

CAN WE SPEAK ENGLISH? REFLECTIONS ON THE UNSPOKEN EFL IN BRAZIL

PODEMOS FALAR INGLÊS? REFLEXÕES SOBRE O INGLÊS NÃO FALADO NO BRASIL

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the issue of oral production in English as a foreign language in Brazil. It reports the difficulty some students find to speak the language to matters of authority and legitimacy constituted in a particular history of language policies. Interest in the theme emerged because many Brazilian students who know English state they cannot speak the language and avoid pronouncing it and engaging in conversations. A discursive methodological framework forms the basis for the analysis of postings collected from discussion forums on different websites. First, *I can't speak English* works as the reference statement that makes it possible to verify a discursive regularity in operation in Brazil. Second, a postcolonial theoretical framework supports the discussion on the conditions of possibility to speak English as a foreign language in a former Portuguese colony. The author argues that the ghost of the native, idealized speaker prevents students from recognizing the English they know as legitimate, and to speak it, and points out that dignity is a possible discourse to help deconstruct the colonial, silenced positioning that exists regarding the oral production in this foreign language.

Keywords: English as a foreign language; Postcoloniality; Discourse.

RESUMO

Este ensaio explora a questão da produção oral em inglês como língua estrangeira no Brasil. Relaciona-se a dificuldade de alguns alunos brasileiros para falar a língua com questões de autoridade e legitimidade em uma história particular de políticas linguísticas. O interesse no tema surgiu porque muitos alunos brasileiros que sabem inglês dizem que não conseguem falar a língua e se abstêm de pronunciar-la ou conversar na língua. O estudo baseia-se num quadro metodológico discursivo para a análise de postagens recolhidas em fóruns de discussão em diferentes sites. Em primeiro lugar, a formulação *Eu não consigo falar Inglês* – é utilizada como um enunciado de referência para a análise e verificação de uma regularidade discursiva em operação no Brasil. Em seguida, um quadro teórico pós-colonial apoia a discussão sobre as condições de possibilidade para falar a língua inglesa como língua estrangeira numa ex-colônia Portuguesa. A autora argumenta que o fantasma do falante nativo, idealizado, impede os alunos de reconhecer o inglês que já sabem como legítimo e de falar a língua, e aponta que a dignidade é um discurso possível para desconstruir o posicionamento colonial e de silenciamento que ainda existe com relação à oralidade nessa língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: Inglês como língua estrangeira; pós-colonialismo; discurso.

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INTRODUCTION

This essay discusses the conditions of possibility (FOUCAULT, 1997) of the emergence and stabilization of the statement *I can't speak English*.. Many Brazilian adult students of English as a foreign language (EFL) who can read, write, and understand the language well find speaking it almost an impossible task and often repeat this statement as they draw back from conversations in the language or simply paralyze when they have to speak it. The questions the essay aims to answer are: How does EFL become unspeakable for these students? What holds them back from saying a language they studied and learned? What are the historical conditions for the existence and recurrence of this statement? The corpus of analysis comprises postings in online discussion forums. The discursive analysis applied to them makes visible the metaphorical processes of meaning making and the stabilization of the reference statement *I can't speak English*.. Within the postcolonial rationality taken in this study, such discursive findings enable the understanding of EFL oral production as an effect of a social voice which comes to exist when there is a social place and a discursive position from where one can enunciate and be heard. I argue that, in the Brazilian postcolonial (or still colonial) interpretive frame, not speaking EFL is, for many who can speak it but do not, a matter of being positioned in the historically constituted place of the non-speaker.

Can we speak English?, the question in the title of this essay, materializes the proposed problematization¹ of the historical conditions for EFL enunciation in Brazil. It aims to resonate and reterritorialize a critical positioning present in postcolonial works, such as Spivak's *Can the subaltern speak?* (SPIVAK, 1995, 1999), Dabashi's *Can non-Europeans think?* (DABASHI, 2015) and its foreword signed by Walter Dignolo, titled *Yes, we can* (MIGNOLO, 2015), and Mahbubani's *Can Asians Think?* (MAHBUBANI, 2001). The regularity of the verb *can* with verbs like 'speak' and 'think' in the titles of these texts marks a moment of an intellectual territory where global, local, political, and historical conditions of humanity, scientificity, and dignity are part of the agenda. These works remind us that to speak is a movement that depends on the existence of a voice and an ear for it (DERRIDA, 1988). As

¹ Problematization is a concept that is present in the Foucauldian studies and means a permanent state of critique towards a topic or theme. Lemke (2011, pp. 32) points out there are two understandings for the concept: one referring to a given structure of analysis and its object of study (e.g.: the problematization of madness or sexuality), when it becomes possible to determine its emergence and conditions of existence, and one referring to the observer's activity of problematizing, that is, his/her positioning as a critical investigator.

it happens for many developing countries, feeling qualified and rightful to speak is a process under construction. The difficulties of EFL oral production in this study are thus reported to historical processes of silencing and delegitimization postcolonial countries from the South are familiar with. I propose there is a position of subalternity regarding EFL in Brazil, and that this position is possible in the constant repetition of a colonial, linguistic policy and interpreting frame: one that operates through the sense of linguistic illegitimacy and insufficiency.

