

“Am I American, Too?” A Critical Analysis of Brazilian EFL Teachers’ Discourse

“Sou Americano, Também?” Uma Análise Crítica do Discurso de Professores Brasileiros de EFL

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Abstract

The current work is aimed at analyzing the speech of nine Brazilian teachers who teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for three renowned institutions of English language teaching in the city of Recife, Pernambuco, so as to verify if the mental models built justify polarization of the groups denominated as groups of US and THEM (VAN DIJK, 2015a). Such polarization has occurred in a reverse way, since Brazilian EFL teachers look up to the American culture in detriment of their own. This polarization reversal was caused in Brazil, not only by the exposure to American products, but also by the country's historical context. The influence of the American government upon Brazil, and its hegemonic power, began effectively around the 1940s, when they established a Bureau in Brazil to foster cultural exchange. Nonetheless, its creation favored the implantation of the American hegemony, which was channeled by diplomatic agreements with Brazil, which were established by the American government and materialized by institutions along with the export of its English language. This research uses a qualitative, transversal and analytical methodology and analysis was guided in the light of Critical Discourse Studies, having Van Dijk (2015a) as the main theoretician. It will support us to comprehend the socio-cognitive discourse aspects and their components, using the discourse triangle proposed by the author, discourse-cognition-society, as well as Souza (2018) and Moita Lopes (2003) among others to understand the historical context of the North American culture coming to Brazil and the mental representations built subjectively.

Keywords

Critical discourse studies (CDS). Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Culture. Polarization. Mental models.

Resumo


O presente trabalho teve como objetivo analisar o discurso de nove professores brasileiros que ensinam inglês, como língua estrangeira, em três instituições renomadas de ensino de língua inglesa, na cidade de Recife, Pernambuco, a fim de verificar se os modelos mentais construídos justificam a polarização de grupos denominados como grupos de NÓS e ELES (VAN DIJK, 2015a). Essa polarização ocorre de modo reverso, uma vez que os professores brasileiros de EFL exaltam a cultura dos norte-americanos em detrimento da sua. Essa inversão de

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polarização foi causada no Brasil, não só pela exposição dos produtos norte-americanos, mas também pelo contexto histórico do país. A inserção do governo norte-americano no Brasil e seu poder hegemônico começaram, efetivamente, por volta dos anos 40, quando eles fundaram no Brasil, um Birô com propósito de realizar intercâmbio cultural. Entretanto, sua criação favoreceu a implantação da hegemonia norte-americana que aconteceu entre acordos diplomáticos com o Brasil e que foram estabelecidos por instituições norte-americanas, juntamente com a exportação da sua língua inglesa. Assim, a pesquisa utiliza uma metodologia qualitativa, transversal e analítica e teve suas análises norteadas à luz dos Estudos Críticos do Discurso (ECD), tendo como principal teórico Van Dijk. Essa teoria nos ajudará a compreender os aspectos discursivos sociocognitivos e seus componentes, utilizando o triângulo do discurso proposto pelo autor, discurso-cognição-sociedade, bem como Souza (2018), Moita Lopes (2003) entre outros, para entender o contexto histórico da vinda da cultura norte-americana ao Brasil e as representações mentais construídas subjetivamente.

Palavras-chave

Estudos críticos do discurso (ECD). Ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira. Cultura. Polarização. Modelos mentais.

Introduction

Based on questions arising from one of the researchers' experiences with the English language, from her time as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) student in 1999 up to now in her career as a teacher of English, we decided to analyze some speeches of other Brazilian EFL teachers due to the common discourse that has been around in language schools. Some of them praise not only the English language, but also tend to compare American and Brazilian cultures. Certain discourses elaborated by these teachers are present in utterances such as: "the English language is easier than the Portuguese one"; "the English language sounds prettier than the Portuguese language"; "speaking English makes me feel closer to their culture", among others.

Therefore, we will explore how the North American culture came to Brazil in the 1940s. Neocolonialism in Brazil took place through entertainment media such as television, radio, cinema, streaming services, music, games etc., and gained strength with the establishment of an American Bureau called *Office of the Coordination of Inter-American Affairs*. Thus, North American culture penetrates Brazilians' lives, without much questioning by the latter, and has been accepted as something natural in political manipulations and alienation through entertainment (ASSIS, 2020).

Understanding the historical path that Brazil has gone through, as well as the cultural and political domination by North America, is indispensable. We explore the theory of critical discourse studies, by Van Dijk, which guided our research with his socio-cognitive analysis to understand the functioning of mental models and its components, such as beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, ideology and ideological discourse. Therefore, learning how these models work and how

mental records are made through external influences (mostly by media in this paper) and personal experiences, shows us how important context is. It is through historical and social contexts that we are able to analyze the discourses of these teachers.

