

# Internationalization of Higher Education in Brazil: Institutional Strategies and Different Discourses About Language Among Academics at one Federal University

## *Internacionalização do Ensino Superior no Brasil: Estratégias institucionais e diferentes discursos sobre língua entre acadêmicos em uma universidade federal*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article presents research which was carried out in one federal university in Brazil. The focus was on: (1) the ways in which institutional strategies and policy initiatives of different types, relating to research and to teaching, were being developed in the wake of internationalization and national policy shifts; (2) the views of different academics regarding these ongoing policy processes, and the wider discourses about language and about knowledge-building underpinning their views. The research was carried out as part of a wider study, based in two universities. The wider study was entitled: *The changing language and literacy landscapes of Brazilian universities*. This article builds on recent lines of theory-building in the ethnography of language policy.

**KEYWORDS:** Brazil; higher education; internationalization; institutional strategies; policy initiatives; different disciplines; different discourses.



**RESUMO:** Este artigo apresenta um estudo conduzido em uma universidade federal do Brasil. O estudo teve como foco (1) as maneiras em que estratégias institucionais e iniciativas de políticas de diferentes tipos, relacionadas à pesquisa e ao ensino, foram desenvolvidas em contexto de internacionalização e mudanças de políticas nacionais; (2) as perspectivas de diferentes acadêmicos em relação a esses processos, e discursos sobre o desenvolvimento de conhecimento que sustentam essas perspectivas. O estudo foi conduzido como parte de um estudo maior, baseado em duas universidades. Este estudo maior é intitulado *A mudança na paisagem linguística e de letramento de universidades brasileiras*. Este artigo baseia-se em recentes linhas de desenvolvimento teórico em etnografia de política linguística.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Brasil; ensino superior; internacionalização; estratégias institucionais; iniciativas políticas; disciplinas diferentes; discursos diferentes.

## 1 Introduction

In this article we provide an account of changes taking place in institutional strategy in one federal university in Brazil, in the wake of internationalization. We take a close look at some of the policy initiatives and activities that were unfolding at the university in 2019, following shifts in higher education policy-making taking place at national level. We also consider the diversity of views expressed by academics, in different disciplines, regarding initiative and activities related to research, teaching and course provision.

Our article draws on the findings of a wider research project, entitled: *The changing language and literacy landscapes of Brazilian universities*. This research was carried out in 2019 by a team of eight researchers, five from Brazil and three from the UK<sup>1</sup>. The research sites for this wider project were two federal universities which formed part of an initial group of universities receiving CAPES-PrInt funding to promote institutional policy-making related to internationalization. They were both in large metropolitan areas and were campus-based universities having around 50,000 students. The pseudonyms Alpha University and Beta University were adopted to refer to these two research sites. In this article, the focus is on the research that we conducted in Beta University.

This article is organised into six main sections as follows: We begin by tracing recent lines of theory-building relating to the ethnography of language policy. We then provide a brief overview of some of the changes that have taken place over time in higher education in Brazil. After this, we describe the research approach that was adopted in the wider research project. In the central part of the article, we present specific findings from the research carried out at Beta University. Here, we focus on policy developments related to research, research funding and the development of research links and we go on to developments related to teaching, course provision, use of different languages in teaching and forms of support for students. The article ends with brief summarising comments and reflections on the value of critical ethnographic approaches to the study of language policy processes within higher education contexts.

<sup>1</sup> The five Brazilian researchers were: Gilcinei Carvalho, Maria Lúcia Castanheira and Andrea Mattos (Federal University of Minas Gerais), Izabel Magalhães (University of Brasília) and Ana Souza (University of Goiás, University of Brasília and Oxford Brookes University, UK). The three British researchers were: Elizabeth Chilton, Eleni Mariou and Marilyn Martin-Jones (University of Birmingham, UK).

## 2 The lines of theory-building underpinning the research

The wider study that we draw upon in this article was ethnographic in nature. It built on critical lines of theory-building developed within the field that has come to be known as the ethnography of language policy (e.g. Hornberger; Johnson, 2007; Mccarty, 2011; Johnson, 2013, 2018; Martin-Jones; Cabral, 2018).

The main aim of the ethnography of language policy is to provide a detailed, situated account of the agents, contexts and processes involved in language policy development (Hornberger; Johnson, 2007) in a particular institutional setting. The adoption of an ‘onion’ metaphor in early theory-building in this field (Ricento; Hornberger, 1996) drew attention to the multi-layered nature of policy processes as they unfold across different spheres of political and social life. Language policy-making, in settings such as higher education is now seen as “a complex social practice” (Levinson; Sutton, 2001, p. 1), involving different social actors, on different scales of institutional life. In landmark contributions to this field, Hornberger and Johnson (2007) and McCarty (2011) demonstrated, in compelling detail, why the study of language policy, ‘on paper’ or ‘on screen’ (i.e., the analysis of policy documents), and the analysis of historical and institutional processes underpinning the creation of policies need to be combined with ethnography, in order to avoid providing only a partial account of the ways in which different actors, ‘on the ground’ understand and engage with policy developments. Taking the argument further, Johnson (2009, 2013) proposed an alternative way of conceptualising policy processes. Moving away from the binary distinction between policy formation and policy implementation, he argued that we should view language policy as “a set of processes – creation, interpretation and appropriation” (2009, p. 142). He also emphasised that ‘appropriation’ can occur in diverse ways, ranging, for example, from acceptance or compliance to adaptation or significant recasting of policies, depending on the perspectives and understandings of different social actors ‘on the ground’.