Postcolonial studies are sometimes seen as attempts to give and legitimate a people's voice. The postcolonial reading presented in this text, however, does not aim to constitute or legitimize a 'Brazilian voice', nor does it aim to neglect a difficulty of communication that may take place due to individual, personal issues, or even to disregard that there is political resistance against EFL. By considering Brazil's postcolonial past, I seek to explore one founding aspect which may help understand why so many students who know EFL silence and hide it, never taking the position of the speaker. In order to do that, in the lines that follow, first, I analyze posts in discussion forums in websites where Brazilians share their thoughts, feelings and experiences about learning English. Such postings reflect the commonsensical comments and complaints in my undergraduate EFL classes and in many EFL classrooms in Brazil. Following a qualitative discursive frame, the concept of metaphor (PÊCHEUX, 1975) guides the analysis along with the discussion of the concepts of statement and enunciation (FOUCAULT, 1997). The discursive frame allows me to observe the linguistic materiality as discourse in a dispositive (FOUCAULT, 2001). Second, I question the relationship between voice and language in history. I end with a discussion on how dignity is a discourse whose practice could help change the subaltern interpretive frame for the acknowledgement of EFL. The theoretical assumptions come along with the discussion of the data.

In this study, EFL proficiency or levels of proficiency in speaking and in other skills by the part of the authors of the selected postings is not questioned. As it happens, English is a subject of the curricula in schools in Brazil since 5th grade, or earlier, and until the end of secondary school, and many students attend private EFL courses. As my focus is on the conditions of possibility for enunciating the language, the analysis concentrates on historical traits and discursive effects. The analysis makes visible the operation of a discourse of failure and fear, in which the EFL that is known is always represented as insufficient for communication.

1. BODY AND LANGUAGE AS TERRITORIES

When one declares *I can't speak English.*, what is stated? Who can occupy the empty place of the 'I'? What does it mean when the 'I' is a Brazilian adult today? The statement was defined by Michel Foucault (1997) as the minimal unit of discourse. It is both and simultaneously propositional content and material. The content can be materialized and repeated in different forms, as of linguistic, imagetic, bodily or sonic, for example, being repeatability and regularity two of its characteristics. Enunciation, as a function of the statement, refers to its level of operation and is singular. Statements emerge in discourses and discourses are practiced in formal institutions (e.g.: schools, hospitals, prisons, the media, families, the State etc.) where the individuals are compartmentalized and 'normalized' into categories (e.g.: gender, race, sex). In his archaeological and genealogical studies, Foucault explained how discourses constitute and are constituted by knowledge/power which is incorporated in our bodies and determine our movements, gestures, perceptions and thoughts. Each historic stratum has systems of knowledge/power (*savoir*) which make possible that specific regions of knowledge (*connaissance*) become disciplined and objectified, establishing certain regimes of truth.

The Foucauldian view on knowledge is particularly interesting because it integrates the body as an element of discourse, as a space of injunction. Every language needs a body to inhabit and historical conditions to be enunciated, and each body is a body of a subject who is constituted through power and knowledge. In such frame, enunciation in a foreign language is an intriguing issue. More than learning how to articulate body and the knowledge of the rules of a linguistic system, the EFL speaker needs to become invested by the power/knowledge interplay in the foreign language, and in a way to emerge as a speaker. The simple reproduction of linguistic forms, as in repetition exercises in the language classroom, although necessary, depending on the case, may not mean the speaker is being subjectified by and in the foreign language. It takes psychic and bodily flexibility and malleability (REVUZ, 1998), and some detachment from the mother tongue to enter the region of possible meanings of the foreign language and incorporate it. Incorporating a language means letting the language live in the body, provoking it to adapt and adjust to new movements, making it able to pronounce and hear different sounds, and available to occupy the position of speaker.

The analysis of verbal data reveals what is being stated, and what is being said and not said but that constitutes the recurrent statement *I can't speak English.*. For this, the refinement of the Pêcheutian analytic frame sheds light on

the understanding of the linguistic. From his initial proposition of an Automatic Discourse Analysis, in 1969, Michel Pêcheux (1990) aimed at developing a non-subjective form of discursive analysis that could be made with the help of a computer processor and that would account for semantics. Over the years, the theoretical and methodological reformulations of the initial proposal led him to consider language as a structure that functions as a surface for ideology. Seeing discourse as linguistic structure *and* event (PÊCHEUX, 2008), the author claims that meanings emerge in the act of interpretation of the subject who is an ideological position in history. In and by discourse, the linguistic structure is partially autonomous, as it keeps rules of its own and becomes thickness when reported to ideology. Meanings are just provisional and function by metaphor:

[...] a word, expression or proposition does not have a meaning of its own, a meaning attached to its literality. [...] Meaning is always a word, expression, or proposition for another word, another expression, or another proposition [...] (*meta-phora*) [...] (PÊCHEUX, 2009, p. 239).