Finally, we have the methodology with the entire research procedure and how data was collected, as well as the analysis of the data collected, together with the proposed theoretical interpretation. We believe that the analysis presented here demonstrates and proves what we intended to show when we proposed this work: a critical reflection on the role of English language teachers in Brazil, their social role as educators, and a deconstruction of the North American hegemonic power in EFL classrooms in Brazil.

1 Uncle Sam in Brazil

In order to comprehend why Brazilian teachers who teach EFL (English as a Foreign Language) praise the American culture and its language, it is essential to have an overview of the context in which Brazil encountered itself back in the 40's, as Van Dijk (2017) and Moita Lopes (2003) suggested to understand the political, social and historical context. Hence, the analysis of the data will be more precise.

Moreover, it is also vital to highlight that this paper does not have the intention to be xenophobic, since there are many positive aspects in the American culture, and consequently in its language as well as long as Brazilian EFL teachers do not disdain their own culture and language. What will be shown is how the American culture infiltrated in Brazil without any war, battle or weapons. Through its imperialist power, the North American culture, entertainment and language were settled down in our country with a diplomatic agreement. In other words, "to control the culture is to control the power, and who holds the culture is the imperialist"¹ (MOITA LOPES, 2003, p. 47, our translation), and to this extent Americans could impose their interests and dominance in Brazil.

The dominated country goes through a forced transculturation process in various aspects and areas such as education, science, technology, means of communication as a whole, politics, and so on. In the case of Brazil, the dependency on the United States started in the 20's, when it got a loan of U\$ 50 million from the USA, and by the end of that same decade, Brazil had an external debt of

1 Original: "Controlar a cultura é controlar o poder e quem detém a cultura é imperialista" (MOITA LOPES, 2003, p. 47).

US\$355 million. From that moment on, the country started to open its borders to multinational companies, such as Firestone, Armour, Burroughs and Pan American Foreign Power. Fearing that Brazil would ally with the Axis Powers (headed by Germany, Italy and Japan) during World War II, the USA founded a bureau named *Office of the Coordination of Inter-American Affairs* as a strategy to insert its culture in Brazil (MOURA, 1988).

While active in Brazilian territory, the bureau implanted three major interconnected areas: information, health care and food. The first area concerned political issues between both countries. However, Brazilian press covered most of American news and broadcasted American shows whereas few American press reported news or broadcasted any other content from Brazil. The Bureau was in charge of vetting the entertainment at the cinemas for movies which could make fun of the Latin American or questioned the American government's attitude. Radios broadcasted news from the United States as Brazilian people wanted to get to know more about the U.S. In education, the Americans also provided training to students in a broad range of areas such as agronomy, public health, medicine, social services, engineering, to name but a few. English soon replaced French, which was taught in Brazilian schools at that time.

According to Moita Lopes (2003, p. 47, our translation), "language teaching is clearly being taken as an ideological tool. Another point of this ideology of colonialism is to establish the superiority of the colonizer and the consequences, inferiorities and dependencies of the colonized"². The definition of ideology that has been used in this paper belongs to the theoretician Van Dijk, who understands ideology as the "fundamental beliefs of a group and its members" (2000, p.7). For the same theoretician, ideology is composed of elements of social cognitions, since it is a complex phenomenon and requires a multidisciplinary approach, such as psychology, sociology and politics, to understand how this phenomenon works. According to the researcher, ideology involves social cognition, which analyzes mental representations, such as knowledge, opinions, attitudes, norms and values. These representations are shared by a group of people who maintain the same idea and, therefore, "acquire, share, propagate and use them to promote their collective interests and guide their social practices" (VAN DIJK, 2015a, p. 1). The notion of mental representation will be more explored along this text.

2 Original: "o ensino da língua está sendo claramente tomado como um instrumento ideológico. Um outro ponto desta ideologia do colonialismo é estabelecer a superioridade do colonizador e as consequências, inferioridades e dependências do colonizado" (MOITA LOPES, 2003, p. 47).

Back then, many exchange programs were created in order to promote the cultural exchange between these both countries and Brazilian middle-class families were seeking those in order to take part in the culture that they were fascinated by. "The educational investment that was happening in Brazil until then aimed at a certain group of Brazilian society, provided them a different status for that social class"³ (ASSIS, 2020, p. 24, our translation). Nowadays this phenomenon can still be seen, as many Brazilian upper middleclasses, in an attempt to resemble the Americans, by buying imported products, feel like them. Meanwhile, Brazilian low middle class, in order not to feel compared to the mass class, begins to imitate the behavior of the upper middle class, which has the Americans as an idealized model of perfection and honesty (SOUZA, 2018).

