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RESEARCHING LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION: GLOBALIZATION, LANGUAGE POLICY AND NEW LITERACIES STUDIES IN DIALOGUE

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Abstract

Global and technological shifts are altering the way education perceives personal, civic and professional lives. The current paper aims at discussing globalization as an umbrella approach to examine the process of policy making in education, particularly the Brazilian policies for English Language Teaching. In this context, curriculum generally reflects external forces and has increasingly been under pressure due to globalizing effects. To address these issues, high school segment will be illustrated as well as a collaborative national project on teacher development addressing new literacies studies.

Key words: globalization, language policy, literacies, teacher development.

Introduction

Globalization is a term used to describe several social changes with idiosyncratic perspectives in different periods. Seargeant (2009), for instance, refers to globalization as a political, economic and cultural movement. As it is a complex issue, globalization can be analyzed, according to Blommaert (2010: 01), as “located and distributed across different scales, from the global to the local and to examine connections between these various levels in ways that do not reduce phenomena and events to their strict contexts of occurrence”. In this aspect, Brydon (2011) calls attention to the fact that even people, who have never moved geographically, have their lives affected by decisions made elsewhere and their imaginaries interact with ideas and images across the globe. She also mentions that although global and local may have opposed connotations, they should be considered as co-constructed.

Another important aspect that is currently under debate on globalization studies is the narrative associated to the role of knowledge in a world of change. Knowledge society is frequently considered neutral descriptions of contemporary societies and cultural development. However, this assumption camouflages the issue of power and dominance and perpetuates a Eurocentric perspective of knowledge. Forsorp (2009) describes it as ‘neo-colonialism’, that is, a key element to survive in a globalized society, which also reproduces modernity, a western-based academic language planning.

Globalization has also disseminated the concept of human capital that reflects policy rationales in education. In this sense, Lingard (2009: 235) points out that “policy has become synonym of continuous change often framed by globalized discourses and economic concerns”. Similarly, Canagarajah (2002, 2005, 2006) argues that the empirism inspired by the enlightenment led to crises in local knowledge and that modernism established geopolitical networks and a world economy that encourages standardization of life to obtain progress. Therefore, western knowledge has been considered synonym of global knowledge. In this context, English language has been associated to a symbolic capital and to a naïve idea of inclusion, which has contributed to disseminate the main rationale for learning such language. Based on such assumption, can we state that the English teachers are included in the process of globalization due to the fact that they speak the language? This is an issue that has implications for language policy, teacher development, power and identity.

The Brazilian high school is a noteworthy segment to be discussed. For some students, it can represent the access to higher education. For others, it can be the beginning of labor period (Maciel 2010, 2011c, 2011d). The access of these students to the knowledge society is more likely to be achieved through private universities. The Brazilian higher education has increasing becoming commoditized. According to the Ministry of Education, 88% of the Brazilian universities are private and 12% are public. The growing diploma market promises “success” referring specifically to an integrated relationship between the daily life and capitalism. Even so, out of 100% of students who start elementary schools, only 12% go to an undergraduate course, 0.2 to master courses and 0.1 to doctoral courses. Those who are unsuccessful (88%) are characterized by very little prestige in the knowledge society perspective. Despite some initiatives of social inclusion to facilitate the access to entrance exams for afro and indigenous descendants, the number is comparatively low. There are initiatives to encourage access to university through distance education but private universities promote the great majority of such courses though.

These figures show that the process of economic globalization brings with it the relative decline of the nation-state as the prime reproducer of capital around the world. If students perceive that their needs have been not met, they may select another product that promises better results or even ‘better guarantees’, as in a consuming culture and its mode of reproduction. In the public sector, on the other hand, they may abandon schools, which can increasingly contribute to their social exclusion. This



situation has long been criticized by educators such as Freire (1970), Giroux (2005), Gee (2001), Monte Mór (2006, 2009) among others, who advocate a critical perspective of teaching and learning.

High school and foreign language policies in Brazil

Depending on the curricular philosophical view, high school may play different roles. In the last decade, some proposals have been put forward in Brazil and they vary from national, state and municipal levels. Two main concerns are commonly addressed in official documents: the first refers to the objective of educating students for further studies and the second raises the importance of preparing them for work. These issues have challenged educational policies to address specific needs

In 2006, the Ministry of Education launched the national guidelines for foreign languages - high school. The two previous documents were written in 1999 and 2001. The former relied on the development of competences and abilities and the latter was based on critical literacy and education for the contemporary society. Apart from the national documents, states and municipals have the autonomy to propose other documents with different epistemologies and philosophies of education. The city of São Paulo, for instance, is oriented by three proposals written to the same segment: the first one, the national curriculum proposed by the Federal Ministry of Education, the second one, launched by the State of São Paulo and the last one was designed by municipal secretary of education. To narrow down this discussion, this article focuses on the National Guidelines for High School¹ (2006).

