



Language learning, identity and globalization: Learners of Brazilian Portuguese in England and learners of English and Spanish in Brazil

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ABSTRACT. This article focuses on language perceptions of language learners in the UK and Brazil. Most participants in the England are British but there are also some from different linguistic backgrounds: Chinese, French, Hebrew, Italian, Polish and Spanish. As for the Brazilian participants, they study English or Spanish as FL. This study discusses how these learners' identity characteristics and the reasons why they have chosen to learn the language impact on their perceptions about language learning. The Brazilian Portuguese learners' perceptions will be compared and contrasted with those of Brazilian students learning English and Spanish in Brazil. The research data was collected primarily through an adapted version of the BALLI questionnaire answered by all learners in two contexts, complemented by an interview. The results suggest that students have different perceptions about language learning due to their distinct linguistic backgrounds, the context in which they live, their interests (both professional and personal), and their opportunities to interact, among other reasons for choosing to learn each language.

Keywords: perceptions, linguistic backgrounds, context, foreign language.

Aprendizagem de línguas, identidade e globalização: aprendizes de Português brasileiro na Inglaterra e aprendizes de Inglês e Espanhol no Brasil

RESUMO. Este artigo busca compreender percepções relativas às línguas que os aprendizes estão estudando em dois contextos: Inglaterra e Brasil. A maioria dos aprendizes de português como língua adicional em contexto britânico são ingleses, embora haja distintos *backgrounds* linguísticos: chinês, francês, hebreu, italiano, polonês e espanhol. Quanto aos participantes brasileiros, são estudantes de inglês ou espanhol como língua estrangeira. Este estudo discute como características da identidade destes aprendizes e as razões por terem escolhido aprender a língua em questão impacta suas percepções sobre a aprendizagem de LE. As percepções dos aprendizes de português, língua adicional, são comparadas e contrastadas às dos brasileiros aprendendo inglês ou espanhol no Brasil. Os dados da pesquisa foram gerados por meio de uma versão adaptada do questionário BALLI, respondido por todos os aprendizes nos dois contextos, complementado por entrevista. Os resultados sugerem que os estudantes têm diferentes percepções sobre a aprendizagem de LE em virtude de distinto *background* linguístico, do contexto em que vivem, de interesses (profissional e pessoal), das oportunidades para interagir, dentre outras razões porque escolheram aprender cada língua.

Palavras-chave: percepções, oportunidades de interação, contexto, língua estrangeira.

Introduction

Learning foreign languages has become integrated to the globalized contemporary world. The number of people learning at least a second language has been increasing for many reasons, such as tourism, work, and social and personal relationships. This has also occurred because learning foreign languages is more accessible than it used to be, and access to the culture of a target language is also easier nowadays. The cultural dimension may be understood in relation to cultures in contact, which takes place in various

ways: through people, the Internet, cinema, music, or other cultural and linguistic exchanges.

The present article focuses on the language learning perceptions of Brazilian Portuguese learners in England who state that they know more than one foreign language; or rather, they have a diverse experience with foreign language learning. This discussion explores the extent to which their identity characteristics impact on their language learning perceptions and also points out the reasons they are learning this language in times of globalization. Furthermore,

the results will be compared with those of Brazilian students who are learning English and Spanish in Brazil.

The article is organized into four sections. The first presents, in two subsections, the theoretical background, with the aim of making explicit the relationship between globalization, identity and language learning. The second outlines the methodological aspects of the study: participants' profiles, research data collected from questionnaires and interviews, and the analysis procedures. The third analyzes the research data and presents the main results. Finally, concluding remarks are provided to reflect on the theoretical discussion and the findings.

Globalization and foreign language learning

In seeking to establish a relationship (or connection) between the term globalization and foreign language (FL henceforth) teaching and learning, this relationship may immediately be made with the English language, which has traditionally been referred to as the language that most people are interested in learning. In fact, when the term globalization is used in FL learning, it has usually been related to the English language (CRYSTAL, 2000). However, various authors, such as Phillipson (1999) and Block (2004), have criticized this predominance of the English language and they remain sceptical of certain aspects of globalization regarding FL teaching and learning. This is because the decision or inclination to learn a given foreign language has been a result of political and economic aspects rather than cultural, and of users' interest in a certain language or immersion in contexts where other foreign languages predominate.

Due to the historical homogenization centred on the English language, the term globalization has been criticized as merely a fad (BLOCK, 2004). Block states that certain aspects must be considered to understand globalization: the historical origins of the phenomenon (the fifteenth century for some people, when Europeans started mapping and colonizing the world, or the second half of the twentieth century, for others); its current stage (finished for some, still developing for others); whether it brings beneficial change or is an instrument of oppression and control in the modern world; its prescription of a lifestyle to adopt or a way to understand events (sociologically) throughout the world; and finally, its imperialist characteristics for some, but for others a phenomenon that brings more equality among nations (and among languages – particularly because not only certain lifestyles or

events determine what should or should not be followed, but also the uniqueness that constitutes users, due to local, linguistic, economic and cultural specificities).