Brazil already aspired to the American standard of living, as it was synonymous to a more evolved society and had a supposedly superior civilization. The Bureau was deactivated in 1946, however, Brazil was already part of a colonial culture and the American government no longer needed to strive to dominate the country. They entered it in such a well-structured manner that up to this day we have consumed American products without realizing the whole scheme of their cultural insertion. It is not hard to see the evidences of the American dominance in Brazilian culture, as the Brazilians themselves have been consuming their products, such as American movies, American TV shows, streaming services (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney +, Apple TV), eating habits (hamburgers, French fries, ketchup, cereals) and Coca-Cola. Some English words have also been borrowed, for instance, website, net, e-mail, laptop, software, page, homepage, site, download, business, standard, ranking, fast food, sale, networking, expert, marketing, franchising, MBA, delivery, hits, performance, bike, not to mention cartoons which have involved Brazilian kids. The strategy was to surround Brazilians from their childhood to adulthood by emerging them into the American culture. Thus, it would not avoid any strangeness nor rejection to the American domination.

Therefore, it can be seen that "no Brazilian has started to consume American products and agree with his ideology overnight. Sequences of political, social and psychological factors have contributed and contribute to this identification with the lifestyle of Americans"⁴ (ASSIS, 2020, p. 31, our translation). It is not dif-

3 Original: "O investimento educacional que estava acontecendo no Brasil, até então, voltado para certo grupo da sociedade brasileira, propiciava um status diferenciado para aquela classe social" (ASSIS, 2020, p. 24).

4 Original: "nenhum brasileiro começou a consumir os produtos norte-americanos e concordar com sua ideologia da noite para o dia. Foram sequências de fatores políticos, sociais e psicológicos que

difficult to recognize the group of people who identify themselves with American culture and language. This polarization of groups can be classified as the "US" and "THEM".

It occurs through the sharing of ideas that members of the groups have in common. The "US" group says that they belong to a positive group, with regard to norms, values, attitudes, among others; and the "THEM" group is seen as something negative, as they do not share the same ideas and are seen as inferior (VAN DIJK, 2015a). As for this paper, as we read and reflect on Van Dijk's theory (2015a), we are becoming more and more convinced that the polarization vision is reversed. In other words, the "THEM" (Americans) are more developed, superior, have the most advanced technologies, while the "US" (Brazilians) are underdeveloped, inferior, among others. Although Rodrigues (1993) claimed that Brazilian people place themselves as inferior by defining this situation with the term 'mutt complex' meaning "the inferiority in which Brazilians voluntarily place themselves in relation to the rest of the world"⁵(RODRIGUES, 1993, p. 52, our translation), it is vital to highlight that "it would not be a voluntary choice but an involuntary behavior, a behavior from a colonized to a colonizer"⁶ (ASSIS, 2020, p. 36, our translation). There is no way to detach from a culture imposed for over seven decades. The mental models had already been formed on the basis of entertainment media (television, songs, cinema to name but a few), food, electronic products, and even through personal experiences. So, how are mental representations and mental models formed?

2 Mental Representation and Mental Models

Aiming to understand how the mental models and mental representations operate, it is necessary to explore the Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) in the socio-cognitive approach proposed by Van Dijk. It is composed of the three dimensions, discourse – cognition – society - As Van Dijk points out (2015b, p. 64) "discourse structures and social structures are of a different nature and can only be related through the mental representations of language users, as individuals and as social members". The texts and talks that people interpret are influenced

contribuíram; e contribuem para essa identificação com o estilo de vida dos estadunidenses" (ASSIS, 2020, p. 31).

5 Original: "a inferioridade em que o brasileiro se coloca, voluntariamente, em face do resto do mundo" (RODRIGUES, 1993, p. 52).

6 Original: "não seria uma colocação voluntária e sim um comportamento involuntário, um comportamento de um colonizado para um colonizador" (ASSIS, 2020, p 36).

by social interactions, social situations and social structures. Thus, these social interactions and structures are influenced by the same cognitive interface of mental models, knowledge, attitudes and ideologies (VAN DIJK, 2015b).

We will analyze the three dimensions of socio-cognitive discourse analysis in order to understand how it works, as it is the important point of our research, since mental representations compose our cognitive system.

2.1 Cognitive Component

This component is crucial in order to understand CDS because it "deals with the mind, memory, and especially with the cognitive processes and representations involved in the production and comprehension of discourse" (VAN DIJK, 2015b, p.66). Hence, a cognitive structure is divided into i) memory: in which we will focus on the long-term memory due to its capacity of retaining lived autobiographical memories as well as knowledge that is stored in episodic memory; ii) mental models: our personal experiences are represented as unique, subjective and through individual mental models, which are stored in episodic memory; and iii) social cognition: it is our knowledge of the world, based on socially shared cognitions, in other words, by being part of a community, human beings tend to share their knowledge, attitudes and ideologies .