While the Foucauldian analyses were based on the concepts of rarity and dispersion to search for the conditions that permit the emergence of statements, discourses and discursive formations, the Pêcheutian analytic procedure attempted to give ways to break through what he considered the material opacity of discourse. The mechanisms of slides, substitutions and repetitions that could happen in the linguistic structure were explored in what he called the metaphorical relationships in discourse:

Meaning does not exist anywhere except in the metaphorical relationships (realized in substitution effects, paraphrases, synonym formations) which happen to be more or less provisionally located in a given discursive formation: words, expressions, and propositions get their meanings from the discursive formation to which they belong (PÊCHEUX, 2009, pp. 240).

According to Helsloot and Hak (2007), in the Pêcheutian perspective of discourse, the metaphoric relations work on the levels of the said and of the unsaid :

The *meaning* of words in a discourse (i.e. in a text or utterance) is explained by their relations to other words that are *not* said: words that could have been said but were not, words that were said previously (either on the same occasion or on other occasions), and words that *could not* be said. This interrelatedness between words is what Pêcheux calls "metaphoric" relations, and their meaning-effect is called a *metaphoric effect* [...] He outlines a theory of meaning as an effect of metaphoric relations (of selection and substitution) which are specific for (the conditions of production of) an utterance or a text.

The Foucauldian and Pêcheutian assertions are not seen as antagonical or incompatible but rather complementary and fruitful for the present discussion. The positivity in the Foucauldian analytic frame does not hinder the understanding of the constitution of the linguistic materiality by the *not said* once it is put to analysis. It is with the concept of metaphor that I analyze the data collected for this study. The results make it possible to reflect on the relationships between Brazilian students and EFL at the level of the historically possible. This hybrid analytic frame helps avoid content analysis and the traps of naturalized truths in the interpretation of the linguistic.

Bringing data into the study is a form of seeing the discursive resonances (SERRANI, 1997) and the commonsensical functioning of the reference statement. The following posts were collected from different websites accessed after the results provided by the browser and its search tool under the Portuguese tags for *I can't speak English*, and its variation *I freeze when I have to speak English*.², which are very commonly said by students in a course of Letters³ in the Southeast region in Brazil, as well as in other EFL classrooms in Brazil. A criterion of selection was posts made by non academic, common users of discussion forums, sharing their opinions and feelings about difficulties to learn or to speak English. Posts or texts produced by educational professionals were disregarded. This criterion is based on the will to access texts which repeat what is considered to be the common sense for many Brazilian EFL students and regular complaints of theirs.

The posts are referred to as Sequences [Seq.] and numbered. The formulations I focused in the analysis appear in italic. Sequence 2 is an answer to Sequence 1, and Sequence 3 is an answer to Sequence 4. Punctuation, spacing and other textual marks were kept as close to the original texts as possible.

[Seq.1]

I can't speak English....

I am hit by a speech block when I have to talk in English. I would like to share it with you and to know if this is what really happens... I attended an English course for 6 years. I can understand English, read and write it well, but when it comes for me to speak it, I panic.... What 's wrong with me?? Fear, laziness ... I don't know what it is... I am thinking about moving to

2 Original Portuguese texts: "Eu não sei falar inglês.", and "Eu travo na hora de falar inglês."

3 These formulations were noted down during conversations with students from different terms of the course attending their first classes of subjects under my responsibility from 2008 to 2015.

*the USA, to try and cure this block, because I know that once I am there, there will be no other way, I will have to speak it... Can anyone help me... ????*⁴

[Seq. 2]

Best answer: [...] I think this is much more common than you think. Reading and writing in English, that's fine, but speaking *we get embarrassed, do not want to make mistakes*, it requires a lot from us and *all these things block the conversation. If u can go to the United States, that's great, because it will force you to speak, there will be no other way so you won't feel embarrassed*. But you could try to have conversation classes in a group, a small group with your friends and a teacher, then choose a topic of interest for you guys, and *ban Portuguese during the classes*. There are also some courses (it's a pity that they are expensive!) of total immersion. The teacher spends a day with you, has lunch and goes out shopping with you speaking English all the time. If this is not possible there's also the option of *hosting an American exchange student*. As he will know nothing of Portuguese, *u will have to communicate with him in English*. Finally, I think it is worth analyzing yourself: "why am I so afraid of making mistakes?" because *this fear of making mistakes is what freezes us*. If you can accept your own mistakes u will soon open your mouth and speak. Did you make a mistake? What about it? It's not end of the world, so make mistakes until you get it right.... and it gets easy!⁵

4 My translation. Original text in Portuguese: "Não consigo falar em inglês....Tenho um grande bloqueio na hora de conversar em ingles. Gostaria de compartilhar com vcs e saber se isto realmente acontece... Fiz 6 anos de inglês. Compreendo, leio e escrevo bem, mas na hora de falar, eu entro em pânico.... O que há comigo?? Medo, preguiça... Não sei o que há... To pensando em ir embora p os EUA, para sanar este bloqueio, pois sei q lá, não haverá jeito mesmo, terei q falar.... Alguém pode me ajudar.???" Available at: <https://br.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080812080023AA3Drb2>. Accessed: 19 November 2015.