Understanding globalization also involves recognizing relationships between the global and the local. For instance, an event is global when it plays an important role that is accepted internationally (LONGARAY, 2009)¹. However, it must be understood that what is local constitutes what is recognized as global – a view this article advocates, because understanding the concept globalization does not seem to be difficult. This is evident in the ease and speed in which people around the world access information through electronic resources (e.g. the Internet, TV, and films) that we have incorporated into our everyday lives, and by the ease of movement between different communities. This possibility of 'movement' has, on the one hand, traces of the local and, on the other, a dialectic or symbiotic relationship with what is considered global. Customs, culture and language represent this equalitarian dialectic much more than does a simple economic-political dimension. Moreover, although authors such as Block and Cameron (2008) claim that globalization is nothing but a fad, it is nevertheless a pretext for discussing economic, social, technological and cultural issues.

Attaining global status depends on the social prestige acquired by the speakers of a language among speakers of other languages that do not have as much economic or political prestige. Nevertheless, to be global(ized) does not depend only on having power but on achieving a special space in communities, which consists of integration, recognition by the members who live in a given community and the speakers considering themselves part of it. Such a space, in some cases, establishes a "[...] delicate relationship between global and local spheres" (LONGARAY, 2009, p. 56). Kumaravadivelu (2006) considered this delicate relationship when discussing cultural globalization, which the author grouped under three perspectives that he related to cultural homogenization: the culture of American consumerism, a decentralized view of culture and cultural transmission as a two-way process.

Participating in diverse communities around the world with speakers of distinct foreign languages is an opportunity to interact with learners from varied linguistic backgrounds, especially those interested in learning languages that are not recognized as the

¹Longaray's (2009) research dealt with the teaching of English in state schools in Brazil and was based on theoretical discussions in two perspectives: globalization and the role or place of English in this globalized world, and identity – in the light of imagined communities (NORTON, 2006).

language of globalization. In this sense, Longaray (2009) suggests that professionals involved in FL acquisition must adopt a more reflective and critical approach; consequently, the challenge could be how to make room for non-imperialist languages. Thus, languages such as Brazilian Portuguese, also an object of discussion in this article, would benefit from globalization.

Longaray (2009), basing her reflections on Kumaravadivelu (2006), states that language creates, reflects and propagates ideas and, therefore, is a distinct configuration of globalization (colonial to postcolonial). This is particularly important if one recognizes that the contact with the culture of the 'other' (BAKHTIN, 1986) is an important factor for the success in learning a FL, since learning a language goes beyond acquiring structures and linguistic uses. Along these lines, Kumaravadivelu (2006) emphasizes that globalization is a concept that can be better understood if a social perspective is adopted in the teaching and learning of FLs. In these social processes, which are often local and seemingly without global importance, there are exchanges that produce, multiply and intensify the interdependence of and interactions between different parts of the world², which therefore promote the recognition of deeper and deeper connections between the local and the global (LONGARAY, 2009). Longaray's discussion can be complemented by the point Phillipson (2008) makes. The latter author argues that it is not possible to isolate a language from political issues, because to do so involves neglecting notions of identity and power³. Moreover, Phillipson's study helps in understanding how the local starts being seen, even if slowly, by the global.

Despite the differences among the studies referred to so far, one feature that stands out is their indication, even if indirectly, that in an era of globalization, identity is multiple, shifting, and fragmented, but which, on the other hand, as Longaray (2009) claims, is very different from the subjects conceived by Locke and Descartes⁴. Block

(2007), for instance, emphasizes that globalization has produced elements that, combined, seem to be able to delineate the subjects' identity characteristics. These characteristics include sharing of history, ancestry, beliefs, (social) practices, mother tongue and FLs learnt, and religion. This topic is addressed in the following section.

Identity and language learning

Norton (2006) argues that identity is a socioculturally constructed notion as it indicates the way an individual understands his or her relationship with the world, in time and space, and in terms of future possibilities. Therefore, when learners have diverse linguistic and other backgrounds, they are likely to have different views (and beliefs) about how to learn a foreign language, which is thus linked to their identities. This means that the learner's profile should be matched to the materials and teaching methods as these are two fundamental elements in language learning that help both to recognize learners' needs (RAJAGOPALAN, 2005) and respect their identity.

Identity, according to Norton (1995), is a social approach that integrates the language learner with the language-learning context. The author sees it as a multiple concept to be understood within the social contexts in which learners live. Thus, understanding the relationship between language learners and the wider social world means understanding the ways learning an FL is influenced by practices (of individuals, the community, and institutions). This is due to the fact that the learner is immersed in distinct communities and, therefore, his/her enunciations, in Bakhtin's terms (1981, 2002), are historical, socially situated and contemporary to the interactions in which the learner participates within the community. In Norton's words, language use derives from

[...] the appropriation of the words of the others in the complex and conflictual process in which words are not neutral but express particular predispositions and value systems (2006, p. 3).

