



ENEM and the Language Policy for English in the Brazilian Context

O ENEM e a política linguística para a língua inglesa no contexto brasileiro¹

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RESUMO: Neste artigo discuto os resultados de uma pesquisa cujo foco foi a política linguística para o inglês no Brasil, especificamente, os efeitos da Prova de Inglês do ENEM nas representações e nas práticas relacionadas ao idioma. Adotou-se a concepção teórica de Shohamy (2006), segundo a qual a compreensão da política linguística não se restringe à análise da legislação visto que a política real é colocada em prática por meio de mecanismos, ou seja, de recursos implícitos tais como placas de trânsito e exames de línguas. Desta forma, além da análise da legislação que trata do inglês, foram realizadas entrevistas com estudantes de um curso pré-vestibular, professores e coordenadores de inglês da rede pública. Verificou-se que o pressuposto de que a presença da língua inglesa no ENEM posicionaria o exame como um mecanismo de política linguística não se confirmou, uma vez que não houve um impacto significativo da prova de inglês do ENEM nas representações e nas práticas relatadas pelos participantes deste estudo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: política linguística; representações; língua inglesa; impacto; Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio.

ABSTRACT: In this article I discuss the results of a doctoral research that focused on the language policy for English in Brazil, specifically the effects of the English questions of ENEM in the representations and practices related to this language. According to the theoretical conception in which the study was based, the comprehension of language policy goes beyond the analysis of what

¹ The present article has an overview of the research conducted under the academic supervision of professor doctor Matilde Virgínia Ricardi Scaramucci during my doctoral studies at the Applied Linguistics Program at IEL/Unicamp (Language Studies Institute, State University of Campinas, Brazil) which resulted in the doctoral thesis (OLIVEIRA, 2017). Available at: <https://www.iel.unicamp.br/br/content/biblioteca-digital-iel>.

is manifested in laws and official programs, since the real policy, called *de facto* policy, is put into practice through mechanisms, namely implicit resources, such as exams, traffic signs, among others (SHOHAMY, 2006). Thus, in addition to the analysis of legislation dealing with English, interviews were conducted with students from a preparatory course to enter university, teachers, and English coordinators from public schools. The initial assumption that the presence of English in the ENEM would place the exam as a language policy mechanism was not confirmed, since there was not a significant impact of ENEM on the representations and practices reported by the participants of this study.

KEYWORDS: language policy; representations; English language; impact; National Exam of Secondary Education.

1 Introduction

In the present article, I report the results of a doctoral research that focused on the language policy for English in Brazil, considering specifically the role of *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (hereinafter ENEM) in this policy. Thus, taking into account the sociopolitical aspects of the teaching processes, learning, and use of English as a foreign language, we sought to identify the possible impact of ENEM on the status of English language as a school subject.

ENEM was initially conceived as a final exam to evaluate students at the end of basic education. However, it has been modified over the last few years to work as an entrance examination for public and private universities. In addition, the use of this exam in several governmental programs aimed at higher education access was preponderant to make it a high stakes exam in the educational scenario.

According to the literature on language examination exams, especially those considered to be high stakes, are seen as an intrinsically political activity (ALDERSON; BANERJEE, 2001). These exams can be used as educational policy tools as well as to promote a specific language related to local language policy objectives.

The theoretical conception of Language Policy (hereinafter LP) adopted in this investigation refers to Shohamy (2006). This author postulates that, although there is an official LP established in legislation and official documents, it is also necessary to consider the existence of a “real” LP, or “de facto” LP, which is put into practice through mechanisms, resources such as traffic signs, rules and laws related to official bodies,

language exams, among others. Besides mechanisms, the beliefs or representations about the language that are shared in the community ought to be considered as well. The importance of mechanisms is that they reveal the true aims of LP as established by the government for a specific language, which are not always explicit in Brazilian law.

The research, the results of which are presented in this article, covered the three components of Shohamy's theoretical model, namely: legislation, mechanisms (in this case, an exam, ENEM), and representations or beliefs about language. To obtain a sample of representations about English language, interviews were conducted with the students from an ENEM preparatory course for university entrance, with two teachers of English and two coordinators from public schools.

In the present article, I begin with a review of the expanded conception of LP elaborated by Shohamy, as it is the theoretical basis of this research. Second, I analyze some documents and laws regarding English teaching in Brazil. In addition to these documents, the English questions of ENEM (2016) were taken in consideration. Finally, I present an overview of the representations about English language that emerged from the interviews which constituted the empirical data of my doctoral thesis.