The Brazilian official document for high school concerning English language teaching relies on the theories of new literacies (Lankshear and Knobel 2003; Snyder, 2001; Gee 2001), multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000) and critical literacies (Luke and Freebody, 1997). The document proposes the reinterpretation of the role of the English language in the school curriculum and specifies the following objectives: to discuss the role and importance of foreign languages teaching for high school; to discuss the issues of exclusion and inclusion in education based on the notion of global values and the interface with English language teaching; to introduce the new theories of language and new technologies (literacies, multiliteracies, multimodality, hypermodality) and provide suggestions about the teaching and learning practices of foreign languages based on such theories.

¹Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio - OCEM



The document is not prescriptive, as a traditional syllabus. Nevertheless, the authors propose a shift from an instrumental view of foreign languages teaching to a critical educational proposal aiming at developing critical citizens through foreign languages teaching (Monte Mór, 2009, 2011). This kind of proposal challenges traditional approaches of teacher development and language policy implementation. In this sense, Cummins and Davison (2007: 01) criticize that “language teaching research and theories have traditionally focused on issues of effectiveness and efficiency” which include methods, focus on skills, CALL and so on. Despite their importance, when they are considered in isolation from contexts, purposes and politics of language teaching and learning, these questions of technical efficiency are naïve and unhelpful. Language teaching cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional set of prescriptions. Likewise, Morgan (2007) recognizes this argument and advocates a dialogue between applied linguistics and post structuralism. From such perspective, knowledge is always seen as partial and the notion of validity is replaced by the concept of dialogic and situated through a critical reflexivity. Furthermore, there are still insufficient researches on the interface of curricular proposals and English language teaching (Maciel, 2001, 2008, 2010, 2011a, 2011b), particularly from a critical perspective. Based on the theories presented on the Brazilian National Curriculum for high school, the University of São Paulo has coordinated a national project in partnership with other public Brazilian universities to focus on local perspectives as I will describe below.

Brazilian National Project for New literacy studies

The New Literacies National project involves professors and graduate students from sixteen public Brazilian universities to discuss new epistemological research views related to the English language teaching. In addition to that, the project has also the contribution of Canadian researchers with interdisciplinary views. The key concepts of Brydon (2009) such as community, *negotiation and autonomy* can be useful to frame such project. They do not represent models and what differentiates them from other terms is the notion of both independency and cooperation because they take into account the community’s perception. In other words, each community of professors represents different contexts and social economic and cultural aspects of the country. Through the process of negotiation with local participants, they may develop autonomy to reinterpret and redesign local proposals. Outcomes have been shared with the bigger community as one of the objectives of the national project. The project



started in 2009 and will take four years, with annual meetings in different parts of the country to share the results and publications.

Although there is a specific project designed by the University of São Paulo with specific goals, each region of the country has a second project according local specificity. The State of Mato Grosso do Sul project (Maciel and Takaki, 2009), for instance, proposed the following objectives: to analyze and to interpret official documents and investigate their interfaces with local schools such as: to expand the notions of different conceptions of language and communication (e.g. Multi-hipermodal languages), knowledge, identity, power, culture, realities that are assumed in the construction of teacher's knowledge in interaction with students; to interpret the notion of teaching and learning of English language in social inclusion, citizenship, research and education; to Identify teachers' and students' perceptions of local and global in the meaning making process; To understand teacher education in relation to epistemologies, local and regional methodologies and implications for critical citizenship;

The State of MatoGrosso do Sul project has fostered collaboration of researchers, teachers and students and local stakeholders. Through a dialogic process, the project intends to promote new designs for local practices.

Redesigning teacher education: towards a critical language policy perspective

Language policy and teacher education has hugely benefited from postmodern theories. Pennycook (2009) points out that we live in postmodern times, marked by changes in social structures, communication, culture and so on. This period has redesigned new conditions of work, economy and political structure. Nevertheless, the modernist and structuralist epistemology in language teaching is still very strong. In this sense, deconstruction is an important approach proposed by poststructuralists to think otherwise. It is important to state that deconstruction does not imply any negative aspect of contestation per se. Under a critical literacy perspective, it means to question a taken for granted idea and try to understand or explain a given underlying assumption of a phenomenon. For more details, see Menezes de Souza (2011).

Similarly, Pennycook(2009) defends the idea of questioning crystallized concepts of language, culture, language rights, policy and other assumptions of modernity, the European epistemology and so called enlightenment, also criticized by Said (2004) as a version of development that could 'solve' the

world. In other words, notions of unitary, totalization, transcendental concepts of belief on disinterested knowledge have to be questioned. In this perspective, it is important to have the consciousness of how we come to think as we do, why we construct particular views of reality, under whose interests some norms and values are supported.