Hence, learning an FL is not a neutral process because negotiating in a language is, above all, a social practice since it involves real situations, uses, and interlocutors, who are socially situated in time and space. In this sense, a closer relationship between foreign language learning and identity is established.

Moreover, Norton's (2006) discussion about the meanings of identity, which the author relates to terms such as 'investment, imagined community/communities, categories' and 'educational exchanges and literacy', is crucial to understand the

²These exchanges have been possible, in many cases, because of the Internet or electronic means, and consist of a distinctive feature in the current stage of globalization. On the one hand, according to Kumaravadivelu (2006), the Internet, which enables interaction across a distance and in real time, guides economic and cultural globalization while accelerating growth and changes. It also allows connections between individuals, and their connections with associations, educational institutions and government agencies. On the other hand, time, space, and borders are reduced and can bring out the sense of preservation of certain beliefs or practices. In such cases, movements of homogenization (global) and heterogeneity (local) may coexist, in which, to reduce potential conflict, it is desirable to accommodate the needs and desires of the receiving culture.

³To discuss power relations among developed or developing countries would require a long reflection that is beyond the scope of this article. However, deeper issues need to be understood; for example, whether Brazil as an economically developing country that offers opportunities for capital investment would be submitting to the global, in a consented domination, or whether it would be imposing itself against those that colonized it.

⁴The mention of Descartes and Locke alludes to the philosophical conception of rationalism and empiricism.

expectations and beliefs of learners of Brazilian Portuguese-FL compared with Brazilian learners of English and Spanish, who participated in this research.

Regarding 'investment', Norton (2006) points out that learning an FL increases the symbolic capital value (BOURDIEU, 1977) of the subject, because the meanings constructed by a subject have value relative to the value this person has in a given society. Furthermore, learning a language goes beyond knowledge and mastery of a linguistic system only; it also involves investing in one's own identity.

As for 'imagined community/communities', Norton (2006) states that learning a language is not an individual/solitary process; instead, it is constructed and results from the social interactions and experiences (and beliefs) of the subject who, as a learner, envisages his/her participation in the community of speakers of the FL he/she wants to learn. In other words,

[...] in essence, an imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context (NORTON, 2006, p. 5).

Therefore, by referring to the concepts of 'investment' and 'imagined community' as a way to explain an FL learner's identity, it is important to take into account that

[...] learners have different investments in particular members of the target language community, and the people in whom learners have the greatest investment may be the very people who represent and provide access to the imagined community of a given learner (NORTON, 2006, p. 5).

Concerning 'categories' and 'educational exchanges', Norton (2006) argues that one way to understand the identity of learners could involve investigating the impact on the learning process of a set of relationships that are historically and socially constructed in particular instances of power – race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation, for example. Finally, 'literacy' requires the learner's participation in situations that involve dealing with written text (reading and text production), as

[...] the comprehension and construction of the text is mediated by the learner's investment in the activity and the learner's sociocultural identity (NORTON, 2006, p. 6).

Besides the points Norton makes, it is also important to bear in mind that a language learner's social identity implies involvement in communication and social interaction. Language learning is assisted

[...] through social interaction of learners and their interlocutors, particularly 'when they negotiate toward mutual comprehension of each other's message meaning' (BLAKE, 2008, p. 3, emphasis in the original),

which indicates that they take into account the 'other' (BAKHTIN, 1986), the subject and the interlocutor. In this sense, there is no hegemony in the different opportunities of social interaction that can take place; hence, negotiation with the 'other' is a key factor. This occurs whenever the subjects seek to make contact, maintain a dialogue, get and give information of various kinds, and establish personal, social, economic, political, and/or cultural relationships, among other aspects related to their sociocultural life. In this context, language is seen as a social and historical action that, in the interaction, also constitutes reality. Consequently, learners take part in a social context of language where its use is heterogeneous.

The concept of language heterogeneity comes from Bakhtin (1986), who notes how speakers participate in a discourse, appropriate someone else's utterances, and follow rules (sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and grammatical ones) in order to be understood by their interlocutors. In other words, learners will be part of a community of speakers as they will have a 'place' in this social structure.

Finally, multilingual communities seem more common nowadays, as well as access to learning different languages – the latter as a result of different needs and interests. This increase in multilingual communities therefore relates to the fact that FL learning is a process in which the local and global spheres do not diverge and the characteristics of a learner's identity may be observed in the way(s) he or she interacts with others. However, in multilingual settings

[...] language choice and attitudes are inseparable from political arrangements, relations of power, language ideologies, and interlocutors' views of their own and other identities (PAVLENKO; BLACKLEDGE, 2004, p. 1)

which are all factors that impact on one's experience of learning a language, starting from the choice of the language to be learnt.