2 Language Policy

The sub-area of Applied Linguistics, called Language Policy (LP), covers a range of topics, such as language rights, language exchanges, language death, as well as decisions about which language to adopt as a means of instruction (the language of schooling in multilingual contexts), among other topics that are neither simple, nor easy to analyze.

During its historical development, the Language Policy research has undergone important changes. The classification established by Ricento (2000) gives an overview of the epistemological paradigms from which theoretical models were created and research determined. This author distinguishes three phases of the research in LP based on the events, processes and paradigms that have been established in recent years.

The studies carried out during the first phase, in the 1960s and 1970s, were characterized by:

[...] primarily addressing practical language problems of new nations, at first, with a sense of optimism and ideological neutrality, and later with an evolving awareness of the potential negative effects and inherent limitations of the modernization and development models within which early LPP efforts were situated. (RICENTO, 2000, p. 197)

In the second phase, which occurs during part of the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, authors began to question the early studies more emphatically, pointing out the need to consider the ethical aspects involved in planning the status of certain languages (especially when prestigious languages overlap local minority languages), as well as the complexity of all aspects involved in LP implementation in multilingual contexts (e.g. India, Nepal, Thailand, etc.).

By that time, there was an appropriate atmosphere for a paradigm shift that characterized the research in LP in the 1990's onwards, which Ricento (2000) classifies as the third phase. According to him, in that time period, the area was beginning to be influenced by two theoretical strands: Critical Theory (Phillipson and Tollefson) and Postmodernism (Pennycook and Canagarajah), who both helped to establish a new paradigm by considering the connection between LP and ideologies and relations of power. The author points out that the most important difference between the first technicist/positivist approaches of LP and the new critical/postmodern approaches is the matter of agency, that is, most recent approaches prioritize the role of individuals and social groups regarding language attitudes, language use, and ultimately the policies themselves, and fail to consider the perspective of official policymakers.

The theoretical models of such authors as Spolsky (2004) and Shohamy (2006) can be placed in the third phase. Both authors expanded the concept of LP by assuming the need to look not only to laws and official programs related to language, but also to take into consideration other devices (such as exams) that influence language attitudes in a community and may also motivate practices that legitimize language use.

3. Shohamy's expanded model of Language Policy

The theoretical model elaborated by Shohamy (2006) includes several aspects of the LP adopted by a community for certain languages, whether they are official, additional, or foreign languages. Although the

author researches and writes from the Arab-Israeli context, notorious for its intense political and territorial dispute that influences the linguistic field and generates permanent tensions in relation to Arabic, Hebrew and even English, its approach is quite elucidative to explain the functioning of LPs that are being used in contemporary societies.

The author expands LP's view by stating that it is not enough to observe policy statements that are explicit in the legislation, but rather it is essential to consider a range of mechanisms used to perpetuate and legitimize language-related practices that usually operate in implicit and covert ways. As she says:

The expanded view of LP, therefore, argues that LP should not be limited to the examination of declared and official statements. Rather, the real policy is executed through a variety of mechanisms that determine *de facto* practices. There is a need, therefore, to examine the use of mechanisms and study their consequences and effects on *de facto* LP, as it is through the mechanisms that *de facto* language policy is created and manifested. (SHOHAMY, 2006, p. 54).

Mechanisms are devices used to create, maintain, and perpetuate, what the author calls, *de facto* language policy, which is manifested in social practices involving a specific language. These devices are used by various groups within a community, either in top- down or bottom-up directions, that is, from government institutions or emerging from people and their informal practices. Nevertheless, the official bodies and governments more often and more efficiently resort to the use of mechanisms because, as they hold power, they can control the elaboration and approval of regulations, laws, examinations, and educational policies that convey the message of which languages really matter, since the mechanisms legitimize them.

Mechanisms translate ideologies into practices and, therefore, are powerful in influencing, manipulating, and maintaining language-related behaviors. This is due to the fact that these mechanisms involve both declared and covert devices whose ideological and manipulative content is usually not noticed in the contexts in which they are used. The author lists the following mechanisms: a) rules and regulations; educational language policy; language exams; language in public spaces; as well as ideology, myths, propaganda, and coercion.

According to the author, the analysis of the LP for a language involves the undressing of these mechanisms, as they are used without the awareness of the community about their ideological and manipulative potential. In the official documents and legislation, policymakers can make up their speech by saying things they do not believe or do not intend to implement and thus pretend to be democratic and inclusive. But the various mechanisms used by policymakers convey the ideology and the real LP, since they are embedded with interests hidden from the public that, once undressed, actually reveal LP (SHOHAMY, 2006).

Thus, the importance of the mechanisms lies in their potential to create *de facto* language policy and to influence representations about a certain language. The choice of one language to be used in the mechanisms mentioned indicates the LP that will actually materialize, since there is a circle in which the language in the mechanisms is legitimized and the mechanisms, in turn, justify the choice of a specific language referring to its prestige and acceptance by the community.

