Language Policy for Language Awareness or Language Awareness for Language Policy?

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"my voice is the offspring / of two countries colliding / what is there
to be ashamed of / if English and my mother tongue / made love
my voice is her father's words / and mother's accent / what does it
matter if / my mouth carries two worlds"

accent – rupi kaur[1]

Language policies (LPs) are more traditionally seen as top-down processes led and imposed by governments, establishing a set of rules regarding which and how languages should be taught, learned and used. However, despite the fact that LPs create circumstances and limit the available options for teachers, learners and language users (Ball, 1994), it is quite clear that it is virtually impossible to rule languages by decree (Calvet, 2007). Such impossibility emerges especially from the way *language* has been defined and understood lately, much more as a process rather than an object (Menezes de Souza, 2019).

In order to be more trustworthy or less suspicious to the public eye, the very concept of LP as well as any attempt of its implementation should embrace the dynamic and the chaos, which, in essence, define languages. For ages we have been trying to name and to tame languages, drawing boundaries as if imaginary fences would constrain neologisms or the profusion of accents to flourish when languages *make love* across time and space. That was how Brazilian Portuguese was born, or continuously is being born since the European language arrived at the Tupi-Guarani land, and gave birth to words such as "Ipanema", to which translation is needless, as the noun is able to bring not only meaning, but also a landscape with colors, sounds and music.

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[1] Rupi Kaur, The Sun and Her Flowers (2017).

Grassroots (Menezes de Souza, 2019), bottom-up (Shohamy, 2006) or in vivo (Calvet, 2007) are possible terms to define the approach to LPs I want to advocate for teaching and learning languages at schools. It would necessarily acknowledge the multi/pluri/translingual and intercultural nature of human communication as such approach has language practices as the starting point of language teaching and learning. Such rationale seems to fit better into the lives of students whose linguistic and cultural background knowledge have long been ignored by the formal educational system. Students are seen as empty vessels, and schools teach languages as synonymous to teaching grammar.

The principles guiding this perspective are not new and are inserted in the field of (critical) language awareness (in language education), as discussed by Altenhofen and Broch (2011) and Fairclough (2013); or merely language education, as posed by Cyranka and Scafutto (2011) and clearly defined by Bagno and Rangel (2005, p.63):

> We understand by *language education* the set of socio-cultural factors that, throughout the existence of an individual, make it possible for him/her to acquire, develop and expand knowledge of/about their mother tongue, of/about other idioms, about language more generally and about all other semiotic systems. This knowledge, of course, also includes beliefs, superstitions, representations, myths and prejudices that circulate in society around idioms/languages and that make up what could be called *linguistic imagery* or, under another perspective, *language ideology*. Language learning also includes learning the norms of *linguistic behaviour* that govern the lives of different social groups, which are increasingly broad and varied, in which the individual will be asked to take part[2].

Therefore, teaching and learning languages should have as a goal

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[2] From the original: "Entendemos por *educação lingüística* o conjunto de fatores socioculturais que, durante toda a existência de um indivíduo, lhe possibilitam adquirir, desenvolver e ampliar o conhecimento de/sobre sua língua materna, de/sobre outras línguas, sobre a linguagem de um modo mais geral e sobre todos os demais sistemas semióticos. Desses saberes, evidentemente, também fazem parte as crenças, superstições, representações, mitos e preconceitos que circulam na sociedade em torno da língua/linguagem e que compõem o que se poderia chamar de *imaginário lingüístico* ou, sob outra ótica, de *ideologia lingüística*. Inclui-se também na educação lingüística o aprendizado das *normas de comportamento lingüístico* que regem a vida dos diversos grupos sociais, cada vez mais amplos e variados, em que o indivíduo vai ser chamado a se inserir."

acknowledging and improving students' linguistic repertoire; that is, the set of multimodal language resources which individuals resort to during the meaning-making process of communication (Garcia & Wei, 2014). In other words, the "linguistic tool kit" (Orellana & Reynolds, 2008, p. 62) speakers build and carry throughout life as a result of their experiences and identities, which, usually, formal schooling do not allow students to bring to their language classes. A pedagogy inspired by such principles seems to encourage language learners as well as language teachers to be ethnographers as, instead of looking into what languages should ideally be, they could explore the conversations and localized uses of languages in everyday life (Canagarajah, 2006). Some scholars have already implemented experiences which can enlighten our paths when willing to apprehend language.

Focusing on the instability that characterizes languages, Shohamy (2006) addresses the dimension of *de facto* LP. It embraces the tensions that emerge from top-down forces (usually imposed by governments or other institutional mechanisms) and bottom-up forces (which arise from diverse communities composed by social actors that represent different domains of society, in order to resist, protest or negotiate political alternatives). When it comes to teaching and learning languages, the study of linguistic landscape is an approach that can aid teachers aiming to deal with such complexities in the classroom. According to Shohamy (2006, p.112),

> linguistic landscape (LL) can be viewed as one domain within language in the public space; it refers to specific language objects that mark the public sphere (...) Examples of LL are road signs, names of sites, streets, names of buildings, places and institutions, advertising billboards, commercials and personal visiting cards as well as labels, instructions and public forms, names of shops and public signs.

Gorter's (2018) paper compiles several LL studies in educational settings. Examples of LL research held in school contexts from Mexico, Korea, France and Portugal demonstrate that this kind of field work provide authentic and contextualized input for "fostering multimodal literacy skills and multilingual competence by developing abilities in different languages" (p. 84). Engaging students in such practices may improve language awareness to multilingualism as well as it can make room

for unveil language ideologies (Silverstein, 1979; Woolard, 1998) by recognizing the existence of hierarchies between languages. Besides the educational arguments for LL approach in the classroom, asking students to take pictures and/or report on what they can see and read around them seems a quite feasible strategy to any school reality.

Another possible path for acknowledging and valuing language instability in the classroom is through the recognition of translingual practices, which challenges the way societies traditionally conceive languages. Aligned with considerations about language hybridity which emerges within the globalization - especially due to the intensified flows of people, whether through tourism, the movement of refugees or by other migratory processes - translingualism encompasses communicative practices of transnational (re / deterritorialized) groups that interact using different languages and codes which are simultaneously present in diverse communication channels, in face-to-face or virtual contexts. These are discussions that conceive that communication transcends language as a concise unit and involves different semiotic resources (Jacquemet, 2005; Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia & Wei; 2014) that potentially come to be recognized as legitimate and productive encounters engendered in the dynamics of globalization that are made up of / by languages (Canagarajah, 2013).

As pedagogy, Zolin-Vesz (2014) presents possibilities for a translingual approach to teach Spanish in Brazil. The aim is to overcome the stigma attached to "Portunhol", conceived as an inter-language result of Portuguese interferences in learning Spanish. Instead of addressing the phenomena through the lenses of error, Zolin-Vesz defines it as "the process by which bilingual students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices in order to 'create meaning' in essentially multilingual classrooms" (p. 325). By analysing students writing samples (Zolin-Vesz, 2014) and ads posted on a restaurant's social media page (Santos & Zolin-Vesz, 2020) it is possible to highlight the dynamic of meaning-making across languages as well as to question "values of truth tied to the monolingual orientation" (p. 115) which traditionally pose language and territory as equivalents.

Beyond teaching languages and/or improving students' linguistic repertoire, alternative approaches as those previously mentioned

potentially educate for diversity appreciation, which entails not only a more realistic way of understanding languages, but also understanding the people who speak those languages across territories.

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