Data and procedures

This article adopts a combination of quantitative instruments (analytical and causal understanding) and qualitative (interpretation of cultural meanings) as its methodology. This combination has to do with our interest in the diversity and the interdependence

of subjects' perceptions about the meaning of learning an FL and the value a particular FL represents to them. Moreover, this combination allows a better understanding of the topic investigated as we can understand the subjects' perceptions from more than one perspective. It also minimizes differences between the data from questionnaires and interviews as it helps to triangulate the different data produced in distinct circumstances.

Quantitative data were collected by using an adapted version of the learner self-report questionnaire, called BALLI (HORWITZ, 1999). The questionnaire investigates 53 different learner beliefs about language learning and has a five-point Likert-scale format. Sakui and Gaies (1999) investigated the original instrument's validity regarding beliefs about learning to understand if the data were reliable. They also compared the data gathered through the questionnaire with face-to-face oral interviews to check whether the former could be confirmed or not. According to Sakui and Gaies (1999), there were differences between the data from the questionnaires and the face-to-face oral interviews. Nevertheless, despite such a limitation, this instrument was chosen to collect data in this exploratory study.

Qualitative data were obtained by individual face-to-face interviews with twelve of the Brazilian Portuguese learners who agreed to be interviewed⁵, and with the nineteen learners of English and Spanish in the Brazilian context. Table 1 shows each source and the types of data collected.

Table 1. Data and Procedures.

| Source of data | Data collected |
|--|---|
| Questionnaire (organized into 3 parts) | i) personal information. ii) previous experience of language learning. iii) perceptions on language learning. |
| Oral recorded interview | i) topics related to their reasons for learning the language chosen. ii) difficulty with the language and to what extent learners compare the FL they are learning to other FLs they already know. iii) reasons why people want to learn the FL language concerned. |

Participants

To investigate the participants' profiles, the following features were considered: (a) FL(s) involved; (b) learners' previous language learning experience; (c) reason for learning the FL; and (d) opportunity to use the FL being learnt.

The Brazilian Portuguese learners participating in this study were 34 students with diverse linguistic backgrounds who were enrolled on Brazilian Portuguese courses in two different contexts – 9 at a university in London and 25 at an independent language school in the same city. All of them were registered at beginner level; 52.94% were male and 47.06% were female, and their ages ranged between 20 and 59. Most (82.36%) stated that their first language was English while the remaining 17.64% had a more varied linguistic background: Chinese, French, Hebrew, Italian, Polish, and Spanish. Regarding foreign languages, 79.41% stated that they had learnt an L2, 50% an L3, and 17.64% an L4.

The participants learning English and Spanish who took part in this study were 19 students, who were all Brazilian Portuguese speakers living in Brazil. Thirteen were enrolled on English and 6 on Spanish degrees in different universities in the south, southeast and northeast of Brazil. In terms of demographics, 31.58% were male and 68.42% female, and their ages ranged from 17 to 45. Among these, 10.52% stated that they had learnt an L2, and 5.26% an L3. The foreign languages concerned were Spanish, German and Italian. Table 2 shows all learners'/participants' profiles.

Table 3 shows the reasons they have chosen to learn the specific FL and the opportunities they have to interact using it:

Table 3. Reasons and Interaction.

| FL being learnt | Reasons | Opportunity to use the language |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Portuguese | - relationships - other personal reasons - study - travelling - cultural interests - to speak with friends - a personal interest in the language | - with friends (main opportunity) - holiday/travel - at work - at home - during the lessons of the course they are attending |
| English | - work opportunity - tourism - because it is the most spoken language in the world | - at university - at work - friends - instant messaging - the Internet |
| Spanish | - culture and history - easier and 'cool' language - work opportunity - tourism | - with colleagues, teachers and native speakers - family - class |

Results

Questionnaire data

Some statements were selected to give an overview of what students thought about aspects of the target language such as interest in it interest, perceptions of learning the specific FL and expectations about those who use such a language. The results are shown in Tables 4A to 4C.

⁵Although this is an exploratory study comparing the learning of three languages, the focus in this article is on Brazilian Portuguese-FL.

Table 2. Learners'/Participants' Profiles.

| FL being learnt | Participants | | Age | L1 | FL(s) known | Previous experience |
|-----------------|--------------|---------|-------|---|--|--|
| Portuguese | 34 | 18M/16F | 20–59 | English (82.36%) Others: French, Polish, Chinese, Hebrew, Spanish | L2 (79.41%) L3 (50%) L4 (17.64%) | - university - self-study - immersion - language schools - hobbies |
| English | 13 | 5M/8F | 17–45 | Brazilian Portuguese | L2 (10.52%) L3 (5.26%) | - language schools - university - at work - immersion |
| Spanish | 6 | 1M/ 5F | 20–32 | Brazilian Portuguese | - | - university - 'A-level' preparatory course |

Table 4A. Interest and Perceptions about Portuguese.