Over the last decade, the scope of language-in-education policy research in Global South countries, such as Brazil, has been broadened. There is a new concern with building a fuller understanding of the ways in which different languages, and ways of writing in those languages, have become embedded, over time, in different institutional contexts, through European colonialism, through enduring coloniality following the end of imperial rule and, more recently, through economic and cultural globalisation. Moreover, in the social sciences and humanities, there is widespread concern with the ways in which Southern epistemologies can gain greater visibility and with the ways in which decoloniality can be achieved, through the development of South-South research links. Consequently, language policy-making in higher education institutions, and the forging of international links by universities, in countries like Brazil, have become prominent issues (Lillis; Curry, 2010; Liddicoat, 2018; McKinney; Zavala; Makoe, 2024).

### 3 Changes over time in higher education policy processes in Brazil

As documented by Calvo and Alonso (2020), policy-making at federal or state levels in Brazil, related to the internationalization of higher education, began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Individual academics in Brazil tended to take their own initiatives when seeking funding for personal mobility, for periods of extended study abroad, or for engaging in research collaboration with researchers or research groups in other parts of the world (mostly in Western Europe or the United States). They applied for funding to CAPES or to other funding bodies or drew on their own resources. CAPES is a federal governmental agency, within the Ministry of Education in Brazil.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new policy initiative, developed at federal level, provided support for student mobility. This was the *Ciências sem Fronteiras* (Sciences without Borders) programme. *Ciências sem Fronteiras* promoted exchange programmes and international mobility<sup>2</sup>. According to Finardi and Guimarães (2017), this policy initiative supported internationalization of small and medium-sized universities in Brazil. A related initiative, *Inglês sem Fronteiras*, aimed at encouraging the learning and use of English and at providing support for the teaching of English in Brazilian universities<sup>3</sup>. Despite this initial focus on English, the *Inglês sem Fronteiras* programme was later changed and other languages, such as French, German, Japanese and Spanish, were included alongside English. The title of the programme was thus changed to *Idiomas sem Fronteiras* (Languages without Borders).

These funding programmes were later discontinued, due to a period of “government cost-cutting and austerity” (Martinez, 2016, p. 221). Now, there is a new focus on “Internationalization at Home” and on federal policy-making for higher education in Brazil (Guimarães; Kremer, 2020). A new policy for federal universities, called CAPES-PrInt, was introduced in 2017. CAPES<sup>4</sup> is responsible for quality assurance and for the evaluation of higher education institutions. PrInt stands for *Programa de Internacionalização* (Internationalization Programme). CAPES-PrInt focuses primarily on postgraduate programmes. These are the university programmes where research, doctoral programmes and postgraduate teaching come together within the Brazilian higher education system. The CAPES-PrInt policy-making has the broad aim of supporting the development and implementation of strategy for internationalization and its role is primarily operational rather than conceptual. This can include the funding and development of international academic networks, the international mobility of staff and postgraduate students, the internationalization of research and teaching ‘at home’ (e.g., by attracting international scholars and students), the development of curricula with global dimensions and research-led teaching, and use of English, French and Spanish as well as Portuguese. This recent policy-making regarding internationalization in public universities in Brazil has ushered in considerable change in Brazilian higher education institutions. Along with digitization of universities, it has had considerable impact on the working lives of individual

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cienciasemfronteiras.gov.br/web/csf/o-programa>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cienciasemfronteiras.gov.br/web/csf/ingles-sem-fronteiras>

<sup>4</sup> CAPES – Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education)

academics, in different disciplines, and on their language and literacy practices. See Souza (2023) for a recent account of the opportunities and challenges posed by recent policy changes for academics positioned in different ways in one federal university in Brazil.

## 4 The changing language and literacy landscapes of two Brazilian universities: The wider research project

As indicated earlier, the research undertaken in the wider study<sup>5</sup> was based in two federal universities in Brazil. The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in 2019. Firstly, we were committed to gaining detailed insights into the situated ways in which policy processes were unfolding in the two universities. As McCarty (2011, p. 3) has put it, in this line of research, “our lens into [...] policy processes is ethnography, a ‘way of seeing’ that is situated and systemic, and a ‘way of looking’ that is grounded in long-term, in-depth, first-hand accounts. Participant observation, in-depth interviews and document analysis are the primary methods in the ethnographic toolkit.”

Secondly, as well as documenting the specific nature and scope of particular policy processes, in each university, we were investigating the ways in which these processes were being interpreted and appropriated by different members of the academic staff, who were positioned in different ways within each university. We also took account of the opportunities and challenges that arose for different academics who were participating in our study due to changes in policy and university practice. Our focus was thus on the *emic* perspectives of the research participants, on their lived experience of changes over time in policy and practice in their university and on their views about these changes. As Heller (2008, p. 250) has argued, “Ethnographies [...] allow us to see how language practices are connected to the very real conditions of people’s lives, to discover how and why language matters to people in their own terms and to watch processes unfold over time.”

The research began in December 2018 and the fieldwork was completed in September 2019. In working ethnographically and collaborating as an eight-member research team, we took advantage of the opportunities this gave us to engage in reflexive research practice. We took part in different forms of dialogue and stock-taking with each other (on and offline). We also organised a final Forum for dialogue with the research participants in one of the universities, in the final phase of the fieldwork.