5 My translation. Original text in Portuguese: "[...] acho que isso é muito mais comum do que vc imagina.Ler e escrever, tudo bem, mas falar....a gente fica envergonhada, não quer errar, se exige muito e tudo isso acaba bloqueando a conversa. Se vc puder ir pra os EUA ótimo, porque vai ser obrigada a falar, não tem jeito e pronto, vai se desinibir. Mas vc poderia tentar fazer umas aulas de conversação em grupo, um grupo pequeno com amigos seus e uma professora, aí escolhem um tema do interesse de vcs e fica proibido falar portugues nessa hora. Tem também alguns cursos (pena que são caros!) de imersão total. O professor passa um dia com vc, almoça, sai pra fazer compras, tudo falando inglês o tempo todo. Se isso não for possível tem tb a ideia de receber um estudante americano por intercâmbio. Como ele não vai saber nada de português vc será obrigada a se comunicar em inglês. Por fim, acho que vale a pena vc se analisar : porque tenho tanto medo de errar? porque é esse medo de errar que inibe a gente. Se conseguir se permitir errar logo vc vai soltar a língua. Errou? e daí? o mundo não vai acabar por isso, vai errando até que acerta....e fica fácil!" Available at: <https://br.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080812080023AA3Drb2>. Accessed: 19 November 2015.

[Seq. 3]

Embarrassment when speaking English!?

Hey ya guys, I am 14 and *I am a good-intermediate level English student but I have a problem*: I don't like to speak English (pronounce) the words. *I know the words but I don't like to say the correct English* for them and MAINLY words with TH. I know that you have to do this thing of putting the tongue and kind of blow it, but I simply don't like to say it I don't know why, it sounds a little "gayish" you know...

Examples are the words: with, month, north, etc

I don't like to speak English with my friends or even with people who were born in the USA, Canada, you know...

As I said, I know the pronunciation of all the words but when I have to speak to someone I speak that Brazilian English, you know?

Example: With, thus I say "uiti" instead of "wif"

Any suggestions for me to overcome this embarrassment? Because I am reaaaaly embarrassed...

I don't attend English lessons and have never done that. I learned it from games and I am at the same level of my friends, I actually risk saying *I can even understand it better than they can...*

And there is a *British teacher* in their English school and they communicate with him only in English. and I think that if I had to do it *I would freeze* despite understanding everything he says, you know.⁶

[Seq. 4]

Best answer: *I have the same problem*, but with a difference: I don't feel embarrassed at all when I talk to people who are at the same level I am, but *if I talk to someone who proves to be at a higher level than mine, gee... I get stuck! lol...*

6 My translation. Original text in Portuguese: "Vergonha de falar inglês!? Ae gente,tenho 14 anos e sou intermediário-bom no inglês mas tem um problema:Eu não gosto de falar inglês (dizer a pronúncia) das palavras. Eu sei dizer as palavras mas eu não gosto de dizer o inglês certo das palavras e PRINCIPALMENTE palavras com TH. Eu sei que tem que fazer esse negócio de colocar a lingua e meio que assoprar sabe, mas eu simplesmente não gosto de dizer não sei porque, parece meio "bixoso" sabe... Um exemplo de palavras são: with ,month, north, etc. Eu não gosto de falar inglês perto dos meus amigos e nem mesmo com pessoas que nascem nos EUA, Canadá sabe... Como já disse, eu sei a pronúncia de todas as palavras mas quando estou com alguém eu começo a falar aquele inglês brasileiro sabe? Exemplo: With, ai eu falo "uiti" em vez de "wif". Alguma sugestão para eu melhorar essa vergonha?Porque é muuuuita vergonha mesmo...

Não faço aula de inglês e nunca fiz,aprendi na base dos jogos mesmo e tenho o nível de ingles dos meus amigos e se lerdar, entendo até melhor que eles...E na escola de ingles deles tem um professor que é britânico e então eles falam com o professor só em ingles, e eu acho que se eu fosse falar com ele eu travaria mesmo intendendo tudo sabe..." Available at: <https://br.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20150315180650AAvsCtd>. Accessed: 20 November 2015.

I am very shy even when I speak Portuguese, imagine English. But you know, I believe the best thing to do is to talk to yourself as if you were talking to your friends, I got this tip from a teacher and I practice it sometimes and I see I am getting better.

PS: Drop this idea that putting your tongue between your teeth is “gayish”. If you think it is, then you are not doing it right, because *if you observe the native speakers speaking English* you can barely see their tongues between their teeth. There’s nothing “gayish” about it!⁷

[Seq. 5]

Difficulty speaking English – what to do?

Hello

Guys, *I always learn* new words, expressions, every day. *I actually get to use them* in my writing. However, *when I have to speak English, they disappear from my mind*. I only use basic words to speak it and because of it I can’t speak well. When I speak it in my mind, *it seems to me I am fluent*, because *I can say everything*, but *when I have to actually spit it out...* Boom, nothing. Is it only me? *Does anyone know what I have to do to fix this problem?*⁸

[Seq. 6]

I understand English very well. But when I have to speak it, I freeze. Why?

*I get to understand native English speakers very well. But when I have to talk in English, the words disappear from my head. Why does it happen? And what can I do to improve my “speaking”?*⁹

7 My translation. Original text in Portuguese: Tenho o mesmo problema, só que com uma diferença: Não tenho vergonha nenhuma se eu estiver falando com pessoas que estejam no mesmo nível que eu, mas caso eu esteja falando com uma pessoa que demonstre ter um nível elevado, acima do meu, vixe... Eu travo! kkk... Eu sou muito tímida até falando português, imagina o inglês. Mas sabe, acredito que a melhor coisa a fazer nesse caso é conversar sozinho como se você estivesse falando com seus amigos. Recebi essa dica de uma professora e pratico às vezes e vejo que estou melhorando nesse sentido!