| Statements | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | |
|--|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------|-------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 01. I would like to learn Portuguese to better understand the Brazilian/Portuguese people. | 29 | 85.29 | 3 | 8.82 | 2 | 5.88 |
| 02. In my country it is considered important to speak Portuguese. | 1 | 2.94 | 6 | 17.64 | 27 | 79.41 |
| 03. It is better to learn Portuguese in a country where it is spoken. | 22 | 64.70 | 6 | 17.64 | 6 | 17.64 |
| 04. It is necessary to know the culture of the Portuguese-speaking countries to speak the language well. | 17 | 50 | 10 | 29.41 | 7 | 20.58 |

Two statements stand out in Table 4A in relation to learners of Portuguese-FL. On the one hand, statements 01 and 03 reveal the belief that the fact of knowing the 'other' – through contact with speakers of the language, particularly in immersion – can help one learn not only the FL per se but also about the daily life and customs of its speakers. On the other hand, responses to statement 04 indicate that knowledge of the culture of the speakers of that language does not seem to be an important factor, which seems rather a contradiction if considering that they see immersion as important in language learning – indicated in their answers to statement 03. Moreover, this also suggests that they separate cultural knowledge from language learning.

From the data observed in Table 4A, a hypothesis may be drawn. This is related to the fact that the Portuguese language, if compared with other languages of 'higher power', such as English, is an FL whose importance prevails at the local level (implied in statement 02). However, the question that stands is whether Portuguese, which is historically a language of the colonized and until recently has represented little in economical terms, has a role at local level only, because knowing its aforementioned aspects may mean that the language,

for the learner, will not facilitate his/her insertion into the globalized world.

Table 4B provides information about those learning Spanish-FL:

Table 4B. Interest and Perceptions about Spanish.

| Statements | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | |
|---|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------|-------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 01. I would like to learn Spanish to better understand the Spanish-speaking people. | 5 | 83.33 | 1 | 16.66 | 0 | 0 |
| 02. In my country it is considered important to speak Spanish. | 2 | 33.33 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 66.66 |
| 03. It is better to learn Spanish in a country where it is spoken. | 2 | 33.33 | 2 | 3.33 | 2 | 33.33 |
| 04. It is necessary to know the culture of the Spanish-speaking countries to speak the language well. | 3 | 50 | 2 | 33.33 | 1 | 16.66 |

Data in Table 4B allow a comparison between the interests and perceptions of learners of Spanish-FL with those of learners of Brazilian Portuguese-FL, which were observed in Table 4A.

Contrasting the answers of these two groups of learners, different data are evident in 4C.

Comparing the data from Tables 4A and 4B and the data of Table 4C are compared, a hypothesis can be drawn to explain the differences between the Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish learners' answers in comparison to the answers of those learning English. It may be argued that this is because English is acknowledged and accepted as a 'global' language (as discussed earlier in this article). This is particularly inferred to in their answers to statement 02 which contrast considerably with learners' answers to the same statement in Tables 4A and 4B. Moreover, this suggests that their interests may be related to aspects other than the identity of the 'other', the user of this language. In addition, another important aspect is the 'power' (economic capital) that the learner perceives and the possibilities of socioeconomic ascent that knowing this language may give the learner.

Table 4C. Interest and Perceptions about English.

| Statements | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | |
|---|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------|-------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 01. I would like to learn English to better understand English-speaking people. | 3 | 23.07 | 1 | 7.69 | 9 | 69.23 |
| 02. In my country it is considered important to speak English. | 9 | 69.23 | 2 | 15.38 | 2 | 15.38 |
| 03. It is better to learn English in a country where it is spoken. | 8 | 61.53 | 2 | 15.38 | 3 | 23.07 |
| 04. It is necessary to know the culture of the English-speaking countries to speak the language well. | 5 | 38.46 | 3 | 23.07 | 5 | 38.46 |

Subjects who want to learn Brazilian Portuguese-FL (or Spanish) agree that contact with speakers of such an FL, along with living and learning experiences in the country where the language is spoken, are important for anyone to succeed in learning the language.

Hence, an aspect that this study tries to explain is the motivation that makes people from different places in the world interested in learning a foreign language such as Brazilian Portuguese. A hypothesis raised in this article concerns political and economic interests which could be related to Brazil's new economic power and it being part of the BRICS⁶, as these have given more visibility to the country and consequently to its language. Other reasons derive from the fact that interests that make these learners want to learn this language are varied and diverse, among them: relationships, personal reasons, study, travel, cultural interests, interaction with friends and a personal interest in the language (cf. Table 3). Thus, these become important aspects for those who are interested or may become interested in learning Brazilian Portuguese.

With regards to perceptions about language learning, despite the fact that the three groups mostly disagreed with statement 04 in Tables 4A to 4C, we can infer that culture in general is an important aspect for all students as there was an agreement in their responses to statement 01, or rather, that 'one can learn an FL through films, music and theatre', as shown in Tables 5A to 5C.