According to Van Dijk (2016, p. 5), the cognitive process "takes place in the mind or memory of individual social actors as members of social groups and communities". These "cognitive processes in memory operate on specific cognitive structures usually called (mental) representations" (VAN DIJK, 2016, p. 5), and they can be stored, changed, activated or deactivated. Therefore, we have different types of mental representations, such as knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, plans, ideologies, thoughts, etc. Both the cognitive process and mental representations "control all human action and interaction" (VAN DIJK, 2016, p. 5). Mental models are part of our personal cognition because they are subjective and personal, especially in "the way we perceive, understand or interpret our daily reality takes place through the construction or reconstruction (updating or modification) of such models" (VAN DIJK, 2000, p. 21), and these models guide the way we interpret everyday events.

2.1.1 Knowledge

As one of the components of the cognitive structure, it is in it that human

beings process all their thoughts, perceptions, understandings, actions, interaction and discourse, making this knowledge system cumulative throughout their lives and, as a result, this knowledge is shared with members of their community (VAN DIJK, 2015b). Socially shared knowledge is applied to people's mental models, which represent their own life experiences, concepts and interpretations of facts. Knowledge is processed through the exposure of news, stories, textbooks, speeches between parents and children and others.

2.1.2 Attitudes and Ideologies

Whereas knowledge is shared socially by everyone or a large part of a community or culture, attitudes and ideologies are shared with a specific group, in which a person or people relate to. Generally, they share the same ideas and beliefs about topics, such as immigration, abortion, LGBTQIA+, racism, among others. Both attitudes and ideologies can vary between what is good and bad, what is permitted and prohibited, as all of this will depend on the beliefs of the members of this community.

There is a polarization between the groups that can be either positive or negative. Everything will depend on the ideologies of a certain group and how they see each other. In ideological discourses are generally represented by the "US" group which maintains a positive representation to the detriment of the others. For the author, this polarization is characterized by the positive properties of "We" (the in-group), and the negative properties of "They" (the out-group). "At the same time, the negative properties of the in-group and the positive ones of the out-group are typically de-emphasized, toned down, mitigated, or simply ignored or hidden" (VAN DIJK, 2015a, p. 5). These opposing pairs will lead us to the analysis of variations in polarization structures, as there are many ways to emphasize and de-emphasize meanings, as well as the ideological bases found in discourse.

2.2 Social Component

The CDS (Critical Studies Studies) are interested in discourses of power abuse or domination as the dominant group dominates the public discourses since it is they who established the laws, commands and prohibitions, legitimating to determine who has the right to speak. It is important to emphasize that CDS are also relevant to citizens in general as they have the ability to learn and

be aware of the manipulations of the undue discourse of a ruling class. Thus, they can perceive what has happened around them, in terms of politics, culture and social issues and can have a mediating discourse in which social actors become aware of the consequences of their own discourse with responsibility for what is said.

2.3 Discursive Component

Despite understanding how cognitive and social components are important to CDS, it cannot be denied that discourse is the main core of essential discourse analysts. Discourse analysis is not limited to the analysis of discourse structures, but beyond that, the cognitive components also have an important role, since, for the discourse analysis to occur, it is considered the role that knowledge, as attitudes and as ideologies exert in a discursive domination.

3 The Ideological Discourse Structure

Bearing in mind that discourse analysis is specifically involved in power (re)production or power abuse and that this is in synchronization with the relationships between social groups and organizations that maintain their ideologies to dominate a particular group, the structure of ideology is categorized into a) polarization: affects every level of discourse, since these are underlying ideologies, which are polarized between a positive representation of members of one group (in-group) and a negative representation of members of another group (out-group); b) pronouns: the pronouns "we", "us", "our", symbolize the in-group, in which its members and peers share the same ideology. In the opposite direction, we have the out-group, which is represented by the pronouns "they", "their", "theirs", which represents the dominated group, competitor or even the resistance group to the in-group. The use of these pronouns expresses the polarization that exists between these groups, the WE vs. the THEY; c) emphasis on positive self-descriptions and other negative descriptions: Van Dijk (2015b, p. 73) points out that "ideologies are often organized by a positive self-schema", depending on the influence of in-group or out-group polarization, we can observe that the in-group describes itself in a positive way; d) norms and values: refer to ideologies based on norms of (good) manners or on the values we fight for, such as, example, equality, justice, freedom, among others.

4 Method

It was a qualitative, cross-sectional and analytical research using primary data. The research was conducted in three English language institutions in the Metropolitan Region of Recife and the interviewees' names remained anonymous which is why fictitious names have been used. Considering a multidisciplinary methodology, data was interpreted following the socio-cognitive analysis proposed by Van Dijk (2000). For data collection, a voice recorder was used with two interviewees; with the others, a video interview was recorded through the Google Meet platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however the same interview script was used in both situations. The study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the Catholic University of Pernambuco (UNICAP) and was approved on March 04th 2020, with the Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appreciation (Certificado de Apresentação para Apreciação Ética - CAAE) number 29242620.80000.5206. After its approval, all respondents signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and we put into practice the semi-direct interview.