### 4.1 Semi-structured interviews

We conducted two types of semi-structured interviews with academics, in different ways:

1. Policy-related interviews with academics who were involved in creating, interpreting and appropriating university-wide policy relating to internationalization and, in particular, to CAPES-PrInt. In each of these interviews, two, three or four members of the research team

<sup>5</sup> Ethics Clearance – As the research we report here involved human beings, the original project was submitted to the evaluation of the Research Ethics Committee and was approved on May 19th, 2015 (CAAE no. 42099315.5.0000.5149).

took part. The interviews were arranged by members of the research team who worked at Beta University. The interviewees were not based in the same department or faculty as these members of the research team, but the academics involved had had some prior contact in carrying out university duties, such as serving on university committees. These collegial links, and the presence of two or more members of the research team during each interview, ensured that the conversations that took place were relatively relaxed, and informal. This was confirmed later when the interviews were transcribed.

2. Life history and techno-linguistic interviews with academics in different disciplines. Most of these interviews were with established researchers who had already developed international links or who had been engaging in international research collaboration prior to the introduction of CAPES-PrInt. These interviews were conducted by just one or two members of the research team and charted individual work life trajectories.

The questions for all the interviews were prepared in both English and Portuguese, to allow the interviewees to choose the language of the interview. Eighteen interviews were conducted altogether, including nine policy-related interviews and nine life history and techno-linguistic interviews. All eighteen interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in full.

## 4.2 Participant observation, fieldnotes and data-gathering during organised events

We also engaged in participant observation during events, organised by the two universities, which were focusing on aspects of internationalization. Field notes were taken during these events and other kinds of data (e.g. policy-related documents) were gathered. In addition, a final Forum for Dialogue was conducted with some of the participants in the final phase of the fieldwork.

## 4.3 Data analysis

Since the eighteen interviews constituted the main corpus of data, they were our starting point for the data analysis. We took a two-step approach: (1) Thematic analysis of all the interview data; (2) triangulation of data sources, making links with other project data (e.g. field notes and policy-related documents), which provided insights into wider institutional conditions and policy processes, past and present. As Blommaert (2007) has noted, working in these ways enables us, as researchers, to uncover some of the complexity of the social and linguistic practices of institutions such as universities.



## 5 Research findings: Insights from six interviews at Beta University

In this section, we focus on different dimensions of the changes in institutional research strategy at Beta University. We draw primarily on five policy-related interviews, and one life history interview, carried out at the university. The interviews were carried out with five senior academics and one lecturer in English language. They were all Brazilians who spoke at least one language in addition to Portuguese. The four senior academics were closely involved in discussions and actions related to the building of the university research strategy in response to CAPES-PrInt and the ongoing shift towards the internationalization of research. We begin by introducing the six interviewees. We refer only to their institutional positioning at the time and we make use of pseudonyms throughout, in order to preserve confidentiality.

**André Silva** was a Professor of International Law and, in 2019, he was the Dean of International Affairs (Diretor de Relações Internacionais) at the university. He had originally received a Ph.D. degree from a university in the United States (US). He spoke English fluently and chose to be interviewed in English. He ran a small International Affairs Office with a limited number of staff. He and his Deputy took part in regular on-campus meetings, gave talks, and represented the university at international meetings. In 2019, they were engaged in the mapping of on-campus activities (in the fields of research and teaching) which had an international dimension. They were also involved in ongoing discussions regarding developments in institutional research strategy. Towards the end of our interview with him, André Silva asked about the size and resources available to other international offices that we knew of, in other universities around the world. He also spoke of the pressures facing his own staff, pointing out, for example, the volume of email correspondence that they had to deal with every day.

**Sônia Almeida** was a senior academic with a specialist research interest in Physics. In 2019, she was the Dean of Graduate Studies (Pró-Reitora Adjunta de Pós-Graduação) at the university, overseeing eighty-six graduate research programmes at the university. She had completed her Ph.D. at a university in the US and had retained close links with the research group there. She spoke English fluently and chose to be interviewed in English. She was also a fluent speaker of French, having lived in France as a child and having received education through the medium of French for four years. She made annual research visits to France, to work with a research group affiliated to the US group she had worked with as a doctoral student. However, when asked during the interview about the language she used in discussing Physics, she emphasised that “for the work in Physics, English is really the main language.”

**Eduardo Cabral**<sup>6</sup> was the Director of an Institute for Transdisciplinary Advanced Studies when we interviewed him in 2019. His academic background was in Structural Engineering and Computing. He was still involved in teaching some courses for graduate students in these areas, although most of his time was taken up with the management of the Institute. He had completed a Ph.D. in the United States in the 1980s and indicated that this was when he began accessing the internet and brought a computer back to Brazil with him. Soon after his return to Beta University, he was appointed to a post in the Structural Engineering department. Several years later, he was invited to join a research team at a university in Spain, on a project funded by the

<sup>6</sup> We also conducted a life-history interview with this research participant.

European Union (EU). Up to then, he had been publishing mostly in Portuguese and in English, but this new line of research involved publishing in Spanish as well. When we met him, he was already on the editorial board of two journals, one published in English and one in Spanish. He chose to be interviewed in English.

**Dolores Olímpio** was a social scientist who specialised in the field of Public Policy. She had, for many years, coordinated a Latin American research network in her field, and was thus very well acquainted with higher education institutions across Latin America. She spoke English and Spanish, in addition to Portuguese, and chose to be interviewed in Portuguese. In 2019, she was serving as a member of the management committee (*comitê gestor*) that had been set up to develop and oversee the university's response to CAPES-PrInt. The initial membership of the committee had been created before 2019 and her appointment, after the other committee members, had coincided with a change in the senior management of the university. She had been asked to join the committee with a view to representing the social sciences. Given her background in research into public policy processes, she occasionally took a more critical stance, in her account of aspects of the university's institutional strategy. It was also clear, from her interview, that she was aware of the history of CAPES (as a federal government agency) and of the thinking about internationalization guiding the development of policy-making at CAPES.