3.1 Exams as mechanisms of Language Policy

Referring to the role of exams in her theoretical model, Shohamy considers them as resources used to establish the status of a language in a subtle and covert manner:

Language tests are widely used mechanisms that are considered covert, since the public is not aware of their effects and impact in creating, affecting and imposing *de facto* language policies, often in contradiction with declared language policies and because they perpetuate ideological agendas. Language tests are considered a powerful device that is imposed by groups in power to affect language priorities, language practices, and criteria of correctness often leading to inclusion and exclusions and to perpetuate ideologies. Tests are powerful also because they are imposed on all students in all schools, with no way of resisting them. (SHOHAMY, 2006, p. 93).

The reliability and apparent neutrality that are often attributed to exams enable their use as a tool of control in the educational system. As such, Shohamy (2006) attributes a role in her LP model to language exams, since they reveal the real intentions of policymakers. The author assumes that exams are powerful mechanisms once they have the potential to

transform ideologies and representations about language and consequently affect language practices and use in a community. Hence, there is a circle where a language is used in mechanisms, which impacts representations and may also induce language practices which, in turn, legitimize representations. These interconnected influences linking mechanisms, representations, and practices operate the LP that emanates from the community, that is the *de facto* LP. Thus, understanding LP implies questioning to what extent the mechanisms impact representations about a language in a community.

3.2 Language Policy and language representations in a community

This research also draws on theorization from the Cultural Studies, namely from Hall (2007), who broadly discusses concepts such as representations, culture, and identity. The author defines representation as “the production of meaning through language” (HALL, 2007, p.16). Hence, representation is a central practice in the production of culture which, in turn, can be understood as “shared meanings”.

Through representations, we attribute meaning to the world and these shared meanings form culture. Chartier (based on Durkheim and Mauss) uses the term “collective representations” which, according to him, are “the matrices of constructive practices of the social world itself” (CHARTIER, 1991, p. 183). For this author, there is an intrinsic connection between representations and ways of acting in the world. According to his conception, “even the highest collective representations only exist, and can only be considered as such if they command acts” (CHARTIER, 1991, p 184.).

Hall’s theoretical reflections deal with how these meanings that make up the culture of a particular nation or group are produced and put into circulation. According to this author, this happens through language which, being a representational system, is used to produce and reproduce the meanings that we attribute to things, to the events of the world and to ourselves, to our feelings and thoughts. It is in the sharing of meanings or representations that culture is formed, which allows us to understand why people in the same community have basically a similar interpretation of the world.

The author assumes that, things and events of the world do not carry meaning in themselves, but rather meanings are attributed by the participants of a culture. Therefore, he explains that language is one of the processes or systems of representation that we use to construct meaning.

4 The research development

From the methodological point of view, the research reported in this article involved the analysis of both documental and empirical data. The former reveals an institutional LP perspective of English; hence, the data included law and official documents related to its teaching in public schools as well as the English questions from ENEM (2016 edition). Empirical data involved interviews with students, teachers, and coordinators, and its purpose was to establish the community perspective, that is, the participants' representations about English language and its teaching in public schools, as well as about the English questions from ENEM.

The referred data resulted from twenty-two individual interviews conducted during my doctoral studies. Most of the interviews (eighteen) involved students from a free preparatory course for university entrance offered in my hometown, São Roque, located in the state of São Paulo. The choice of the preparatory course is due to the fact that most students have to take the ENEM, which made me assume that this exam would be considered to be high stakes for the participants, and thus a potential mechanism to change the teaching and learning of English. Besides the students, two English teachers and two English coordinators from public schools were also interviewed.

5 Language Policy for English from the government's perspective: the analysis of legislation and institutional programs

The comprehension of the LP for a language involves looking at the legislation and the official documents, as they give the LP dimension from the perspective of the State. Thus, in order to understand the LP for English adopted in Brazil, some official documents² and laws were analyzed:

² The official documents and laws cited in the article are available at: [http:// portal.mec.gov.br](http://portal.mec.gov.br)

Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (National Education Guidelines and Framework Law) (BRASIL, 1996); *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais: Língua Estrangeira* (National Curriculum Parameters for Foreign Language) (BRASIL, 1998); *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais – Ensino Médio* (National Curriculum Parameters for Foreign Language- Secondary Education) (BRASIL, 1999); *Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio* (Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Education) (BRASIL, 2008); *A Reforma do Ensino Médio* (Secondary Education Reform) (BRASIL, 2017).

Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (National Education Guidelines and Framework Law), considered an important law in education in Brazil, is also very important for language teaching, because it made the offering of at least one foreign language in the diversified part of the curriculum mandatory. The language to be taught was to be chosen by the community. In paragraph 5, article 26 of this law, we can read:

Art. 26. The curricula of primary and secondary education must have a common national base, to be complemented in each system of education and school unit by a diversified part related to regional and local characteristics of society, culture, economy, and the community.

§ 5.º In the diversified part of the curriculum, it will be mandatory, from the fifth grade on, to teach at least one foreign language, which will be chosen by the school community, within the institution's possibilities. (BRASIL, 1996).

To provide a pedagogical support to the compulsory offering of foreign languages established by National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (NEGFL), National Curriculum Parameters for Foreign Language (NCP) were launched in 1998. Although NEGFL and NCP had established that the community had the right to choose the foreign language, the leading role of English had been established in the educational system since the 1960s. This was due to geopolitical factors, among which I mention the economic dominance of the United States in the post-war period and the growing space of English language in cultural industry (Hollywood films, rock music diffusion, etc.).

Ribeiro da Silva (2011) analyzes NEGFL and points out that, at first sight, LP for foreign languages could be considered as truly multilingual and democratic. On the other hand, NCP reveals, what this author calls, an “utilitarian bias”, according to which the criteria to be considered in the

choice of the foreign language to be taught in the school should be mainly based on historical and geopolitical factors (RIBEIRO DA SILVA, 2011). This utility criterion explains the reason why English and Spanish were mentioned in the text of the NCP in the following section:

The linguistic needs of society and its economic priorities have to be considered, regarding the economic and geopolitical significance of specific languages at a certain historical moment. This reflects the current position of English and Spanish in Brazil. (BRASIL, 1998, p. 40)

The utility bias of the formal LP also appears in the text of the National Curriculum Parameters for Foreign Language-Secondary Education (NCPSE) and the Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Education. As a matter of fact, CGSE is the first official text to mention explicitly the teaching of a foreign language: Spanish (RIBEIRO DA SILVA, 2011).

Therefore, the LP scenario for foreign language teaching was somewhat complex, since there was a formalized PL establishing a freedom of choice of the foreign language to be taught in the school system, while at the same time there was a law regarding the compulsory offer of Spanish classes in public schools. On the other hand, there was a utilitarian bias throughout the texts of the documents that established the pedagogical guidelines, the NCP, NCPSE, CGSE, as well as determining which languages were included in important programs, such as *Programa Nacional do Livro Didático* (National Program of School Books) and ENEM (both include only English and Spanish).

Until the approval of *Reforma do Ensino Médio* (Secondary Education Reform), LP for English was implicit in Brazilian educational legislation and operated as a “representation policy”, since the teaching of English language in the education system was legitimized by its social status and because it is the language used in exams (ENEM, university entrance exams, admission exams for public jobs, Cambridge exams, etc.), as well as in important institutional programs, such as the National Program of School Textbooks (RIBEIRO DA SILVA, 2012).

Although the leading role of English was already a fact in many schools all over the country, as well as in the National Program of School Textbooks, in ENEM and in some local educational policies (which is the

case of the state of São Paulo), no law was formulated to determine the option for English, that is, an explicit LP for English.³

5.1 The Secondary Education Reform

The Secondary Education Reform, approved at the beginning of 2017, has established profound changes in the structure of Secondary Education, nonetheless its implementation happened without a debate or discussion with students, teachers, and specialists in the area of education. It was of notorious knowledge that a reform for this level of education was necessary, though nobody expected that such an important reform would be implemented by the force of a presidential decree. The main criticism of this reform was precisely the lack of debate with the community about its controversial content.

As regards the LP for English, however, the Secondary Education Reform was an important legal and political document, as it canceled law no. 11,161, which determined the offering of Spanish classes in public schools and, for the first time in Brazilian legislation, established English as a mandatory school subject according to the following parts of its text:

Art. 26./ § 5.º In elementary school curriculum, English language will be offered from the sixth year on.

Art. 36./§ 8.º Secondary education curricula shall include the compulsory study of English language and may offer other foreign languages, preferably Spanish, according to availability of supply, places, and times established by educational systems. (BRASIL, 2016).