PS: Largue de pensar que colocar a língua entre os dentes é meio “bixoso”. Se você acha que parece, então você não está fazendo direito, porque se olhar os nativos falando mal dá pra ver a língua entre os dentes. Nada de “bixoso”!¹ Available at: <https://br.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20150315180650AAvsCtd>. Accessed: 20 November 2015.

8 My translation. Original text in Portuguese: “Dificuldade na hora de falar Inglês - O que fazer? Ola. Galera, sempre aprendo novas palavras, expressoes todos os dias. Consigo até usá-la na escrita. Entretanto quando vou falar, elas desaparecem da minha mente. Uso apenas coisas básicas e devido a isso não consigo falar direito. Quando eu falo mentalmente, parece que até sou fluente, pois consigo falar tudo, porém quando é pra sair da boca pra fora..... Bum,, nada. Acontece só comigo? Alguem sabe o que devo fazer para melhorar isso?” Available at: <http://www.englishexperts.com.br/forum/dificuldade-na-hora-de-falar-ingles-o-que-fazer-t21687.html>. Accessed: 15 November 2015.

9 My translation. Original text in Portuguese: “Eu consigo entender super bem o Inglês. Mas na hora de falar, eu travo. Por quê? Eu consigo compreender muito bem nativos no idioma. Mas quando vou falar parece que as palavras somem da minha cabeça. Por que acontece isso? E o que posso fazer para melhorar meu “speaking”? Available at: <https://br.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20120918080009AA4KBMr>. Accessed: 15 November 2015.

In a first level of analysis, the analytic gaze aimed at grouping sequences which repeat one same meaning as it emerges metaphorically along the different formulations. Sequences 1 to 6 were selected among many to be considered to represent well and to repeat that which many Brazilian adult students¹⁰ say about their experiences of speaking English. The reference to Brazilian adult students today is noteworthy, and as it is a condition of possibility since the form of contact with English may have been similar to most of them – that is, by considering the history of EFL in Brazil up to now. The absence of EFL oral production and the difficulty or fear to speak EFL, which is referred to in every sequence, is assumed as a frequent fact in our schools in the Brazilian context¹¹. The discussion that follows aims to unfold the historic unsaid which constitutes such difficulty and fear.

In a second level of analysis, where the focus was to understand the discourse of failure and fear on EFL speaking, two intertwined regions of meanings for *I can't speak English*. emerged. The first refers to a sense of permission and legitimacy, when *can* means having power, right or qualification to speak EFL, and when speaking means being *acknowledged* as EFL speaker. The second refers to physical effects on the body, when *can* means being able, knowing and having the ability to do it, that is, when the body is made able to speak.

2. UNACKNOWLEDGED EFL

The discursive contradiction that is present in these accounts is that although the students know and understand EFL, they cannot speak it and make their knowledge audible and accessible to the other. *I know English*. is a silenced, hidden statement enunciated but not said in all the sequences, as they formulate sentences with expressions like “can” and “get to understand”, and “be good at”, “be fluent” and “always learn [English]”. These expressions function metaphorically in a discursive net which we get to see operating in the linguistic surface in these sequences:

10 I assume all analyzed sequences as having been produced by adults. I considered what is being accounted in the texts (e.g.: the possibility to leave and move to another country, as in Seq. 1), and the photographs posted by the users for their identifications in the websites as marks of adulthood. Although explicit mention to age was only made in Seq. 3, for the purposes of this study, the age of 14 is also being considered an adult age.

11 Difficulty in EFL oral production has been very frequently related to unsuccessful classroom practices in K12 schools, specially the public ones. On this matter, see: Lima (2011), and Pessoa & Pinto (2013).

- I can understand
- I am a good-intermediate level English student.
- I can even understand it better than they can.
- I always learn
- I actually get to use them in my writing.
- It seems to me I am fluent because I can say everything.
- I understand

EFL is known and understood, but the specter of a native or better speaker haunts and stops oral communication, in a process of delegitimization of knowledge. It happens in the order of the ghostly, as it is not an actual word from the native or better speaker or his/her actual presence in actual interaction that is referred to, but its existence as an imagined body or figure and as synecdoche:

- I am thinking about moving to the USA
- If u can go to the United States
- hosting an American student
- If you observe the native speakers
- if I have to talk to someone who proves to be at a higher level than mine
- I get to understand native English speakers very well

Legitimacy and authorization to speak are hence based on what is thought of as a qualification of the listener and his/her judgment of how one speaks, and on the anticipation of his/her authoritative presence. It is based on an everlasting ghostly ear to whom one speaks and that works as a foreign authority. The Derridian discussions on spectrality (DERRIDA, 2006) and hospitality (DERRIDA, 2012) explain how, operating on the level of the ghostly, the specter's trace is marked by a sense of legitimacy and the possibility of heritage. The foreigner is a position who seeks hospitality and acceptance in the territory of the other (in the case of EFL, the territory is the language itself); and the host is the one who must welcome and accept him/her in his/her difference. However, the position of the guest is imaginarily constructed with the sense of a debt, as if he/she needed to return a favor or do justice to the imagined/anticipated welcome. In sequences 1 to 6, the guest's counterpart, in the case of the linguistic knowledge to speak EFL, would be an acceptable pronunciation, an imagined perfect grammar to please the host. This would somehow pay back for the even better, native-like accent heritage that

would result from the encounter with the host. But the host is not really ever there. He/she does not need to be.