**Sandro Calvino** was a senior academic in the discipline of Psychology. He did his Ph.D. at a leading university in Brazil and, by 2019, he had published widely. Most of his publications had been in Portuguese and some had been in English. He chose to be interviewed in English. Before moving to Beta University, he had served as Dean of Research (*Pró-Reitor de Pesquisa*) at another university, in the same region of Brazil, and therefore had experience of overseeing research and publishing strategy. After his move to Beta University, he was asked to build a portal for the journals published at the university. In this capacity, he served as Director of scientific production for the university research office (*Diretor de produção científica da pró-reitoria de pesquisa*) from 2014-2019.

**Clara Araújo** was a lecturer in English language (*Professora de Língua Inglesa*) at the university. When we interviewed her in 2019, she had been the Coordinator for the Language Proficiency Sector (*Coordenadora do Setor de Proficiência em Línguas*) of the International Affairs Office for four years. She had completed a Masters and a Ph.D. in the Department of Letters at Beta University. She had also worked, for over three years, in the International Affairs Office of a smaller university in the region, dealing with mobility programmes and had taught English for Specific Purposes there. After completing post-doctoral research in educational technology, she had gone on to act as coordinator of the English language strand of the *Idiomas sem Fronteiras* programme at Beta University, and as coordinator of the CAPES-Fulbright section of the English Teaching Assistants programme. She had a couple of publications, in English, relating to English language teaching and learning.



## 5.1 Developing institutional research strategies: Diverse discourses among academics and issues arising

### 5.1.1 Responding to the national shift in research policy

Beta University was among a group of universities in Brazil where a significant number of individual scholars and research groups had already been developing robust research strategies and engaging in productive international research collaboration well before the launch of the CAPES-PrInt programme. Individual scholars had been taking their own initiative and applying directly to CAPES, or other funding bodies, for support for their research projects and for international mobility. These were agentive moves by individual scholars and doctoral researchers, rather than initiatives that were centrally managed by universities. When we interviewed Sônia Almeida, she referred to her own experience as a scholar during the period prior to the introduction of CAPES-PrInt, and then went on to characterise the nature of the policy shift that had taken place within CAPES. In her words: “There was a change of policy at CAPES, because we applied individually for all those fellowships... it was a programme to give leadership to the universities and not to individuals.”

The principal focus of our interview with André Silva was on the ways in which the university had been defining this leadership role in response to CAPES-PrInt. He referred to some of the discussions that had taken place among members of the *Comitê gestor do CAPES PrInt* (the CAPES-PrInt management committee) about how to respond to this policy shift within CAPES. He described the nature of these discussions as follows:

“We have been discussing ways to align our policies with PrInt, right [...] not accepting all of it without questioning, but trying to see how it can fit into our grand scheme of things. And, in some regards, I think we have been able to find ways of stimulating partnerships and perhaps giving funding to those partnerships that already exist and need to grow, or to those that have a lot of potential.”

Sônia Almeida threw more light on the notion of “stimulating partnerships” in her interview. Aligning herself with the CAPES-PrInt management committee, using the pronoun ‘we’, she said: “We wanted to make the graduate studies<sup>7</sup> more interdisciplinary and so we built a programme, a multi-disciplinary project [...] to lead the way for people to collaborate internally [...] and we would choose important themes that also have social impact”. She then went on to use ‘Aging’ as an example of a possible theme. Then, looking back at the outcome of this institutional strategy, she noted that: “Some projects worked wonderfully, others less so”.

When asked about the evaluation of the interdisciplinary research proposals put forward at Beta University, she referred to a further major shift in CAPES policy, namely that of devolving responsibility for the evaluation of research proposals and the selection of projects to the universities. She highlighted the workload

<sup>7</sup> Graduate studies programmes in Brazilian universities bring together established academics, post-doctoral research fellows and post-graduate students in developing research and in applications for funding.

implications of this policy shift for the university's senior management team. As she put it, rather ironically: "CAPES is also very smart... now we have to do all the selection (laugh) that we didn't have to do before". To deal with this challenge, the university management team had devised a selection system involving two external referees for each project proposal. As well as taking account of the "merit, originality and relevance" of each project, account was taken of the value of any proposed research collaboration with research groups or centres in other countries and of the potential long term value of each collaboration for the university.

While André Silva and Sônia Almeida appeared to be quite committed to and satisfied with the institutional strategy that had been unfolding in the university since the launch of CAPES-PrInt, another member of the *comité gestor* expressed concern about some aspects of the strategy. During her interview, Dolores Olímpio summed up the gains and losses of the policy processes that had been unfolding as the university response to CAPES-PrInt was being developed. She outlined what she saw as the gains as follows:

"I think there are some losses in this, but there are more gains than losses. Because this policy has forced people to get to know each other right here, to have some change, more interchange across areas, because of our tendency to always talk to each other in our own spaces, we have been narrowly focused and rather restricted to our own forms of competence [...] So, this university project took on transdisciplinarity. It is a transdisciplinary project and so, for this reason, they chose broad themes" (our translation).<sup>8</sup>

Outlining the losses, she referred to the fact that the specific field in which she was doing research – public policy – had lost out as the university's institution-wide strategy had unfolded, since a rather 'common sense' view of the field had predominated during the selection of research proposals. She also noted that critical voices were still being heard among social scientists regarding this issue. In her words, "I often hear this critique" (our translation).<sup>9</sup>