In practical terms, Secondary Education Reform established an explicit LP for English somehow similar to *de facto* LP that was being practiced for the language, since the preference for English language established in this reform have already existed if we consider official programs, actions, and exams that operate as LP mechanisms for English. I take as a reference that English has been the language chosen for important

³ The National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional) launched in 1996 was modified because of the Secondary Education Reform, which established the compulsory teaching of English Language at the elementary and high school levels. These recent changes in the LP for English will be detailed and discussed in the next section of this article.

programs, such as *Idiomas Sem Fronteiras* (Languages Without Borders), National Program of School Books, ENEM, and even for some curricula and textbooks published in states.⁴

This significant change established in the Brazilian context as regards Educational Policy and formal LP for English is undoubtedly related to the hegemonic role that English has played worldwide in diplomatic, commercial, and intercultural relations (the latter benefited by internet access) and, therefore, in education (SPOLSKY, 2004).

The website of MEC (Ministry of Education and Culture), which features a question and answer section about the Secondary Education Reform, justified the decision to make English a mandatory subject in the curriculum with the following statement: “English is widespread, and it is the most taught language in the whole world.”⁵ MEC’s discourse seems to reproduce current historical conditions in which English has been consolidating itself as a lingua franca, that is, a language which is no longer associated with English-speaking countries, because it has become widespread and used by people of different nationalities for intercommunication.⁶ Hence, the fact that the LP for English was once implicit, and it is now explicit and formalized by the text of Secondary School Reform follows the phenomenon according to which “[...] English language is deeply established as the standard language of the world, as an intrinsic part of the global communication revolution” (RAJAGOPALAN, 2005, p. 135). The same author, in a more recent work, observed the prevalence of English in South America:

⁴ In the state of São Paulo, English is the language selected for pedagogical guidelines documents and *Cadernos do Estado de SP*, which is a type of textbook to be used in classrooms

⁵ Source: Available at: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/component/content/article?id=4036>. Retrieved on: Oct. 2, 2017.

⁶ As pointed out by Graddol (1997) and Crystal (2003), the number of non-native speakers of English has surpassed that of native speakers. According to Graddol (1997), there are 375 million speakers of English as a first language in such countries as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, etc.; for 375 million people, English is the second language, which is the case of India, Singapore, and Nigeria; and 750 million people speak English as a foreign language in such countries as Brazil, Germany, Argentina, etc.

English is consolidating itself as the region's main foreign language, thanks mainly to increasing trade relations with the rest of the world (...) The importance of English at all levels of Argentinian life is now indisputable. Despite the development of Mercosul, it is a knowledge of English that middle and upper class Argentinians aspire to rather than Portuguese (and in Brazil, the first L2 is English rather than Spanish). (...) The post-World War II years witnessed a stupendous growth in the demand for learning the English language, widely perceived across the continent to be the key to success and career advancement in the new world order. (RAJAGOPALAN, 2009, p. 148)

The analysis of the laws and documents that constitute the official LP for English revealed two quite distinct phases in the LP for that language, that is, the years before the Secondary Education Reform and those after it. We assume that by imposing English as a mandatory school subject, this reform would establish an explicit LP for this language, which might give English a new status or bring about new programs and actions with the purpose of improving its teaching in public schools.

Considering that this important change in LP for English took place by the time the research was about to be concluded in its final stage, there were no elements to analyze the consequences or implications of it upon English teaching. Thus, future research should search for evidence as to whether the existence of an explicit law regarding English language teaching will lead to more consistent policies for this language in public schools, such as policies to improve English undergraduate courses in Brazilian colleges and universities, or efforts to make teaching careers economically attractive, among others aspects, or even if the compulsory teaching of English established in the Reform will remain as a “manifestation of intentions” law (SHOHAMY, 2006), that is, a law whose text guarantees something on paper and does not involve any actual changes, since it is not followed by substantial measures for its effective implementation.

5.2 The English questions of ENEM (2016 edition)

Shohamy's LP model (2006), which theoretically grounds this research, establishes the need to analyze not only the official discourse, but also to consider the mechanisms used to legitimize and lead to practices related to a specific language in a community. As mentioned in the introduction,

among the mechanisms that can be used to implement LP, we chose an exam, specifically the English questions of ENEM.

The first aspect to be observed regarding the English questions of ENEM is the quite reduced amount of space reserved for foreign languages in an important exam that evaluates students at the end of basic education. It is emblematic that an exam with 180 items includes only five questions to assess foreign language knowledge. An argument in defense of it could be “five questions are better than none”, that is, regardless of the number of items, at least English is evaluated in the exam. However, considering the impact of the exam upon the students’ representations and attitudes related to English, the reduced number of English questions in ENEM actually maintain the low status that English holds in the public educational system.

Besides the legislation on English language teaching, the data analyzed here included the five English questions that were part of *Prova de Linguagens, Códigos e suas Tecnologias* (Language, Codes, and their Technologies Test) of the 2016 edition of ENEM. Considering that previous research on the English questions of ENEM (RAUBER, 2012; AVELAR, 2015) had already established important contributions, we selected only the 2016 edition for analysis.