We interviewed nine Brazilian teachers who teach English as a second language, three from each institution. As it is a language school, teachers have different education backgrounds, as there is no requirement from language schools that the teachers should hold a BA in Languages in order to be hired.

Aiming to analyze the Brazilian EFL teachers discourse and the operation of their mental representations, we chose to collect data through a semi-open interview in order to make the interviewees more comfortable so that we could extract as much information as possible to understand why the fascination for North American culture and the English language and how the mental models have been processed to Brazilian teachers who were and have been exposed to them over the years. It is necessary to explore the questions that guided the interview in order to understand what was intended to be investigated through them.

Table 1 – Guided questions used in the interview with the Brazilian EFL teachers

Questions	Sociocognitive Discourse Analysis
1. What is your perception of American culture and its language?	Establish the context to understand the respondent's beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and perceptions about the other's culture.
2. What American products do you consume the most?	Identify the exposure that fosters an individual's mental models.
3. Do you believe you have American habits for consuming products from the U.S.?	Shape beliefs and attitudes.
4. Do you think that the U.S. is a model country to be followed by other countries?	Understand how U.S. ideology and hegemony influence their worldview through discursive ideological semantics.
5. Have you ever lived in the U.S.? What is your opinion about the place where you lived and the American way of life?	Share experiences, social practices and the mental models to which they were exposed to.
6. How did you feel when you realized you were returning to Brazil?	Evaluate polarization; mental models through feelings; ideological semantics.
7. What are the moments in your daily life in the U.S. that you miss the most?	Mental models; polarization of groups; ideological semantics.
8. What is your perception of Brazilian culture and Portuguese language?	Analyze beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of their own culture.
9. Do you consume Brazilian products? What are the Brazilian products that you consume the most?	Analyze the group polarization.
10. Why did you decide to become an English teacher? Do you intend to continue in this area for long term?	Verify whether the power of American ideology and hegemony influenced the choice to be an English teacher.
11. How do you deal with American and Brazilian cultural issues during your classes?	Analyze the teacher's discourse in the classroom when both cultures are compared by students.

Source: ASSIS(2020).

Not all of the teachers participating in this interview had the experience of living in or visiting the United States, so the questions 5, 6 and 7 were modified in the following ways: 5) What do you imagine the experience of living in or visiting the U.S. would be like? 6) How does it feel to know that you haven't lived or visited the U.S. yet? 7) What do you think would be different in daily life in the U.S. and in Brazil?

5 Corpus Analysis

Context analysis was the first element to be established as criteria to devise the questions, so that we can draw a profile of these teachers, as well as their knowledge, beliefs and perception on the subject. As a consequence, we have some statements:

Roberto - *I am passionate about American culture. [...] for me, American culture is something fascinating like ... I'm a person like ... who is passionate about American culture.*

Luiz - *[...] I don't know if it is influenced by the idea of an evolved country that Brazil is not at this level yet, but I see that the North American culture is still predominant in all the actions that Brazilians do.*

Maria - *[...] I think American culture is very related to... music, music videos, lyrics... so I think if I had to summarize the connection between the English language and American culture, it would be more in the matter of music. Of course, we can't help but... dismiss... series and movies, especially movies, I would say, because movies have the Hollywood thing [...].*

We can see that these teachers share knowledge and beliefs, because they are also exposed to the same types of media such as movies, series, music, and so on. In addition to that, the teachers think that the English language is mandatory or a requirement because they have listened to this speech regularly. According to Pennycook (1994, p. 9):

By and large, the spread of English is considered to be natural, neutral and beneficial. It is considered natural because, although there may be some critical reference to the colonial imposition of English, its subsequent expansion is seen as a result of inevitable global forces. It is seen as neutral because it is assumed that once English has in some sense become detached from its original cultural contexts (particularly England and America), it is now a neutral and transparent medium of communication.

Furthermore, it is common to get closer to members of a community who

share the same knowledge, interests and beliefs towards a particular issue. According to Van Dijk (2000, p. 13), "people not only have personal beliefs about personal experiences, but also share more general beliefs with others, such as other members of the same group, or even with most others in a whole society or culture". Therefore, we notice that these beliefs still remain at the present day, since research carried out by other authors, such as Moita Lopes (2003), in the 90s, and Cox and Assis-Peterson (2001), in the 2000s, for example, did not show any changes from teachers' discourse back then.