Derrida (2012, pp. 79) points out languages are mobile territories that can be carried inside other mobile territories (the bodies). Nevertheless, the integration of territories is just not a simple act of will, as history intervenes. As a second skin, the mother tongue is the always already there with its own ghosts from which one may have trouble to separate from. The presence and authority of the host in the case of foreign languages (the native or more proficient speakers) does not need to be real because, for postcolonial countries, it is a residue of the founding relationship with the Other, the foreigner whose language must *again* colonize and which is represented, in the discursive memory of the mother tongue, as the master. Ultimately, this relationship with the native/better speaker is transformed in a private language policy and in models of adequate or more appropriate forms of language for communication (“the correct English”, “do not want to make mistakes.”).

The ghostly presence of a legitimate, language authority is a mark of a colonization which aimed at monoculturalism and monolingualism (WANDERLEY, 2013). During the Brazilian history, language politics is marked by the banning of languages other than Portuguese¹². These politics seem to have created a sense of taboo (PAYER, 2006) related to foreign languages and a foundational sense of impossibility to enunciate them, which provokes effects up to present. Adding to this, some teaching practices for both Portuguese as a mother tongue and EFL have been following one same authoritative and colonizing pedagogic pattern in most schools. They focus on the teaching of metalanguage and grammar rules which would serve the purpose of stabilizing unquestioned correct linguistic forms of writing that are discursively transferred to the speaking dimension, and which end up silencing any kind of oral production. Students who know EFL do not speak over fear of making mistakes and because of excessive care and consideration for grammar rules that work mostly for written productions. That is not to say that grammar should be banned from syllabi or that there are no transgressive teaching practices, but that the process of legitimation of linguistic knowledge and the possibility of both social and sonic voices in EFL seem to be a longer process

¹² Two examples of silencing language politics in Brazil are (i) the 1757 Pombalese Educational Reform and the Indigenous Directory, which institutionalized Portuguese as the only legitimate and allowed language in the Brazilian territory when it was still a colony, and (ii) the immigration incentives in the Republican period, in the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, when immigrants from countries like Germany, Italy and Japan, for example, started to move to Brazil to set colonies or work as white slaves and had their mother tongues banned during the years of the Second World War.

related to intellectual emancipation. It takes dislocations and new positionings in discourse.

In the data, it is also relevant to consider the construction of the identification for the non-English speakers as non-Americans. Souza (2015, p. 49) defends that the naturalized conservative liberal frame, which was built from the intellectual debates on the differences of colonization in Brazil and in the U.S.A. since the 1930's and that still dominates our political, social, and intellectual orders, have idealized the United States as a model country. In this frame, Brazilianess in its pre-modern, Orientalized (SAID, 2007) sense has been signified as an opposition to the American model, while Americaness becomes a desired way of being. Identification, in these terms, reports to the Other who is the exegetic horizon of difference (BHABHA, 2013, p. 95). Having an epistemologic advantage on us, the Other is a shadow whose shape we try to conform to. Subalternity, explains Bhabha (2013, p. 108-114), is originally metonymic, and ghosts are part of the colonial scene.

Subalternity in relation to EFL, in the Brazilian context, as I see it, refers to the repetition of the Portuguese colonial discursive frame, and to the subsequent violent language politics and policies that mark the (neo)colonizing and authoritarian traditions that have been regularizing the production, evaluation, acknowledgement and circulation of linguistic knowledge and practices in its territory. Knowing and being able/authorized to speak EFL thus becomes a process that happens, for most of us, within an interpretive frame where the foreign language is the main object of stability of political, economical and cultural relationships between countries, and a naturalized asset that functions mainly to satisfy the (new) colonizer. Sequences 1-6 all point to an obligation to speak EFL for and to the native speaker, to the only ear that matters in such discourse.

3. EFL IN THE BODY

In Sequences 1 to 6, speaking is related to the capacity of a machine-like body which eventually does not respond as wished or whose control is lost under too much pressure. It is conditioned by imposition (when one has to speak it):

- I am hit by a speech block when I have to talk in English.
- I will have to speak it
- it will force you to speak
- u will have to communicate with him in English

- when I have to speak English, [the words] they disappear from my mind.
- when I have to talk in English, the words disappear from my head.

In such discourse, what can be seen as a certain resistance to EFL and to such pressure is signified as a failure of the machine: the body freezes, the mind goes blank because it has a “problem”.

- What’s wrong with me?
- I have a problem.
- Does anyone know what I have to do to fix it?
- I have the same problem.