### 5.1.2 The building of international research links

When we first met with André Silva in 2019, he and his colleagues in the International Office had, for some time, been mapping the international research links that had already been established by individual academics and by research groups across the university. They had become aware that the university had up to 600 agreements (of different kinds) with universities in other countries. These agreements covered research and/or teaching. Moreover, they had found out that the university was part of 10 international higher education networks. In this interview, André Silva pointed out that difficult decisions had to be made, since supporting this number of university links was not feasible, given the resources of the International Office. Thus, they had adopted a principle of "qualified universalism". As he put it: "We have to work better with a smaller number of partners". The choice of new partners would need to be governed by the two following principles: (1) Looking for partnerships in "leading universities" (since Beta University was "a leading uni-

<sup>8</sup> Originally in Portuguese: "Eu penso que tem algumas perdas nisso, mas tem mais ganhos do que perdas. Porque essa política tem forçado as pessoas também a se conhecerem aqui dentro, a ter uma troca maior, maior intercâmbio de áreas, porque a nossa tendência é falarmos do nosso lugar, né, ficarmos mais estreitos e mais restritos à nossa às nossas competências [...] Então esse projeto da universidade assumiu uma transdisciplinaridade. Ele é um projeto transdisciplinar e então por isso eles elegeram grandes temas"

<sup>9</sup> Originally in Portuguese: "eu ouço muito essa crítica"

versity in Brazil”); and (2) taking account of the CAPES requirement that mobility grants can only be awarded when the research partners are based in universities that have formal agreements in place.

One initiative taken by the *comitê gestor* (the management committee handling the response to CAPES-PrInt) was that of organising an international research seminar. The seminar was organised around the interdisciplinary<sup>10</sup> themes that had been identified for the university’s institutional strategy, and was chaired by the external member of the *comitê gestor*.<sup>11</sup> The main aim was to foster international research links around the interdisciplinary themes. He was a senior British academic who spoke Portuguese. The seminar was organised before the university received the results of their response to CAPES-PrInt. André Silva explained the thinking behind the timing of the seminar in the following terms: “It should be part of our strategy, so if we did not get the grant from PrInt, internationalization should move on”.

In the run-up to the seminar, there had been some discussion, in the *comitê gestor*, regarding language use during the actual event, and it was decided that participants should present in the language they felt most comfortable with. However, English turned out to be the dominant language of the seminar, although there was considerable disquiet about this among some of the participants. As Dolores Olímpio explained: “There was a good deal of resistance, especially among groups in the social sciences and humanities about this...subordination to another language” (our translation)<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, Dolores Olímpio acknowledged the significance of English as the language of internationalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the need to invest in it. In her words, “We understand the importance of the English language, I am totally convinced of this, that the language of internationalization is English, yeah, that we need to promote English within the university and ensure that future generations of students have a command of English” (our translation)<sup>13</sup>.

A further concern raised by Dolores Olímpio related to the significance of internationalization within the Global South. For example, she drew attention to the weakening of links with universities in Latin America. As she put it: “We are living through a very critical moment of this internationalization, [...] some regional agencies have been considerably weakened” (our translation)<sup>14</sup>. One of the examples she gave was that of the Montevideo Group, which had brought together forty-three universities in Latin America.

<sup>10</sup> The terms ‘interdisciplinary,’ ‘multidisciplinary’ and ‘transdisciplinary’ were used by different interviewees, revealing their degree of awareness of epistemological debates related to work across academic disciplines.

<sup>11</sup> Including an external member was a CAPES requirement.

<sup>12</sup> Originally in Portuguese: “Havia uma resistência muito grande, sobre tudo nos grupos de ciências humanas, dessa [...] subordinação à outra língua”.

<sup>13</sup> Originally in Portuguese: “a gente entende a importância da língua inglesa, eu sou convencidíssima disso, que a língua da internacionalização é o inglês, né, que a gente tem de fomentar o inglês na universidade, e propiciar que as nossas futuras gerações tenham o domínio do inglês”.

<sup>14</sup> Originally in Portuguese: “Nós estamos vivendo um momento muito crítico para essa internacionalização, também é, algumas agências regionais estão muito enfraquecidas”.

### 5.1.3 The language of publications and particular academic literacies

The concerns raised by Dolores Olímpio about the use of English during the university seminar based on transdisciplinary themes came up again when research publications were discussed, especially during the life history interviews carried out as part of the wider study (see, for example, the article by Izabel Magalhães in this special issue, which focuses on life history interviews carried out in Alpha University). As with the case of the seminar at Beta University, concerns about the use of English were mostly expressed by academics based in the social sciences and in the humanities. Academics in these areas of higher education questioned the privileging of English for publications, especially with respect to research in Latin America, where knowledge-building in Portuguese or Spanish would be more appropriate. These concerns chime with those documented by other scholars who are engaged in research into the linguistic consequences of internationalization of higher education (e.g. Lillis; Curry, 2010, 2016; Liddicoat, 2018). As Liddicoat (2018, p. 4) has observed: “Such practices may work to diminish or marginalise local epistemologies as they fail to recognise the role that languages play in the ways that knowledge is both created and disseminated”.

As a social scientist, Sandro Calvino took a more pragmatic approach, casting the language issue in terms of ethics. In his words, “It’s an ethical thing, I am funded by the government [...] and, so I have to give back to society, and the way of doing that, in my opinion, is to publish [...] it’s about communication. We have to communicate what we are doing. We are doing very interesting things in Brazil.”

Academics in the sciences, engineering and computing clearly accepted the use of English, in their respective research environments. When Eduardo Cabral was asked about the language resources other than Portuguese that he had in his communicative repertoire, he mentioned English first, in the following terms: “I speak English [...] it’s a language, at least in Engineering, you have to live with.” In her interview, Sônia Almeida described her Physics research programme in the following terms: “It’s a very internationalized programme. We only publish in English, all the books are in English, we go to conferences [...] we talk to people (in English).”