Our participants' mental models were and keep being built, mainly, through the means of communication and entertainment that we have today, such as streaming services, music, movies, among others. Participants cite how they connect with the American language and culture, as we can see below:

Patrícia - *Movies, for sure, movies, series, the vast majority of what I see is from there. I like it. That's what I grew up watching.*

Igor - *Like, my music streaming subscription is American, my video streaming subscription is American... It's... like it or not, a lot of the stuff I put in my house is American brands and even food that is becoming more popular in Brazil.*

Luiz - *The fact that I consume a lot of American music, I find myself speaking American slangs and, for example, when buying clothes from American brands, whether you like it or not, you imagine yourself wearing the American look, for example. I don't think I see myself as an American now, but I have behavior and habits that came from there.*

Roberto - *I listen to music every day, American music, English music, much more than international music, to be quite honest.*

It is unanimous that these teachers consume the products, not only entertainment, but also food, from North America. Although when asked about the consumption of Brazilian products, they said that they consume a lot. During the interview, they eventually claim that the consumption of North American products stands out over Brazilian products. And it is such a natural consumption that a participant did not even consider international music, music from North American or England.

We can also see that during this question number 2, we have already observed evidence of group polarization, once again, bearing in mind that this polarization is done in an inverse way, from what is proposed by Van Dijk's theory, since THEM, here, are better than US, as we can see in this speech:

Roberto - *[...] All my money I managed to save for a trip, I want to go to the U.S.*

because it's where I know that people understand me. When they understand me, when I speak and people praise me: "wow... your English is very good"; "you don't even sound like a Brazilian", that gives me more desire to keep coming back. It's something I love.

In addition, they identify themselves as Americans, not only because of their perfect emulation of the English language, but also because they believe they have American habits:

Roberto - *Certainly. No doubt. I grew up playing basketball, right? Well, something that is strong in the U.S., right?*

José - *No doubt, no doubt. Including eating habits.*

Carina - *If you imagine a person who has spent their whole life growing up and watching American series and American movies, whether they want to or not, consciously or not, they end up importing a little bit of that culture, that behavior for what they do. So, I think so.*

João - *I've always been, or I've always thought myself, very Americanized, because as I learned English on my own, my... My language source was from series, mainly Friends and American music.*

It is interesting to notice that the cultural identity is cancelled, apparently, as they begin to believe that acting as the THEM group would be the most correct way, as we can see in this excerpt:

Carina - *Another thing that really upset me when I got back was... in a way, the culture shock. How people relate. There, people are much more polite and... yeah... people respect the individual space more, physically, nobody gets that close to each other. You don't talk close to another person. Nobody is touching you all the time and, here in Brazil, we know that this is very different (laughs). Here everyone hugs, kisses when talking, touches each other and I used to be like that. I'm not saying I wasn't, but after spending some time in the States, I just kind of changed my habit and I saw that some things make more sense... personally, I thought some things make more sense because, here in Recife, for example, you're introduced to a stranger and you kiss that person twice on the cheek... as a normal way of greeting and it's very strange that you're kissing a strange person who you've never seen in your whole life (laughs). So, for me, nowadays, a handshake makes more sense. I don't know who this person is, got it? So, like, a few things I took from there and held it with me.*

Not being identified as Brazilian is like an achievement, a victory, a triumph, a way to evolve into the group of the other. It is to feel integrated into the desired group. However, according to Moita Lopes (2003, p. 43, our translation), "such an attitude of perfect imitation is the first symptom of alienation to

be detected, since it is a total identification with the "other", with the consequent abandonment of their own cultural identity"⁷, and this type of discourse in the classroom can foster students' beliefs that the U.S. is a perfect model of culture to be followed and despise their own culture.

We believe that we, as educators, should understand our political and social role, to awaken in the student a critical awareness of their surroundings, in order to transform them into a reflective citizen and to avoid fostering cultural alienation that will not prompt any reflection. On the contrary, it would just be the continuation of the same beliefs that were and/or are instilled up to now, as we can observe in this teacher's speech:

Roberto - *I always tell my students that the more you know the language, the better you will be treated. Yeah... People don't have a lot of patience these days and the more effective, the faster you are in your communication... I think you'll be much more welcomed, you'll get a little more attention, and I think that, through the language, I made it.*

Here, the teacher wants to emphasize with "the more you know the language", not only in the sense of communicating with accuracy and fluency, but speaking like native speakers once we asked about what it would be like to "be treated better". It was because, in his conception, he did not sound like a Brazilian, but like an English native speaker.

It is noteworthy that mental models are not only composed by media exposure, but also experiences. It is because of them that we also develop our opinions and interpretations about events. Some of our interviewees had personal experiences when they lived in the U.S. and their opinions and interpretations of what it is to be an American citizen are connected to more positive aspects than negative aspects. We were able to attest it, analyzing the following speeches:

Maria - *In the suburbs, it's quieter. Traffic is very quiet. What I have experienced is a very good quality of life, very peaceful and much safer than here.*

Simone - *So, the notion of civility is very strong there. Another interesting thing about the American people is the notion of citizenship. They know... The vast majority of Americans may not know the law, the law itself, but they are very aware of their role as citizens. So, they have a very strong sense of community, you know?*

Comparisons are made using their own country of origin, Brazil, as a reference. Once more, the comparison of a better civilization, of educated and honest