Table 5A. Perceptions about Language Learning in General (Portuguese).

| Statements | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | |
|---|-------|-------|---------|-------|----------|-------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 01. One can learn a foreign language through films, music, and theatre. | 21 | 61.76 | 7 | 20.58 | 6 | 17.64 |

⁶BRICS is a grouping acronym that refers to the countries of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa which are all deemed to be at a similar stage of newly advanced economic development.

Table 5B. Perceptions about Language Learning in General (English).

| Statements | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | |
|---|-------|-------|---------|---|----------|-------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 01. One can learn a foreign language through films, music, and theatre. | 11 | 84.61 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 15.38 |

Table 5C. Perceptions about Language Learning in General (Spanish).

| Statements | Agree | | Neutral | | Disagree | |
|---|-------|-----|---------|---|----------|---|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| 01. One can learn a foreign language through films, music, and theatre. | 6 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

As to learner 'investment' (NORTON, 1995; 2006), which is a gain in the classroom context⁷, this is much more related to cultural (the different, the distant) than to economic interests. This hypothesis is corroborated by the percentage figure indicating that it is necessary to know the culture of the 'other', or the identity of the 'other' to learn an FL. This dimension can be better understood by considering the interview data in the following section.

Interview data

Face-to-face interviews with the participants of this study complete the data analyzed herein and indicate issues related to (a) need for learning the language, (b) difficulties faced with learning Portuguese and other foreign languages, and (c) reasons why people want to learn the language they are studying. These interviews were conducted in class by the teacher as part of other speaking activities to enable the students to be as natural as possible, relieving them of the pressure and stress that formal interviews can cause. The results indicate the following:

- (a) Need for learning the language.

For the Brazilian Portuguese learners the need to communicate with friends/ relations is crucial. This is followed by tourism and work interests. The fragments below show these aspects:

(01) por que eu quero falar português com os amigos brasileiros
 hum hum
 e, e, também eu gosto do Rio e, talvez, talvez, eu vou no Brasil agora e talvez eu trabalho no Brasil, hum, eu eu não sei...
 [because I want to speak Portuguese with my my Brazilian friends
 hum, hum and, and, also I like Rio and, maybe,

⁷This is because learning through resources and situations that are part of the daily life of users of the FL one wants to learn is a gain since the learner may be in contact and observe distinct dimensions of uses of such a language.

maybe, I will go to Brazil now and maybe I will work in Brazil, hum, I, I do not know.]

(02) por que meu namorado é português. Eu gosto, eu me gosto falar com seu pais porque eles não fala outra língua que o português.

[because my boyfriend is Portuguese. I like, I like to talk to his parents because they do not speak any other language besides Portuguese.]

The two fragments, extracted from interviews with learners of Portuguese, suggest that learning of another foreign language derives from personal motivation but also depends on previous and current experiences.

In the Brazilian context, the needs seem to be related to professional interests. Observe the data from learners of Spanish and English, respectively:

(03) Porque é uma área da educação que está em falta no mercado profissional, quase não há profissionais. (Spanish learner)

[Because this is an area of education that is lacking on the professional market, there are almost no professionals.]

(04) Uso a língua no trabalho (com meus alunos), 3 a 4 vezes por semana, e na faculdade, tenho a oportunidade de ouvir aulas ministradas em inglês e, falar durante exposições de trabalhos ou mini-aulas preparadas por nós alunos. (English learner)

[I use the language at work (with my students), 3 to 4 times a week, and at the university I have the opportunity to listen to the lessons in English, and speak during presentations of coursework or mini-classes prepared by us, students.]

(05) (...) Muitos livros específicos de certas áreas são em inglês. As empresas precisam de gente que saiba inglês. (English learner)

[Many books specific to certain areas are in English. Companies need people who know English.]

Most learners in the Brazilian context, therefore, opt for an FL for long-term motivations: to work as FL teachers or in areas or careers that require knowledge of an FL. Hence, many of them see their undergraduate languages courses as the beginning of a career, and this professional motivation is an evident variable in the learners' perceptions. In turn, learners who envision other professions perceive that a FL is an ally to help them acquire more profitable work.

(b) Difficulties faced with foreign languages.

For most learners, Brazilian Portuguese pronunciation and talking in the language are the most frequent difficulties. On the other hand, those who know another Latin language state that Portuguese is easy to learn.

In the Brazilian context, independent of the FL being learnt, English or Spanish, the difficulties are varied, as the statements below illustrate:

(06) O aluno deve perder a timidez com o companheiro, se ele interagir nesta comunicação oral, sairá de seu curso pronto para comunicar-se com um falante nativo com boa fluência e coragem.

[The student should lose his shyness with his partner. If he interacts in oral communications, he will come to the end of the course ready to communicate with a native speaker with good fluency and confidence.]

(07) (...) falar com outros... no meu caso o problema é que tenho vergonha de falar inglês, não sei porquê, mas tenho.

[to talk to other people ... in my case the problem is that I am shy to speak in English, I do not know why, but I am.]