The feelings associated to what is considered a malfunctioning are hurtful and refer to self-consciousness and fear:

- when it comes for me to speak it, I panic...
- Fear, laziness
- this fear of making mistakes is what freezes us
- we get embarrassed.
- you won’t feel embarrassed.
- Because I am reaaaaly embarrassed...
- I am very shy even when I speak Portuguese, imagine English...

Fixing is related to insistence, to recreating the conditions of imposition, and the politics of colonization:

- hosting an American exchange student
- there will be no other way
- it will force you to speak, there will be no other way
- u will be forced
- ban Portuguese during the classes

The body is a contradictory space and a conflictive territory where language policies leave their marks. Resistance to EFL or to exposure is being unconsciously rewritten in the body as muteness, shyness and inertia. The body is the first and last territory of the subject and it may be an arena. Body, identification and language are dimensions which blend into one confusing, contradicting unit: the frustrated

individual who does not understand why speaking EFL is so difficult. The unspoken EFL, however, is unspeakable because of certain historical conditions.

4. CONDITIONS FOR VOICE AND UTTERANCE

In the sequences, fear, embarrassment and silence in EFL are rewritings of a resistance in the body and seem to be related to the lack of a voice. Voice must be understood as both the sonic materiality that is produced by the human body, needed for utterance, and also the possibility of enunciation, the acknowledgment of knowledge. The question of not having a voice on account of the impossibility to speak has been discussed by authors such as Spivak (1995), who explores the subaltern silence in a postcolonial perspective.

While recounting the story of Bhubanesvari Badhuri, an Indian teenager between 16 and 17 who hanged herself in Calcutta in 1929, for example, Spivak (1995) reflects on extreme acts that are held in an attempt to be heard. The author mentions that through her gesture, Badhuri “spoke”, but was not “heard” either by women or men. According to Spivak, at the time of the act, the teenager was menstruating, and her meticulous choice of that period was to show to the others that she was not killing herself because she was pregnant from an illicit love – a fact that was considered illegal in India and that would explain her death to that society. For quite a different reason, she killed herself because she was incapable of killing someone else. As Spivak explains it, and as it was found out only a decade later in a letter left to her older sister, Badhuri was a member of a resistance group that fought for the independence of India. She had been assigned to assassinate a political figure, but she did not have the courage to take action. To prove her commitment to the cause, she decided to commit suicide. What causes astonishment and commotion in Spivak is that, through her gesture, Badhuri tried to leave her subordinate silence and speak, turning her body into a feminine text. Still, in her extreme act, she was not *heard* from her place as a woman in the Indian society.

The way Spivak chooses to report it, bringing the linguistic forms “talk” and “be heard” to explain the effects of the dead body of suicide, materializes an intimate relationship between the visible and the expressible and points to the metaphorical relationship between both significant orders in the language practices, and the production of meanings. The gesture that was visually and symbolically apprehensible is not, in itself, transposed into words, but for the author as well as to many readers, it does *speak*. This gesture was a way to make a place of speech and

voice. For many other subjects, also in the place of the subaltern, forms other than words have to be made so what calls for meaning can be said in some way.

Sliding Spivak's reflections to the situation of enunciation in foreign languages, I propose that having a voice and a body to speak a language refers to having the historical possibility to do so. We learn from her account and reflections that speaking demands a place, a form, and the acknowledgement of the voice. Especially for cases like Brazil, which was colonized by Portugal and not by an English speaking country, English really has the quality and the mark of a foreign language. Speaking it revolves interdictions and taboos and means trying to occupy and dominate a new territory – a practice that postcolonial countries with silencing linguistic histories like Brazil do not know up to now. Although rooted in the body, learning to speak a foreign language is not the mere result of physical and intellectual capacities; it is also an issue closely related to a memory of (learning) languages and founding economic, political and social conditions of a nation, with its injunctions. It is a subjective movement to leave the place of the silenced subordinate. It is certainly not a simple movement, especially when there is a postcolonial heritage and a subaltern frame which dominates and organizes the various forms of activities and thoughts. *I can't speak English.*, and the actual silencing of spoken EFL as its metaphor in discourse, is a statement that can only emerge because a place and a voice to speak still have to be constructed.

In this sense, the discussions presented by Chauí (2013), on the founding Brazilian myths, and on unity and identity dispersions during the foundation of the country may give light to our reflections. For the author, the Brazilian national question was permeated by different moments in the history of the creation of a national identity. What in the 1800's and early 1900's was the discussion of a *national character* which would be aggregating and totalizing in the construction of a country, following the ideology of the time, becomes a matter of a *national identity* in the years 1950-1970, when the figure of the gentle and friendly Brazilian (FREIRE, 2003; HOLLANDA, 1995) had to slide to different characters and categorizations in classes that were being formed in the country. This ideology, according to Chauí, worked with *shortage* as the main feature, with the notion of backwardness and underdevelopment and the desire that the predominantly agrarian country could become an economic power to be compared to other developed countries: we were not good enough as the colonizer but we could be.