Language policy analysis and ethnographic research can offer important perception of how a certain ideology is constructed, under whose interests, to what kind of society education and how local knowledge responds a given document. Likewise, Ricento (2009: 21) mentions that

research on language policy can contribute to our understanding of how differences are experienced in various contexts and how policies – implicit or explicit - may reinforce or oppose social and economic inequalities related to gendered, ethnic, racial, tribal, religious, cultural, regional and political differences.

Other categories, listed by Pennycook (2009), such as man, woman, class, race, ethnicity, nation, identity, awareness, emancipation, in a poststructural perspective, should be seen as contingent. These classifications are produced in the particular rather than having an ontological status. Therefore, investigations should look to the local, focus on situated and contingent ways of understanding language and language policies.

Another perspective to study language policy is presented by Wodak (2009). She proposes a ‘multimethodical’ approach to analyze language policies which includes linguistic analysis that integrates the study of different genres, different public spaces, different methods and different perspectives or dimensions of the object under investigation. The genres would include written, oral and visual texts.

Under Globalization and linguistic imperialism, Phillipson (2009: 348) reports that there are “top-down pressures to maintain the position of national languages and bottom-up requests to secure linguistic diversity and the implementation of language rights”. Apart from that, post imperial or neo-colonialism forces promoted by the World Bank, the IFM, the World Trade Organizations, and the United Nations globally also pressure the expansion of English. Phillipson (2009: 249) states that “language policies continue largely unchanged into the postcolonial age”, with the argument that alike from the past, World Bank that gives priority to the former colonial language and a marginal status to local languages influences postcolonial education system. He advocates life long foreign language learning apposed to learning one lingua franca alone as a global linguistic apartheid.

Local perspective has been a focus of investigation under a poststructuralist perspective. Canagarajah (2009: 153) proposes ethnography as a tool to study language policy. This kind of research focuses on a micro-level perspective. He mentions that the research tradition has followed a top-down fashion according to the imperatives of policy makers and reveals macro level perspectives. Ethnography, on the other hand, develops grounded theories about how languages are practiced in localized contexts. In this perspective, the main concerns are the community's perceptions and interpersonal relations in localized contexts.

In this sense, I have been particularly interested on how local communities perceive, interpret and implement top-down curricular proposals in Brazil under a critical perspective, as processual, dynamic and in motion. It is important to stress that the concept of “critical” is not obvious. Critical Language policy research has the role to question traditional practices that emphasize colonial views of language and education and needs to take into account the necessity of reconstructing local knowledge and practices through a more pluralistic orientation.

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) state that education witnesses a fast policymaking period. In Brazil, for instance, many proposals have been put forward and most of them fit in the category of ‘symbolic policies’, that is, opposed to material policies, the institutional documents are not followed by investment in implementation. Most of them only respond to attend external pressures influenced by globalization such as IMF, PISA standard tests and so on. In practice we have witnessed documents being launched at federal, state and municipal levels. Consequently, these initiatives, according to Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 21) may cause a ‘reform fatigue’ and can be ignored by teachers.

Conclusion

Decisions for curricular reforms may be prompted by a number of stimuli, some of them highly influenced by globalization. Once such decisions have been made, the implementation will be subject to influences within the education system in which it is to be installed. The applicability of new proposals requires changes and the results may reflect the negotiation and collaboration among the individual involved in the process in which proposals can be accepted or rejected.

Interdisciplinary fields, such as critical theory, feminism, literacies, poststructuralism and postcolonialism have a lot to contribute to language policy. Moreover, public policies that were



exclusively developed within a national setting, now operates in a global level. In this sense, global and local are interconnected, and new imaginaries have been produced. As Fukuyama (1992) mentioned, “the end of history”, as an illusion to capitalism, liberal democracy and market ideologies have now become globalized and have effect on education policies. The nation state has not exclusively control of education and has been under pressure of external forces. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010) point out, most educational policies have shifted from social democratic to neoliberal orientations to ensure competitiveness and narrow set of concerns about human capital development.

In this sense, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) criticize older theoretical and methodological resources, which are no longer sufficient to understand policy processes in a world that is increasingly networked and shaped by a range of transnational connections. Brydon (2008, 2009, 2011) and Appadurai (2000) point out that new interdisciplinary tools are needed to cope with the new global imaginary.

New views of research require collaborative work as well as more interdisciplinary dialogues to deal with the complexity of problems. Studies can benefit from Spivak’s (1998, 2004) concepts of *unlearning privileges and learning from below*. They refer to an ethic that has to emerge and to discipline our privilege in having a critical consciousness. This privilege has also to do with losing privilege of having certain knowledge about the *other*. The tradition of research in English language teacher development and the way discipline has been treated isolated from the educational aspect has not fostered other possibilities of abandoning such privileges. Furthermore, Britzman (1997) reminds us that it is time to realize the tangles of implications that represent our way of thinking that interferes or forbid us to see other possibilities once we shaped by our views of languages. The New literacies collaborative project described in this article, addressing local and global perspectives may contribute to redesign perspectives for teacher education and language teaching in situated contexts.

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