At first, I considered two important aspects in exam elaboration: the assessment method (open questions, multiple choice tests, etc.) and the alternatives written for each question. As regards the items, I observed three aspects, first, whether they contained unnecessary information, which would increase the cognitive processing load to perform the evaluation task; second, if the alternatives were plausible and consistent with a possible reasoning of the candidate; and finally, if the correct alternative was “genuinely correct” (ALDERSON; CLAPHAN; WALL, 1995).

The main purpose of the analysis, however, was to identify the construct that guided the elaboration of the English questions, that is, to disclose the language and reading conception behind the questions. Thus, we sought to understand to what extent the exam construct was in harmony with the documents related to the Exam: *Matriz de Referência* (Reference Guidelines) and *Mapa de Itens* (Items Map).⁷ In addition, I also took the reading conception of National Curriculum Parameters for Foreign

⁷ Available at: <http://download.inep.gov.br>.

Language-Secondary Education (BRASIL, 1999) and of the Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Education (BRASIL, 2008) as a criterion of analysis, since ENEM was originally conceived as a final examination for students, meant to produce a diagnosis of basic education in Brazil.

After a thorough analysis of the English questions from ENEM (2016 edition), I concluded that, although the items actually assess some lower reading skills listed in the Item Map, they are not sufficient to demonstrate the candidate's ability to use small parts and pieces of information in order to have a global understanding of the text. Moreover, the items do not evaluate important reading skills, such as the comprehension of implicit information, or the ability to read beyond what is said even superficially in the text. Therefore, the items require a limited knowledge of English language from the candidates, once they focus on smaller components of reading.

The Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Education (BRASIL, 2008) proposes the concept of critical literacy, which assumes that the reader is someone able to use "analytical and reflexive skills" to construct meanings while reading. The items analyzed, however, do not follow this conception of reading, as none of the English questions from ENEM (2016 edition) require reflexive or analytical abilities from the reader. The items do not relate the topics from the texts to relevant issues that the candidates may experience in real lives.

Another aspect to be considered are the problems found in the writing of the questions and their alternatives, which are considered a threat to the validity of the items. To illustrate this, I bring some considerations from my analysis of question number 93 (Blue Test):⁸

⁸ Languages play an important role regarding communication between people from different cultures. Because of the trend of higher education internationalization, Politecnico di Milano University has decided to....

- a- ... Make exams in English for student admissions.
- b- ... Open more undergraduate courses to foreign students.
- c- ... Invest in advertising to make the university known in international markets.
- d- ... Replace the national language to take part in globalization.
- e- ... Establish goals to improve the quality of Italian teaching. (available at: inep.gov.br/)

QUESTÃO 93

Italian university switches to English

By Sean Coughlan, BBC News education correspondent
16 May 2012 Last updated at 09:49 GMT

Milan is crowded with Italian icons, which makes it even more of a cultural earthquake that one of Italy's leading universities — the Politecnico di Milano — is going to switch to the English language. The university has announced that from 2014 most of its degree courses — including all its graduate courses — will be taught and assessed entirely in English rather than Italian.

The waters of globalisation are rising around higher education — and the university believes that if it remains Italian-speaking it risks isolation and will be unable to compete as an international institution. "We strongly believe our classes should be international classes — and the only way to have international classes is to use the English language", says the university's rector, Giovanni Azzone.

COUGHLAN, S. Disponível em: www.bbc.co.uk. Acesso em: 31 jul. 2012.

As línguas têm um papel importante na comunicação entre pessoas de diferentes culturas. Diante do movimento de internacionalização no ensino superior, a universidade Politecnico di Milano decidiu

- A elaborar exames em língua inglesa para o ingresso na universidade.
- B ampliar a oferta de vagas na graduação para alunos estrangeiros.
- C investir na divulgação da universidade no mercado internacional.
- D substituir a língua nacional para se inserir no contexto da globalização.**
- E estabelecer metas para melhorar a qualidade do ensino de italiano.

The introduction of the question, which includes unnecessary or dubious information, misleads the reader from the central idea of the text, according to which Italian was replaced by English as a global language in a traditional university. By saying that “**languages** have an important role in communication” the item seems to be contradictory, since the correct alternative points to one language: English. It is important to state that inconsistencies in the writing of items and alternatives negatively interfere in the assessment of the intended skill, in this case, reading.