As our conversations about policy-making with the five senior academics at Beta University moved on to the evaluation of publications, it also became clear that there was some diversity in knowledge-building strategies across disciplines, and that specific ways of presenting research, and particular written genres, carried more weight than others. It was not just a matter of using English, but using it in particular discipline-specific ways, and prioritising particular academic literacies. Sônia Almeida commented explicitly on this, comparing the humanities with computer science. As she put it: “For humanities [...] books are important [...] depending on the editor or publisher. In computer science what is most important for them is publications related to conferences”.

### 5.1.4 Increasing the international visibility of the university’s journals

In this section, we focus primarily on the interview with Sandro Calvino and on a particular policy initiative in which he had played a key role. He had been asked by the university to coordinate the building of a portal for the journals published at Beta University. As part of this project, he was looking into ways in

which these journals could achieve greater international visibility. In his interview, Sandro Calvino drew attention to the wider context for the work he had undertaken on the portal from 2014-2019, stressing that, in Brazil, academic journals are not produced by publishing houses for profit, and that “most of the journals, ninety-five per cent of Brazilian journals, are published by the universities, by the public universities... and some Catholic universities”. The only exceptions he noted were the journals supported by (or affiliated with) professional associations. The particular associations that he referred to were in the fields dentistry and veterinary sciences.

The initial task for Sandro Calvino was that of building a picture of the range of journals produced at Beta University and documenting the journal titles, the keywords associated with them, the language(s) used, the size of the editorial board and the functions of the board members. This proved to be a very challenging task, because of the size of the university and the number of journals. As Sandro Calvino put it: “It was very difficult because nobody knew exactly how many journals we have. This is incredible.” Sixty-four journals were eventually identified, with the proportion of journals in the social sciences and humanities being much greater than what Calvino called ‘the hard sciences’. A significant number of the journals were published in Portuguese, with some including articles in English. Some journals in Portuguese were quite highly ranked, and Sandro Calvino expressed frustration about the problem of accessibility, for a wider readership, to the high-quality research being reported in these Portuguese-medium journals. As an example, he referred to one journal in his field. When asked about the use of English as being one of the criteria used by CAPES in evaluating research output, and in defining research as being of international quality, Sandro Calvino acknowledged that this was the case. He said: “Right now, it’s English...there’s no question about that,” though he also noted that French had had a similar role in Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s. He also drew attention to the fact that, as in other public universities in Brazil, Beta University made funding available to academics who wanted to have their articles translated into English, on condition that someone from the university team of approved translators was asked to do the translation.

However, the main position he took during the interview was that the internationalization of journals needed to involve much more than including articles in English. In his view, it was not just a matter of writing articles in English, but also a matter of knowing how to command the conventional written genres in each field, and the ways in which conventions vary across cultural contexts. He gave a personal example of how he had come to understand this point and talked about the valuable guidance he had received from a British scholar in the field of academic literacy, when writing one of his first articles in English. He described his approach to increasing the international visibility of the journals produced by Beta University in the following terms: “I am trying to make the meaning of internationalization broader than only translating into another language.” His aim was to engage with journal editors and invite them to consider their strategies for achieving an international profile for their journal. These strategies were as follows: (1) including articles by scholars from other countries on the editorial board, or co-editing with them; (2) reconsidering the key words associated with the journal; (3) including abstracts in different languages, and (4) including some material online, in languages other than Portuguese.

Sandro Calvino had worked on this journal portal project for four years, sharing these ideas with journal editors at Beta University. He had also been developing a wider portal project with other universities in the region. As we saw above, his motivation for undertaking this challenging work lay in his conviction regarding the quality of the research being carried out in Brazil.

### 5.1.5 Language in research group administration

The interview with Eduardo Cabral gave us insights into the specific nature of the issues facing established research groups and institutes, which already had international links. The Institute for Advanced Studies, that he was directing, hosted visitors on a regular basis. It also had a website, in Portuguese and in English, which needed updating on a regular basis. A major workload challenge for Eduardo Cabral, as Director, lay in the fact that the language and literacy resources of the administrative staff did not match his own. As he put it: “We have a very small group [...] and there’s nobody here who is fluent in English.” This meant that Eduardo Cabral needed to translate and to engage in administrative literacy practices like checking all the texts being produced by the Institute, including web pages and even travel arrangements for visiting scholars. Just before our interview, he had had to translate into English the flight details for a visitor due to arrive the following week. The details had only been produced in Portuguese by the governmental travel agency issuing them. Expressing deep frustration about these kinds of workload challenges, Eduardo Cabral said: “It’s up to me, I have to translate [...] among 20,000 other tasks!”

## 5.2 Developing initiatives around teaching and course provision: Issues arising

### 5.2.1 Teaching through the medium of English

We begin this section with insights gleaned from our interview with Clara Araújo. In this interview, there was extended discussion of an initiative that had been developed to support academic staff who wished to teach their university courses through the medium of English. This initiative had been made possible with funding from the English Language Teaching Fellows scheme, run by the Regional English Language Office (RELO), associated with the US Embassy. On the arrival of the English Language Teaching Fellow at Beta University, this initiative was formally launched, in an opening ceremony, complete with a visiting speaker and two workshops. All university teaching staff had been invited.

The U.S. Teaching Fellow had already been working at Beta University for several months when our interview with Clara Araújo was scheduled. She invited him to join us for the interview. He told us that he was organising workshops for academic staff from different disciplines, including Finance, Veterinary Science, Law, Biology and Psychology. He also indicated that his approach to English Medium Instruction (EMI) was guided by the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) model and that he did not exclude the use of Portuguese.

