1983]). However, as we have seen, the teaching of the English Language, taught through linguistic instruments that are often out of context, promotes a reproduction of this memory about the representation of an overvalued language and its supposedly universal culture - guided by an idealization of a society.

This discourse on the English language is in line with the dominant ideology. We live in a capitalist society whose foundations are based on the relationship between work and (to) profit. The

minimum condition for teaching and learning the English language in Brazilian schools made it possible to memory about the impossibility to learn this idiom in the school environment and, thus, the proliferation of private language courses giving to the learners the illusion of learning this idiom “fast and easy”, promoting to the students the seduction for learning this language supposedly under direct transposition from the mother tongue to the foreign language; mainly, provide them with the imaginary of learning a special language in which they will achieve professional and personal success, like a magic formula.

Taking a psychoanalytical approach to understanding this process, Melman (1992) states learning a foreign language is a part of a complex process as result of the subject's effort to learn it. As one of the consequences of the imaginary of this learning without hindrance is the frustration – inversely proportional to the enchantment – of apprehension of the language, causing many learners to give it up during this process.

Considering the disagreement between language discourse and language teaching in schools, we can realize the high number of students who fail on this learning, contributing to the suppose impossibility to learn this idiom at school. Especially in Brazilian public schools, where students have a lack of economic condition, the attraction of learning the language often causes disgust for students for this learning due to the poor performance of students in English classes. In this context, this effect is even more devastating for these students, as it is related to their insertion in the new society and, moreover, to their relationship with their mother tongue, culture and history, with implications for subjectivity, therefore.

According to the author (PÊCHEUX 1988 [1975]), the subject's identification to certain senses is also a relevant factor so that discourses are established or not in society. Naturalization of this kind of discourse about English language still contributes to the student's identification for private language courses as the only possibility to learn English. The other consequence to the students is the high

level of rejection of English learning in Brazilian classrooms.

In her studies on the discourses about the English language in the media, Grigoletto (2007, 215) affirms what she calls "spectacularization" of English learning in the media" is fostered by the discourse of constitution of globalized identities - as a consequence of a world without restrictions - produces effects on national representation over our country and people; then, in the constitution of the Brazilian national identity, influencing, or even determining, the way in which we are summoned to relate to the languages (mother tongue or foreign language) with which the subjects identify themselves.

The process of teaching and learning English is linked to the reproduction of Anglo-Saxon culture in our society, present in social practices due to the appropriation of that culture, as a process of a supposed social (and cultural) evolution of a community. In this context, the process of instrumentalization/manualization of that language in the Brazilian educational system promotes not only an overvaluation of the Anglo-Saxon language in relation to the mother tongue, but also directs the senses towards a hierarchy among peoples. Thus, the interdependence of the American language/ culture, as understood in our social formation, poses a particular question: Would we be the inhabitants of a "new world" called globalized, or colonized by a nation whose culture is widespread, especially in countries with less economic power?

In her book *Linguistic colonization*, Mariani (2004) presents an overview of the processes of formation of the Portuguese language in Brazil and the role played by the Anglo-Saxon language as a colonizing language in the New World. The spread of the English language on the world stage was driven by mercantilism that occurred in the 17th century, and was carried out, in general, through the teaching and diffusion of the language, aiming at linguistic pragmatism, in order to respond to the consolidation needs of the new land. In this context, the establishment of English manuals for travelers, such as the creation of "phrase books" and the language dictionary,

became essential to promote the accessibility of the language and, later, of the Anglo-Saxon culture, as well as their reproduction.

In the middle of the 16th and 17th centuries, these linguistic instruments functioned mainly as a linguistic policy that, consolidated from 1783 - in the 18th century, therefore - functioned as a support to this practice of knowledge transmission, institutionalized with the creation of schools in order to catechize the indigenous and, later, the Africans, but, above all, to teach them to read and write in English and to reproduce through language (gem), the English way of life in the new land (MARIANI, 2004). In this sense, Mariani (2004, 28) states that

Linguistic colonization is the order of an event, produces changes in linguistic systems that had been constituting separately or, still, causes reorganizations in the linguistic functioning of languages and disruptions in stabilized semantic processes. Linguistic colonization results from a historical process of encounter between at least two linguistic imaginary constituting culturally distinct peoples - languages with memories, histories and policies of unequal senses, in conditions of production such that one of these languages - called the colonizing language - aims to overlap on the other (s), called colonized (s)⁹.

Still according to the authoress, the effects of this linguistic colonization process are present in different ways, opening up possibilities for displacements, ruptures, resistance to ideologically over-determined senses (and positions) that are marked in and by language. This is because, in the discursive approach, the

⁹ In the original language, in Brazilian Portuguese: "a colonização linguística é da ordem de um acontecimento, produz modificações em sistemas lingüísticos que vinham se constituindo em separado, ou ainda, provoca reorganizações no funcionamento lingüístico das línguas e rupturas em processos semânticos estabilizados. Colonização lingüística resulta de um processo histórico de encontro entre pelo menos dois imaginários lingüísticos constitutivos de povos culturalmente distintos – línguas com memórias, histórias e políticas de sentidos desiguais, em condições de produção tais que uma dessas línguas – chamada de língua colonizadora – visa impor-se sobre a(s) outra(s), colonizada(s)".

senses are fixed from a game of forces that is inscribed in the language, in view of the socio-historical-ideological conditions in which the subjects are involved in the production of their discourse.