The notion of identity in construction, the sense of a founding loss and the lack of a voice may, therefore, be rooted traces of our discursive memory still to make effects. The sense that we never are because we need the foreigner to say we

are may be one of its symptoms. Our own voice does not seem to be constituted as we live and signify ourselves in the order of what we will be (and never once is). This is the tone that also persists in the sequences previously analyzed. The Portuguese spoken here never seems to be enough in our Portuguese classes, which are based on the sense of error and incompleteness, and the EFL we know is never enough to be uttered, to be given audible voice. The place from where to speak is never constituted and remains as a promise for a muted body. The incompleteness in knowing EFL and the fear of failure are the meanings which have been recurring in the words of the students. As Wanderley (2013, p. 131) puts it, the trait of the Portuguese colonization, which is still being assimilated and which resists in the various former colonies, constitutes the effect of the “unspeakable spaces related to our identities”.

CONCLUSION

Is it the social voice or is it the foreign language that is impossible in the case of the unspoken EFL speaking in Brazil? The matter of the body that can speak a foreign language was discussed in this paper as the constitution of a social voice and a place, and the occupation of a discursive position which empowers the body to speak. In the case of oral communication, having a voice is not only being able to enunciate it because there is knowledge incorporated, but also to feel allowed and legitimate to say it, to give it a sonic materiality, and this step demands the realization that there is an ear that accepts it. This could be inferred in the analyses of accounts posted by EFL students in discussion forums on websites and with the interpretation from a historic/discursive perspective that takes into account the linguistic politics in Brazil.

The impossibility of EFL referred to in this text reports to an excessive self-consciousness to speak the foreign language in relation to the virtual/ghostly presence of a legitimate or “native speaker”, and to a positioning of resignation or subordination, historically constituted and constantly repeated outside and inside the language classroom. Legitimacy was discussed as (a) a representation of a quality of the foreigner, native inhabitant from the North, whose mother tongue is English, and who is seen as the ideal speaker, (b) the idiom itself, in the form of grammar rules which are illusively wished in entirety but which are never grasped in totality and controlled, and (c) even ourselves as them, and our own *differáncia* (DERRIDA, 1982), when some of us are represented as more capable or legitimate to speak it.

The agency, in all cases, was always the other who is imagined as better. English, in this context, may be sensed as a forever unattainable object.

Speaking EFL in the sense of being able and allowed to speak it means dislocating oneself from the place of the silenced, invisible subject to the place of the conquerer, who can enter the territory of the foreigner. It refers to what Serrani (1998) calls the act of “dominating the word” in the foreign language, as to enter the play of enunciation, power and identification that emerges from it. The responses in the bodies of the students, as of silencing the EFL they know, were interpreted as movements of historic repetition, by that which is not said but which constitutes what is said. Conflict and contradiction are two marks of the learning processes, and the historic marks are rewritten in our bodies. Body and language are conflictive territories.

In this sense, as a counter movement, dignity may be an interesting concept to be pursued in the reflections. Mignolo’s concept of dignity relates to that which was attempted to be taken from Indigenous peoples in the making of the modern/colonial world (MIGNOLO, 2011). As a mark of political, economical and educational colonizing actions, the colonized have been signified as less human in the foundational difference with the colonizer. Original knowledge was discursivized as myth as our languages were erased from our memories. However, says Mignolo, dignity is kept by the colonized people in the multiple, varied forms of thinking and doing things – something that cannot be understood in the colonizing interpreting frames. It is a form of resistance and struggle. In this logic, speaking EFL may be signified as possible for us if subalternity could be ressignified as a process of dignity, with the alteration of the interpretive frame. It is a discursive move that would change the sense of failure and malfunction to the sense of creativity and production. Legitimization of EFL knowledge, in our case, needs detachment from the colonial discourse of lack and imperfection, so that the voice can be signified as possible and actual speaking takes place. Unspoken English has to be related to historical imprinting of the equivocal sense of unspeakability, and knowledge of EFL has to be made possible as we know it. Such move must be in progress already, and once we change our interpretive frames in our studies, there is a chance we can make them visible. Reterritorialization of the ghost of the host and validation of an EFL voice will make possible that the ones who know EFL recognize their knowledge is legitimate and their voice worthy.

I have argued that there seems to be a subaltern position in relation to EFL that is materialized and discursivized in the statement *I can’t speak English.*, and that it is also materialized as EFL silence. *Subalternity*, in this sense, does not refer to

us being an ethnic minority, or to the ones of us who find it hard to speak EFL, nor to a permanent condition of identity, but to a provisory identification many individuals from postcolonial, non-English colonized countries like Brazil may take. It is linguistic subalternity which is constituted in history and that is related to an invisibility subjects apply to themselves. In such positioning, one does not see oneself as a subject of knowledge. To acknowledge this sense does not constitute or legitimate a voice, but gives us space to reflect on EFL teaching and learning as emancipation, and to think of a different cartography from where to map and understand the colonized and subaltern bodies of the South with their silenced idioms.

I proposed this discussion from the place and discursive position of English teacher, who strives to understand why so many of her students refrain from speaking a foreign language they can read, write, understand and pronounce well in the classroom. I believe I am one among many colleagues who have been teaching and doing research in the past decades, trying to dislocate EFL from the subaltern frame so that it can be spoken. It seems, however, that the deconstruction of the colonial linguistic, cultural frame within which we are subjectified, and a counter movement of stabilization of a sense of legitimacy regarding the EFL we know still need time to endure.

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