6 Representations about English

Based on the interviews⁹ with the participants of this study, I put into categories their representations about English and about its teaching in order

⁹ The fragments of the interviews were taken from the author's doctoral thesis.

to understand their “linguistic ideology” (SPOLSKY, 2004), understood as “the beliefs that designate a consensus of a discursive community about the value attributed to a language” (SPOLSKY, 2004, p. 14). By describing these beliefs or representations, I sought to understand to what extent the English questions from ENEM have an effect on participants’ linguistic ideology or influence them to adopt specific practices related to this language.

Assuming that the production and circulation of representations happen in/through language, I established four categories from the narratives and words chosen by the participants in the interviews to refer to English, and I named them:

- English: international language;
- English and technology;
- English at school;
- English from ENEM.

The category **English: international language** echoes the hegemonic discourse about this language, and it is present in the speech of students, teachers, as well as coordinators. Several participants represent English in a similar way as the *lingua franca* of communication, describing it as either “easy”, “didactic”, or even “simple”. Moreover, according to their words, knowledge of English will “open doors to good jobs and social prosperity”. The following fragment illustrates this:

Fragment 01

R: (...) English language has become universal, not only culturally, because the United States and England have always been poles of technology. English is a scientific language, there are people who say: “oh, a universal language that everyone could speak”, that language nowadays is English; when compared to the others, it is much simpler, besides being the language of many researchers, of many studies, of anything digital, and it is a very simple language, it is didactic. It is easier to use than any other; for example, Portuguese, has several grammatical suffixes, the same for German. It is a language that overcome all of that, it is communicative. I consider it very important. (Rafael, student, 20 years old)¹⁰

¹⁰ In order to preserve the identity of participants, all names mentioned here are fictitious.

Thus, from the perspective of participants, learning English is “necessary for life”, a “basic” knowledge, “very important” for several purposes, all of them referred to the “demands” of the job market.

However, according to their narratives, English learning does not take place in the collective dimension, since both students and teachers mention personal motivation as a starting point that leads a person to individually study the language. One of the teachers interviewed, Guilherme, believes that “anyone with normal cognitive functions” can learn English as long as he or she is systematically committed to it. The idea of learning English alone motivated by a personal push, not related to any school or institution, is reiterated by the participants.

The representation that associates **English and technology** emerged mainly from students’ speech. Many of them mentioned that they are often involved in leisure activities or activities tailored to learning the language in which they use technology. This reference to an intense use of technology is not surprising if we consider the increasing popularization of technological tools and gadgets that have been occurring everywhere, that is, more and more people have access to smartphones, tablets, computers, cable television channels, etc. Fragment 20 elucidates the technology-related habits mentioned by several participants of this study:

Fragment 20

E: Since I was 8 I have been in contact with that, with technology, I have been used to read texts in English, for example, in games, I have to understand what they are asking me to do, or this or I don’t play ... because it is a strategy game, RPG, so I had to do anything to find a word, use a dictionary, Google, whatever. If I couldn’t make it, or did it wrong, I had to start the game again.

I: And you believe that helped you ...

A: ... to build vocabulary, for sure ... I have no doubt that it was that, what I know today is because of that.

(Rodrigo, student, 20 years old)

Assuming that representations motivate practices (CHARTIER, 1991), the prevalent idea among students that language is “easy” and that it is possible to “learn English alone” seems to be the motivation that leads them to use technology in their favor in learning the language. Deborah’s words elucidate the intensity of this representation present in students’ speech:

Fragment 13

D: (...) I have found some apps and websites that help me a lot. But there are so many sites that help you to learn English, for free, you know. It is... today to be in contact with English is very easy, wherever you go, you find things in English, it only depends on you to be interested on that.

(Débora, student, 18 years old)

Although the participants represent English with a high status, using positive words and images to refer to the knowledge of the language and the possibilities that this knowledge can bring, when talking about English as a school subject, however, there is a drastic change in their speech. Images, emotions, words, and stories reported by both students and teachers in the interviews regarding **English at school** are negative.

Although English is a school subject, and it is part of a public school curriculum, it is in fact represented by several participants, such as a class that does not produce considerable results. Ricardo's words, which are similar to the narratives of other students, elucidate this quite well:

Fragment 23

R: (...) because English class in public schools is like that, something vague, it's there, but it seems like it isn't. It seems that the students do not know its importance, they consider it less important comparing to other subjects. For most students ... they don't know why to study this language, most of them don't pay much attention to the language, they don't have the importance of learning it in their head, they don't understand the purpose of this class. Maybe it is because the teacher keeps teaching much grammar, written activities to filling in gaps, that makes English so heavy and dull. I think it makes any language boring to study like that.