The discussion that followed his account implied that the aim of this initiative also encompassed aspects of higher education pedagogy as well as the use of English. As Clara Araújo pointed out: “We are preparing professors [at Beta University] who want to teach their content in English. They are fluent but they want to develop more, they don’t know how to teach through this EMI kind of class [...] because for EMI lots of collaboration, interaction needs to be done”.



This policy initiative was still in its early stages in 2019 and, as indicated earlier, it was coordinated from the International Affairs Office by Clara Araújo. Despite the ambition for this initiative, and the potential for attracting international students to the EMI classes, the in-class use of English was quite limited across the university. As Clara Araújo put it: “There are not many professors teaching in English” and the International Affairs Office was finding it difficult to build an institution-wide picture of in-class use of English.

### 5.2.2 Teaching and assessment in English: The challenges for students

The interview with Sônia Almeida provided a different set of insights. She drew our attention to the linguistic challenges facing students in science disciplines, such as Physics, where “all the literature is in English.” Sônia Almeida illustrated her account by introducing a narrative about a professor, from the US, who had been appointed to her department. He spoke Portuguese fluently and taught through the medium of Portuguese. At one point, he had been asked to offer a graduate course in English and had agreed to do so, but found that some students were not able to follow the course. Because it was a compulsory course, he felt that he had to revert to offering the course in Portuguese.

Sônia Almeida also indicated that, in the Physics Department they had had to abandon the use of a standardized English test and develop their own test for students applying to do graduate-level study. She explained this departmental decision as follows: “Those who go to graduate school [...] they’re quite focused, they are very good in Physics, not necessarily so good in English, so [...] instead of using the standard tests, because we were losing lots of good physicists, we decided to apply our own test.”

### 5.2.3 Provision for international students

One other dimension of the university’s internationalization strategy was the development of different forms of educational provision for international students. The teaching of Portuguese as an Additional Language (*Português como Língua Adicional*) was one well developed dimension of this strategy, at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Clara Araújo commented on this form of language provision, with confidence, saying: “Portuguese as an Additional Language [...] it’s strong here at [Beta University].”

Sônia Almeida pointed out that most of the international students coming to the university and needing language support were from South American universities. She elaborated on this as follows: “For example, in Physics, there are [...] students who work hard and they’re very good at Maths and Physics [...] we receive [these students] from South America because, in many countries in South America graduate studies are not that well developed.” André Silva also drew attention to the significant numbers of international students entering the university from South America and added that most came from Colombia.

Other policy initiatives, designed to attract international students at undergraduate and graduate levels were led by the Office for International Affairs. One initiative was the organisation of a multidisciplinary, English medium summer school in Brazilian Studies which was held in July. The summer school was widely publicised. As André Silva noted: “We did a lot of advertisement in Asia.” In 2019, forty students were recruited to the summer school.

Another initiative was the development of a Minor in International and Comparative Studies. The courses offered as part of this Minor were in English or Spanish, although the use of English predominated. In 2019, twenty-five courses were taught in English and two in Spanish. Academic staff from twenty-seven graduate programmes were involved. As André Silva observed: “Most of the courses can be offered in Spanish or English, the professor can choose, but the majority choose to use English.”

#### 5.2.4 Language education provision designed to support student mobility

A range of languages were being taught as a means of supporting student mobility, primarily for undergraduate students. This provision had been initiated as part of the *Idiomas sem Fronteiras* (Languages without Borders) scheme and, by 2019, this language provision was drawing on different funding sources, including university resources and external funding (e.g. from CAPES). According to Clara Araújo, the languages included English, French, Italian and Spanish. In the past, ten English teachers had been funded via grants from CAPES, however, in 2019, we learned that this funding had been put on hold. Clara Araújo described the consequences as follows: “We had ten grants [...] we had thirty groups because each lecturer taught three groups, and now we only have three groups...changing policies [...] it was the previous government that helped the *Fronteiras* [programme] to function here.”

Graduate students had opportunities for mobility if they were associated with a particular research programme that had received external funding. In addition, external assistance with preparation for further study in the US was made available. This focused on preparation for the TOEFL test and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE).

Language support in preparation for mobility was also provided through a new university-funded programme called English for Academic Purposes (*Inglês para fins acadêmicos*). This was taught by Clara Araújo and the recently appointed U.S. Teaching Fellow. It had been running for two and a half years in 2019 and Clara Araújo highlighted as follows the innovative nature of this university course: “I don’t know of any other universities that have English for Academic Purposes as a regular course for students.”

## 6 Concluding comments

As indicated in earlier sections of this article, we have been drawing on research carried out as part of a wider study that adopted an ethnographic approach to the policy processes at work in two universities in Brazil, following the launch of CAPES-PrInt. Building on recent lines of theory-building in the ethnography of language policy (Johnson, 2009, 2013, 2018), we approached the policy-making at work in the two universities as “a set of processes – creation, interpretation and appropriation” (Johnson, 2009, p. 141). Our analyses of the semi-structured interviews with academics at Beta University – presented here – gave us insights into all three of these policy processes: the creation of the university’s policy response to CAPES-PrInt; the interpretation, by academics in different disciplines, of specific elements of the institutional strategy for the

internationalization of research at the university, and some of the issues arising as different dimensions of the strategy were eventually appropriated.

Our analysis of the themes emerging from the interviews was combined with insights from other data sources, such as policy documents, research bulletins produced by the Office of International Affairs and field notes taken during different policy-related events (e.g. a talk in March 2019 given by André Silva in one university faculty on the topic: *Desafios da internacionalização de pós-graduação hoje* (The challenges of internationalization in postgraduate programmes today).