The historical-social and ideological processes of the insertion of the English language in our country bring to mind the process of worldwide spread of the language as a result of the rise of North American hegemony. Based on the effects of senses presented here, we could think that we are facing a process of linguistic colonization, with the consequences discussed above including a behavioral mimesis of Brazilians to Anglo-Saxon culture, often meant as universal, in silence of their mother tongue and its culture.

We can observe that language is fundamentally heterogeneous, taking into account the historical-ideological aspects are inherent to it. In this sense, there is no neutral discourse, nor is there a transparent language to which the subject can have free access through learning without obstacles. Therefore, with Althusser (1970) it is understood that it is the function of ideology to hide its functioning in language, in order to direct the subjects to occupy their ideologically predetermined places in the social sphere. For this, the naturalization of certain senses provides an evidence effect that makes the subject believe there is in an absolute truth. Based on our reflections and analyzes, we still will make some considerations in view of the way that ideology works into subjects and senses.

IV. FROM DISCURSIVE PRACTICES TO SOCIAL PRACTICES: LANGUAGE, SUBJECT AND IDEOLOGY, SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As seen earlier, the social conditions of production/transmission of knowledge contribute to a representation about the language to be learned. In this regard, the precarious conditions for the transmission of English language knowledge, linked to the fact that students, especially in Brazilian public schools, rarely have access to other forms of culture, demonstrates the paramount importance of the role of the school and, more particularly, the preponderance of the

teacher's role in the formation of the Anglo-Saxon language in our society, since it has implications for their relationship with the mother tongue.

The discourse of teaching-learning of the English language as a condition for insertion in the globalized society, combined with the impossibility of learning the Anglo-Saxon language in regular education, contributes to a representation of an elitist language to which few people can have access. In these terms, the legal discourse materialized in the teaching practice operates the exclusion of contemporary society, considering those who do not have access to private language teaching, given their socio-economic conditions. The discourse of teaching-learning of the English language as a condition for insertion in the globalized society, combined with the impossibility of learning the Anglo-Saxon language in regular education, contributes to a representation of an elitist language to which few people can have access. In these terms, the legal discourse materialized in the teaching practice operates the exclusion of contemporary society, considering those who do not have access to private language teaching, given their socio-economic conditions. Furthermore, it contributes to the legitimating of a hierarchical relationship between languages and peoples, producing a conflicting relationship between the native people and the mother tongue, through a memory of the foreign language overvalued in our society.

From the reflections and analyzes undertaken so far, we still have a question: Are we Brazilians re-living a movement of language policy, or rather, of learning the English language, in a colonial context?

We observe that the discourse in the laws of Education, as well as the entire process of disciplining the language in the country, legitimizes practices of overvaluing the English language, in order to satisfy the demands of a capitalist ideology that reinforces the supremacy of a nation, a language and a people. The effect of a Brazilian behavioral *mimesis* vis-à-vis the *modus vivendi* related to the North American people, supposedly superior to the Brazilian

people and their native language, directs us to what I call a cultural anthropophagy inside out¹⁰, intrinsically related to the excessive consumption of goods and values associated with American culture as a *status* symbol.

The notion of cultural anthropophagy is founded by Oswald de Andrade, whose meanings are related to the process of “ingestion” and “digestion” of the different cultural matrices existing in the national territory (Portuguese, African and indigenous), with a view to the production of a contemporary culture “Genuinely” Brazilian. From this notion emerges the anthropophagic movement related to the Modern Art Week of 1922.

When articulating this conception to our research work, we propose to think, then, of an anthropophagic movement inside out, since Oswald de Andrade's cultural anthropophagy did not foresee an overlap of these matrices, as with what happens with the English language and culture in our territory national. With the establishment of new social practices based on an ideal of people and representation of society, despite the erasure of the historicity inherent to the formation of the country, we observe a culture of domination and exploitation, consistent with the interests of the Market, putting at stake the identity relations between Brazilians and their country.

From our analytical gesture, it is possible to understand that the insertion of the English language in the educational environment aims at a homogenization of the senses and the subjects, with a view to their objectification. Under this bias, such discursive and social practices are materialized in school environment- either by the linguistic instruments and enunciative acts of education professionals, or by a behavioral mimesis of students in the North American way of

life - guided by a relationship of domination/ exploitation of the American power over our language and our culture. Then, we can observe teaching and learning English process in Brazil is much more a colonial movement to keep a hierarchy between these cultures than effort to insert Brazilian people in a Global community as a decolonial one.

According to Pêcheux (2004), the concept of a merely utilitarian language is a powerful weapon to erase the dissymmetry that constitute social relations, as it allows to erase the power games that are inherent to them. Starting from my problems related to the practices of English teachers in public schools in Brazil, it is worth mentioning that one of its objectives is to better understand the effects of the disciplinary process of the English language in regular schools, mainly in Brazilian public schools, as well as its impacts for these students, because, in my view, it implies their learning and, mainly, their subjectivity. Thus, this article also aims to denaturalize the senses and discourses about the English language naturalized in our society, in order to provide new possibilities for reading from our gesture of interpretation. If the love of language produced (and produces) such concerns, the title of this paper emphasizes that, being an inherent treasure in every society, language deserves the struggle of its speakers for its establishment and, mainly, for its value in our community.

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¹⁰This work is the result of research, reflections and analyzes pointed out in my doctoral thesis entitled “From silence to echo: an analysis of the sayings about the English language and its teaching that resonate in the student's discourse” (DARÓZ, 2018), where I look at the political-ideological questions about the teaching of the English language in Brazil, taking into account the movements of identification of the student with the language being learned.

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