The examples indicate that oral interaction has been a frequent difficulty for learners and this variable has been a particular focus of attention in the learning process. This concern, by hypothesis, is due to the fact that many learners envision their profession involving an FL, hence their interest in classes (or methodologies that follow a communicative approach) in which they can speak and participate in communicative activities. On the other hand, learners also seem to 'idealize' the contact with the speaker of the FL (cf. example 06) as bringing more challenges to them at the time of oral interaction; therefore, they believe that interaction with such speakers gives them greater confidence in the use of the FL.

(c) Reasons why people want to learn FLs.

It is not clear to learners why more and more people are interested in learning Brazilian Portuguese, which is indicated in their diverse replies, as the following responses by two of them illustrate:

(08) ... eu não sei, penso que tantos estão a aprender português, mas penso que não é verdade, penso que a Londra (Londres) por exemplo, há tantos brasileiros e muita gente, muitas, muitas pessoas, ah, gosto a viajar a Brasil, mas, há muitas pessoas aqui na Inglaterra que têm uma casa em Portugal e [incompreensível] e viajam para vacancias por, por [inc.] en Brasil, por isso...

[... I do not know, I think that many people are learning Portuguese, but I think that it is not true, I think that in London for example, there are many Brazilians and many people, many, many people, ah, (people) like to travel to Brazil, but, there are many people here in England who have houses in Portugal and [unclear] travel for holiday to, to [unc.] lots of tourism, hum...]

(09) ... agora, agora Brasil é um país, e um país chique (inc.) muitos brasileiros aqui em Londres, ah, no mundo e, e no mundo [inc.] muitas coisas agora [inc.] muito turista, muito turismo, hum ...

[...now, now Brazil is a country, a posh country [unc.] many Brazilians here in London, ah, in the

world, in the world [unc.] many things now [unc.] many tourists, much tourism, hum...]

These examples indicate various reasons for learning Portuguese, including: travelling, to live in countries where Portuguese is spoken, tourism, and the fact that Brazil is in the 'spotlight'. But there is no doubt that aspects related to tourism and personal interests seem to be the most important for the learners. In addition to these, working and networking are also important factors as evident in the following answer:

(10) ...mais pessoas têm que viajar trabalho e mais pessoas viajam por todo o mundo e mais connect com a internet e mais [inc.] aprender

[...more people have to travel to work and many people travel all around the world and more connected [sic] with the Internet and more [unc.] learn.]

In turn, among the main reasons that participants in the Brazilian context give to learn an FL, especially Spanish, are:

(11) Porque ela traz uma cultura que me encanta. [Because it has a culture that delights me.]

(12) Porque sempre tive interesse em língua estrangeira, aprender um novo idioma, novas culturas e a história de nossos vizinhos argentinos.

[Because I've always had an interest in foreign languages, learning a new language, new cultures and the history of our Argentine neighbours.]

With respect to English, learners give various reasons, including:

(13) Porque é a língua mais falada do mundo. [Because it is the most spoken language in the world]

(14) Porque todo mundo fala, sabe, entende? Você pode ir a qualquer lugar do mundo inteiro falando inglês que eles vão te entender.

[Because everybody speaks and knows it, do you understand? You can go anywhere in the world speaking English and they will understand you.]

Data by Brazilian learners show significant differences with regard to the reasons for learning an FL. These include, on the one hand, culture and history (examples 11 and 12) and, on the other, the belief that there are more speakers of the language being learnt if compared to other languages. This belief, in our view, stems from an identity constructed around a language and the power that a certain language may represent in relation to others (examples 13 and 14).

It can therefore be argued from the data discussed that identity construction of a language is intrinsically linked to its users and the power they may or seem to represent. This derives from a set of

relationships that are historically and socially constructed in particular instances of power, the perception learners have of the 'other' and the desire to be part of the community of speakers of the language they chose to learn.

Main results

The results of this study consider the participants in terms of linguistic background, reason for learning the FL and aspects related to the opportunity to use each FL concerned.

With regards to the linguistic background, there is a considerable difference between the participants learning Brazilian Portuguese and the Brazilians learning English and Spanish. Most of the learners of Brazilian Portuguese indicated a heterogeneous experience with FLs as they have already learnt at least one, whereas most of the Brazilian learners have not learnt another FL. Therefore, this result could be connected to the multilingual or multicultural context in which learners of Brazilian Portuguese are living.

Secondly, regarding the reason for learning the FL these participants are interested in, there are considerable differences among the groups. The Brazilian Portuguese learners in England want to learn the language to have/establish personal and, for some, professional relationships, to speak Portuguese with Portuguese speaking friends and colleagues, whereas the Brazilian learners study an FL mainly to enhance their work profile to attract employers. Therefore, for the latter students, to know an FL is an opportunity to start a professional career.

Thirdly, for the Brazilian learners, opportunities for face-to-face interaction with speakers of the target language are scarce, but this does not seem to be the case for the learners studying Brazilian Portuguese. The latter have various ways and more opportunities to access and use the target language, such as on their holidays, travel, and at home with friends, housemates, or members of the family (e.g. a wife, husband, or in-laws). On the other hand, for the Brazilian learners, access to the target language takes place mainly through new technologies – for example, interaction via instant messaging and the Internet.