## 6.1 The creation of the university's internationalization policy

The research we conducted at Beta University gave us insights into the wide range of policy initiatives, related to research and to teaching and course provision, that had been adopted as part of the university's internationalization strategy. As we saw above, in the interview with André Silva, the *comitê gestor* was guided by the following principle, in the development of its institutional strategy for research, in response to CAPES-PrInt: "Not accepting all of it without questioning, but trying to see how it can fit into our grand scheme of things."

Furthermore, in developing the university strategy with regarding to the building of international research links, André Silva and his colleagues were guided by what he called: "qualified universalism." This meant aiming to invest in the development of fewer, more productive research links with universities in other countries.

## 6.2 Interpretations of different aspects of the university's research strategy

Across the interviews, and during discussions following the talk given by André Silva, different views of the university's policy regarding research were expressed. These views echoed wider discourses about internationalization. As we saw in the interview with Dolores Olímpio, some aspects of the university's broad institutional strategy in response to CAPES-PrInt were welcomed. These aspects included the emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration (or "transdisciplinarity", as Dolores Olímpio put it).

However, Dolores Olímpio also gave voice to wider concerns. These were not only her views, they echoed similar views expressed by colleagues in the social sciences and humanities.

Firstly, she raised concerns about the procedures for the selection of research proposals in some areas of social science. Secondly, she expressed concerns about the nature and scope of the research links that were being established and about the weakening of research links with universities in Latin America. In speaking about the policy shift away from higher education collaboration across Latin America, she described it as "a critical moment". In her account, we see echoes of a wider discourse that has emerged in the last decade or so about the need to foster South-South research links and perspectives, and about working towards decoloniality in/as research praxis (e.g. Mignolo; Walsh, 2018).

Thirdly, she highlighted concerns about the ways in which the university's research strategy reflected the broad trend towards the use of English, in publications, with a view to achieving international visibility. She made explicit mention of the way in which English dominated the seminar that was organised to launch the university's interdisciplinary research strategy. Here, she was articulating the objections that had been raised by researchers in the social sciences and humanities about their "subordination to another language". These comments echoed wider discourses within academia, which question the privileging of English in academic literacies and in knowledge-building, especially in the case of research in Latin America, when publishing in Portuguese or Spanish would be more appropriate means of developing local epistemologies (e.g. Lillis; Curry, 2010; Liddicoat, 2018).

The five other research participants introduced in this article, especially Sônia Almeida – the physicist – and Eduardo Cabral – the engineer –, simply interpreted the emphasis on the use of English in publications (and particular kinds of academic literacies) as an established fact, and gave examples of normalized use of English in their respective disciplines.

### 6.3 Appropriation of the university's strategy

We carried out the research presented here in 2019, at a time when the university's institutional response to CAPES-PrInt was still being appropriated in different ways, in relation to research, in different spaces within the university. We have documented some of the research-related activities involved in this article. We have also drawn attention to some of the issues arising and some of the workload challenges for particular members of staff. In addition, we gained insights into some alternative approaches to research related policy appropriation. These included Sandro Calvino's four years of work with the editors of journals published by the university, providing pointers as to how to achieve greater international engagement.

The university's response to internationalization was also being appropriated in different ways in teaching and course provision. Those dimensions of policy appropriation that appeared to be the most firmly established appeared to be those that were funded by the university. Take, for example, the new course in English for Academic Purposes, taught by Clara Araújo. However, developments in other areas of language-related course provision, such as the English course that had been offered as part of *Idiomas sem Fronteiras* (Languages without Borders), were dependent on more precarious external funding. Despite the vision expressed by Clara Araújo and André Silva, for the initiative designed to support staff wishing to teach their courses in English, the International Affairs Office was having difficulty identifying the actual number of staff doing any teaching through the medium of English. This policy initiative also relied on external funding.

Beta University was a large university and keeping track of what was happening 'on the ground' was a significant challenge. André Silva spoke of the problem of "information governance" facing the International Affairs Office, and Dolores Olímpio's assessment of the situation was as follows: "We have here a large gap between what is established as a programme and what we are doing" (our translation).<sup>15</sup>

Our research was carried out at one moment in time, in the early stages of the university's response to CAPES-PrInt, in the year before the outbreak of the COVID pandemic and before the elections of October 2022. The policy processes being played out when this article is published will, no doubt, be rather different.

<sup>15</sup> Originally in Portuguese: "Nós temos aí um gap grande entre o que está estabelecido como programa e o que a gente faz."

However, our aim has been to demonstrate the value of a critical ethnographic approach to the study of the processes involved in policy-making in a higher education context. An ethnographic approach to policy-making allows us to chart the complexity of the processes and the challenges involved, at each stage, from policy creation, to policy interpretation and appropriation. It also allows us to identify the ways in which different social actors are positioned across these stages. In addition, it enables us to capture the ways in which different actors interpret the policy processes, along with the discourses underpinning their interpretations.

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## Authors' Contribution

This article is based on joint empirical work. As indicated in the Introduction, the wider empirical work, in two universities in Brazil, was carried out by a team of eight researchers (including the three authors of the article). Marilyn Martin-Jones developed an initial draft, building on discussions with Ana Souza. Ana Souza and Gilcinei Carvalho then contributed to the revision and refinement of the article in preparation for submission by providing detailed comments and checking for accuracy.

## Dedication

This article is dedicated to our former colleague, Dr. Elizabeth Chilton (University of Birmingham) who passed away in April 2023. Her deep understanding of the nature and scope of the changes currently taking place in academic literacy practices guided us in developing the lines of analysis presented in this article.

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