7 Original: "tal atitude de imitação perfeita é o primeirosintoma de alienação a se detectar, já que se trata de uma identificação total com o "outro", como consequente abandono de sua própria identidade cultural" (MOITA LOPES, 2003, p. 43).

people is questioned and, of course, Brazilians are classified as inferior people, not as civilized as the North Americans. This is one of the factors that makes these teachers feel nostalgic for the time they lived in or visited the U.S. as it follows in some fragments of the speech:

Patrícia - *Back in time when I was there... What I thought was really cool that I don't see here, in Brazil, in particular, is the patriotism. I think this is strong for them and I think it's beautiful.*

José - *People's politeness. There, people are much more... umm... cordial. [...] It is very complicated to live in this country with people who cannot realize that they are responsible for their own well-being and the others. Something that in the U.S. you can.*

Maria - *[Opinion regarding the self-checkout service in Brazil] ... of honesty. I think people will take advantage of it. I don't know... they can scan the barcodes of the entire shopping and don't scan a package of sugar. I think people are so opportunistic. There's no education, no maturity for this kind of service.*

As we can see, the words "honest", "cordial" and "civility" were chosen to classify who belongs to the positive group and the words "no maturity", "no education" and "opportunistic" to the negative group. The selection of these words was not made in vain, as Voloshinov (2017, p. 181, our translation) points out, "the word is always full of content and ideological or everyday meaning"⁸. In Brazil, we can see how the political domination of the USA is strong. Having the USA, once again as a reference, the polarization happens in reverse, as the Brazilian puts himself in the role of a mutt as the 'mutt complex' (Rodrigues, 1993) mentioned previously.

The teachers hesitated in choosing some words, still they ended up choosing words that bring negative meanings to classify or identify Brazilian people. On the other hand, the words used to refer to the American people are totally the opposite. Van Dijk (2000, p. 45) makes a broader analysis of the meanings of words, in the discursive ideological semantic field, when he points out that "[...] ideological 'content' is most directly expressed in discourse meaning". In other words, meaning changes according to the context.

One of the aspects of meaning is characterized by contrast. We can observe it when the interviewed use words such as "polite", "civilized", "friendly", as a way of attributing positive aspects to North Americans and, on the other hand, use negative words, such as "rude", "not mature", among others, as a way to po-

8 Original: "a palavra está sempre repleta de conteúdo e de significação ideológica ou cotidiana" (VOLOSHINOV, 2017, p. 181).

larize these two groups. It was interesting to observe that at the same time that the teachers used these words to classify Brazilians, when they were asked to answer questions 8 and 9, they completely changed the discourse and started using positive words to classify Brazilians, such as an apparent denial of what was said in the previous questions. This is what Van Dijk (2000) classifies as disclaimers, another aspect of ideological semantic proportion. According to Van Dijk (2000, p. 50), "the negation in such a case primarily serves as a form of positive self-presentation, of face keeping", because they do not want the recipients to think negatively about them mainly because it is their country of origin. As we can see in the following speeches:

Patrícia - *I will not be able to say bad things about my country. [...] The Brazilian is... is seen as a warm person, lovely... a person who is... receptive, welcoming. We have this reputation as "good people". Brazilians are seen as "good people".*

Carlos - *I think it's wonderful. I think the plurality of accents of the same language, in the same country, is amazing for being so big, and I think the Brazilian culture is amazing, wonderful, especially in Pernambuco.*

We do not want to say here that they do not like their language and their culture. However, it was interesting to hear them throughout the interview and realize that their opinions about Brazil sounded more like a way of appeasing what had been said before. Thus, the exaltation of the THEM group does not stand out. Likewise, it happened with the Portuguese language. It was always connected to traditional teaching methods and few teachers highlighted the language's beauty, as we can see in the following fragments:

Carina - *[...] regarding the language... I have to confess that I was never good at Portuguese [grammar] (laughs). It's not an easy language. I don't think it's an easy language. Today, I think I speak Portuguese because I was born here. I believe that if I hadn't been born here, I wouldn't be able to learn it. I'm being very honest. [...] So, if I compare one language with another, I see English much, much simpler than Portuguese.*

Luiz - *I think the Portuguese language is a very difficult language to learn because it has infinite conjugations.*

José - *So, I graduated in Language, right? I can teach Portuguese, English and Literature, but I never really liked it. I think Brazilian Portuguese grammar is very... rigid formulas, you know? We have to memorize many names, memorize variations that, in real life, in everyday life, we don't use. So, I never liked this formality process.*

Igor - So, it has the boring aspect of it, the grammar thing, deciphering that sentence piece by piece [...]

The feeling that is being highlighted in the interviewees' speeches now expresses their emotions for having had the experience of living in the USA or for thinking about visiting this country one day. As Van Dijk (2016, p. 7) claims "mental models are individual, personal, subjective and multimodal. They not only subjectively represent a situation or an event, but also opinions and emotions, and partly in terms of vision, sounds, gestures, motor movements, etc."