As to opportunities to use the FL indicated by the participants, one aspect to highlight concerns 'power' and the popularity the English language still has because it allows users to interact with different people and cultures (both in local and global contexts). This is, primarily, to establish economic relations. The learning context of English-FL for

most of the participants relates to enhancing their career prospects by getting a better job or increasing their incomes. Longaray (2009) gives an example that indicates how knowing an FL empowers the learner, which is relevant to the discussion herein. In her research, she noted that high-school students in state schools in Brazil see English-FL learning as an opportunity for 'flying' (i.e. being successful) 'regarding economic and cultural development'. This indicates that there is a "[...] belief about English as the language of development and future possibilities" (LONGARAY, 2009, p. 235), besides being a language "[...] almost always linked to an image of economic success and the concept of development"⁸ (LONGARAY, 2009, p. 235). However, according to the author, these students face barriers in learning English because the quality of teaching in state schools in Brazil needs to be improved, in particular, the teaching/learning of FLs.

A second point to highlight concerns the learners' perceptions regarding the FLs discussed in this article. The learners of Portuguese and Spanish share similar perceptions, whereas the English learners' perceptions differ in the group. A reason for this could be the fact that the learners of English have more interests relating to work, particularly as they mention in their complementary questionnaire responses that English can be used around the world. So they seem to relate learning the language with increasing their opportunities to interact either for professional or personal purposes, including for work.

Finally, the last point to highlight relates to the learner profiles. Many people are encouraged to learn another FL because of family relationships and their cultural background, so they have previous experience of learning FLs. However, as suggested in statement 4, they have different opinions about whether it is necessary to know the culture of the country of the language they are learning, despite indicating that immersion is important to learning a language well, which will demand cultural awareness from them whilst in a country where the language is spoken. Moreover, based on the results of this research, it is suggested that previous language learning experiences, experiences of travelling, and experiences in immersion and interaction with speakers of the language being learnt can also make a difference. Hence, the diversity of interests, beliefs and possibilities for the learners can be considered. Diversity is not just in

terms of learning opportunities, but also in terms of the heterogeneity of learners and their interests, goals and previous experiences in learning FLs and the process that is experienced while learning the FL concerned.

Final considerations

There are links between Brazilian students learning Spanish and the students learning Portuguese, which are suggested by the fact that both are interested in learning not only the language, but also the culture of the countries concerned, either for personal and/or professional reasons (as indicated in their complementary answers in the questionnaire – summarized in Table 3). On the other hand, Brazilians learning English differ from both in the sense that they seem to see in the FL they are learning opportunities that go beyond personal and professional reasons, including social ascent. However, the reason for learning the language varies not only between the learners of Portuguese and the Brazilian learners but also between the two Brazilian groups learning Spanish and English as English learners' purposes and use of language still seem more related to work and job opportunities.

The learners of Portuguese seem to be at an advantage regarding the use of language and cultural awareness as they live in a multicultural context in which a variety of linguistic backgrounds as well as uses of distinct FLs coexist. Thus, by being in such a context the learner is in constant contact with linguistic, identity and cultural heterogeneity. Also, they appear to have more opportunities to travel as most of them have been to Portuguese-speaking countries, which is not the case for Brazilian learners.

The learners' previous experiences regarding the foreign language(s) they have had contact with is relevant, as expectations are higher towards FL learning; likewise, possibilities of 'investment' are also diverse – they invest in personal, family, cultural, and intercultural relationships.

Reflecting on how language learning, identity, and globalization are related, as the title of this article suggests, is to consider language learning from a teaching practice perspective which incorporates learning situations that allow learners to be active subjects of what they 'say'. And, because of their previous experiences, perceptions of the world, and expectations that arouse their interest in learning a new language, they always have something to 'say'. This study has acknowledged that identity plays an important role in how this

⁸Original: "A língua inglesa surge quase sempre atrelada a uma imagem de sucesso econômico e à noção de desenvolvimento". (LONGARAY, 2009, p. 235).

learning process is delineated in relation to the need to recognize the 'other' as a subject who has the ability to perceive the uniqueness of each situation and the experience of each subject – not something dichotomized between the 'global' or the 'local' – and the impact and importance of each interaction for users of a particular language.

Finally, it is necessary to make some considerations about the nature of the data and the characteristics of the instruments used for its collection. A look at the data from different perspectives allowed a better understanding of the subjects' perceptions regarding foreign language learning and in relation to the actual identity characteristics of the subjects learning languages. The heterogeneity is intrinsic to the subjects, whether learners or users of an FL, and, in this case, it was possible to show in this study a more comprehensive view of the results, indicating some factors that shape these contexts. Limitations remain, and further studies could complement the current one to contribute towards teaching methods and topics that address the expectations and needs of foreign language learners.

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