(Ricardo, student, 19 years old)

Reflecting on the implications of the two categories of representations about English, which I have named **English at school** and **English and the technology**, I realized that, to some extent, the interviewees' speech eliminates the social aspect of learning a language. By taking the responsibility of learning English to themselves, trusting their frequent

use of technology to have fun (in English) and to learn the language, the interviewees (mostly the students) exclude the State from its responsibility and its role in the LP for the English, especially since participants do not show any expectation of learning when referring to English as a school subject.

However, school certainly plays a key role in democratic access and teaching of English since not every family uses the same digital and technological tools and appliances. Moreover, it is the school, specially public schools, that should promote learning in a collective manner.

The last category of representations identified in the interviews was called **English from ENEM**. In this category, the participants do not describe English with the same intensity as when they refer to it as an international language. Consistently with their attitude towards English as a school subject, they do not attribute much relevance to the five English questions from ENEM. This is true especially for the students. Since they are not concerned with English on the exam, they decide not to study it. I have chosen two fragments to illustrate how the participants describe **English from ENEM**:

Fragment 40

I: And do you hear people saying they are going to prepare for the foreign language questions on the ENEM?

M: No, because of the number of questions. In the preparatory course, many people chose not to study English so they can study other subjects such as mathematics, Portuguese, history and geography, because these subjects have more questions and can help in the final grade.

(Matheus, student, 19 years old)

Fragment 41

I: So you have already done ENEM once. And did you prepare yourself for the English questions?

L: Not really. Well, sometimes I was reading an article or something like that. I said, I chose not to put English in my study routine. I do not study English. First of all, I said, if I need to prepare myself for ENEM, I won't need English.

(Lucas, student, 20 years old)

The behavior described by Lucas, the student who decided to eliminate English from his study routine because of the need to prepare himself for “most important” subjects, is repeated by several students who took part in this research. Lucas justified himself by saying he was in contact with English in everyday activities, and what he learned from them would be enough to answer the English questions from ENEM correctly. There is a parallel pattern in the way students represent **English from ENEM** and **English and technology**. In both cases, they refer to comprehension skills as sufficient to carry out online leisure activities, as well as reading comprehension activities, in which they place the English questions from ENEM. In addition, in many interviews, English questions on the exam were described as “not difficult”, “easy”, “very easy”; therefore, it is reasonable that they do not feel like adopting any type of preparation for the exam.

7 Concluding Remarks

In the LP model adopted as the theoretical basis for the presupposition of this study, exams are considered as mechanisms used to influence practices related to languages (SHOHAMY, 2006). Hence, I assumed that ENEM would play a preponderant role in fomenting representations about English language in the context chosen for this study. However, my initial hypotheses about the exam being a potential mechanism of LP was not confirmed: there were no reports relating an impact of the exam in the participants’ speech during the interviews that constituted the empirical data of this research.

Although interviewees admit, at least in their speech, the importance of the exam in the educational setting, this relevance does not apply to English questions, especially regarding students’ perceptions. Most of the interviewed students consider the English questions on the ENEM exam to be easy; therefore, they decide to include other subjects in their study routine and to exclude English. In fact, in the researched context, ENEM seems to consolidate the low status attributed to English in the educational system.¹¹

¹¹ When I returned to the university entrance preparatory course to apply as a volunteer teacher, I clearly understood that students do not consider including English in their study routine for ENEM. At that moment, the coordinator asked me to teach Portuguese instead of English, since students had said they did not need English classes.

Although I understand that there are specific characteristics regarding the context and the participants of this research that may have influenced the results found in this study, I consider it important to analyze why a potential LP mechanism has no effects or significant impact on teaching or in students' representations. Among the possible reasons for the absence of an impact of ENEM in the participants' representations about English, I point out two factors: the reduced number of items and their low level of difficulty. By including only five questions to evaluate English in an important national exam such as ENEM, the Brazilian government indicates its option to keep the language's low status and irrelevance in the perception of the candidates, as already occurs with English as a school subject.

I understand that the reasons for keeping the relevance of English questions low, despite the high importance of ENEM in the educational scenario, is one of the many contradictions of the LP for English in the Brazilian context. The first contradiction refers to the government, as it confirms the importance of English by including it in a high stakes exam. On the other hand, it limits the language impact on teaching because the questions are relatively easy.

The second contradiction refers to the progressive depreciation of English teaching in public schools in the national scenario, which is inconsistent regarding the growing status of English as an international language for intercultural communication.

Finally, what is also paradoxical is the adoption of a formal LP for English implemented with the approval of Secondary Education Reform, since it establishes English as a mandatory school subject, not considering the precarious scenario already set up in Brazilian public schools regarding the teaching of this language. Therefore, by keeping English questions on the ENEM exam as unimportant items, due to their low number and complexity, the government implicitly indicates that things will remain as they are: nothing will actually change regarding educational language policies for English.

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