Carina - Ahm... (sighs) Let's see. [...] (a deep sigh that shows how much she misses it).

Igor - Umm... I think it would be a very rich experience, because, as I said, I'm a visual person. Everything is lit up, shines and it is big, right? (Referring to Times Square) They catch our attention. So, I think my senses would be very happy (laughs) with this visit.

João - Ah... extremely upset, you know? (laughs). Coming back from a trip is always toooo hard.

Carlos - So, but I really wanted Brazilian neighborhoods to be like the American neighborhood style, you know, like, everything was in its own place. [...] So, it's the way they have built their areas. It's utopia. It will never happen (laughs). I miss organized neighborhoods.

Maria - [...] Although the situation there is not so good, I think you can work. Work and live in a dignified manner. That's what it looks like to me.

In these discourses, we can analyze some teachers' experience of having lived there and the expectation of visiting the country one day by others. For those who lived in the USA, their good memories make the registered mental models reinforce the positive experience in the other's land. Likewise, it happens to those who have not yet experienced a visit to the country, as they keep alive, emotionally speaking, the expectation of experiencing what is presented on TV screens, through movies, series, etc.

The hegemonic cycle of the USA continues going from generation to generation, because, without realizing it, these teachers end up recommending, as a way of improving the language, to continue watching North American streaming services, available on the market (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV and Disney +), American songs, trips to the U.S., among others and reinforce the mental representation. However, there is still no critical reflection on why English contin-

ues to be heavily studied and why the North American culture still dominates in Brazil.

When we asked our interviewees about how they deal with the speeches that the U.S. is better than Brazil in the classroom, we got different answers, but few teachers proposed a reflection on U.S. hegemony in Brazil and some were just attempting:

Simone - *My English is totally American and, having had this experience in the United States, I can bring much more of the North American culture to the classroom, if we compare, for example, with the British culture, which is normally contrast to American English, right?*

Maria - *They really show that... out there it's very different from here. Even though they are mostly from the upper class. When they're abroad, they manage to enjoy it much more and this was something that I learned from my students, to work more, save more money, and when possible, to have my own travel experience so that I can also experience this. It made a difference in my life.*

Igor - *They will always bring, either because of their age group or their own experience, an example of a trip they did. It's impossible for them not to come back highlighting everything that was the best during their trip and why this trip is better, why there is better than here. And this reflects in so many other things, in exercises, for instance, when you say: "choose a country or choose a nationality", Brazil is never chosen in these activities. It rarely happens. And they always refer to the American universe, at most, they choose Canada, London. However, it's always the USA, New York, Los Angeles... They always talk about the USA.*

From these exposed fragments, we can see that they have no idea about the diplomatic agreement between Brazil and the U.S. and the existence of a Bureau in the 1940s of mass domination. Even if there is an attempt of reflection, it does not seem to be effective, since not all teachers of language schools have the same attitude towards the topic.

Conclusion

After analyzing the nine interviews, we can conclude how the effects of mental models were and are well established by the hegemonic power of the United States in Brazil. This North American presence is so strong and deeply-rooted in Brazilian culture that the consumption of North American products is something natural, and the continued consumption of these products main-

tains the beliefs, attitudes and knowledge shared by this group, who, without realizing it, transfers to another group without giving it a thorough thought. There is no critical reflection.

Most of the time, when this topic is mentioned in the classroom, they just point out their perspectives and continue the class without questioning why Brazilian students have to study the English language and the exacerbated consumption of American entertainment. We can see, in the teachers' practices and in their speeches, that the focus is on communicating and entertaining without critical reflection or emphasis.

We believe that perhaps there is not a concrete order from the school director that teachers cannot debate this issue, but we also noticed, through the interviews, that not all teachers feel comfortable in discussing this issue. So, what could be done to resolve it? Our proposal is: to bring light to the Brazilian history of the diplomatic agreement and the strategy established by the U.S. in the country, which used entertainment as power domination and mind control; to expand this discussion in language schools, returning this research work to the Brazilian EFL teachers community, so that these professionals can comprehend that many of the constructions of their discourse are connected to the constructed mental models; to break the cycle of beliefs that what comes from abroad is always the best and to start to value what Brazil can offer.

Of course, it is noteworthy that our intention is not to develop in Brazilian teachers a xenophobic and nationalist feeling, since there is richness in all cultures. All are welcome when there is respect. An interculturality among nations and sharing different cultures bring a sense of tolerance to cultural diversity, develops and expands our knowledge.

Therefore, we believe that this subject should be present in conferences and in congresses in language teaching in the country, and not just stick to discussions in the academic world, in order to raise awareness among professionals in this area. We know that we will not resolve this issue overnight, but we understand that these critical reflections need to be made more accessible to all so that we can move towards meaningful change and not become hostages to just one cultural domination.

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