

The Slaughter of Kachru's Five Sacred Cows in Brazil: Affordances of the Use of English as an International Language

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Abstract

This paper reflects about a change in paradigm regarding the role of English in Brazil relating it to Kachru's notion of the slaughter of the five sacred cows of English. So as to foreground this reflection the study reviews the role of English materialized in language policies in Brazil suggesting that there is a gap between people's views of and language policies regarding the role of English in that country. The analysis of language policies in Brazil also suggests that English is seen as a foreign language on the one hand, in public schools, and as an international language on the other hand, in private language institutes. Based on the analysis of language policies in Brazil the study suggests that these two divergent views of English create a social divide between those who can afford to learn English and those who cannot. The study concludes that one possible way to slaughter Kachru's five sacred cows of English in Brazil so as to enable the change of paradigm regarding the role of English in that country is to adopt a view of English as an international language.

Keywords

English as an international language, language policies, Brazil

1. Introduction

The English language has acquired many different names and adjectives which include but are not limited to: international language (Cain, 2008; Erling, 2005; McArthur, 2004; McKay, 2002); international language of social inclusion (Finardi, Prebianca & Momm, 2013); lingua franca (El Kadri & Gimenez, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2001; Schmitz, 2012); world or global language (Graddol, 2006; Rajagopalan, 2010); academic language (Mauranen & Ranta, 2008); language of imperialism (Kumaravadivelo, 2006); minor English (Zaidan, 2013) and the most spoken and studied language worldwide (Kramersch, 2014) (Note 1). Though these studies are relevant for pointing out some of the implications of adopting a certain view of English, they say little about how these views are materialized in different contexts. So as to fill in this gap, the present study aims at reflecting about how these different roles of English are materialized in Brazil.

Much has been said about the spread of English and its implications (e.g., Cain, 2008; Graddol, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; McKay, 2003) in a world where non-native speakers of English are said to outnumber

native speakers by double (Kachru, 1996), triple (Pakir, 1999 cited in Cain, 2008), or quadruple (Kachru, 1996) depending on the source of statistics. If the spread of English continues as projected (Graddol, 2006), language policy makers, implementers and critical users must consider the implications of using, teaching and learning this language in a variety of local and global contexts.

Although some efforts have been made in this direction in the applied linguistics literature worldwide (e.g., Kachru, 1996; Rajagopalan, 2010) and in Brazil (e.g., Finardi & Ferrari, 2008; Zaidan, 2013), the transfer of this reflection to English language teaching, use and policies in Brazil (e.g., Finardi & Ferrari, 2008; Finardi & Prebianca, in press) and elsewhere (Bhatt, 2001; Cain, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Kachru, 1996; McKay, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2001) falls short of its expectations.

So as to offer a glimpse of how different views of English are interpreted in a given context this study reports on language policies concerning the role of the English language in Brazil trying to relate them to a change in paradigm proposed by Kachru's (1996) notion of the slaughter of the five sacred cows of English, namely: the acquisitional cow, the theoretical cow, the pedagogical cow, the sociolinguistic cow, and the ideological cow.

In Kachru's (1996) view, sacrificing the acquisitional cow implies the critical reflection on the ownership of the English language by native speakers which in turn relates to concepts frequently associated with this ownership such as the notion of interference errors, the notion of interlanguage (Selinker, 1972) and the notion of fossilization. The notion of interference errors considers the native speaker's language as a yardstick against which to judge errors in the target language; the notion of interlanguage also considers the native speaker's language as the target towards which the non-native speaker's language should move in an endless effort to become a developed language system. Finally, the notion of fossilization refers to a non-native speaker's lack of capacity to notice and or correct errors in the target language or interlanguage. The notions of target language (the language of native speakers) and interlanguage (the language of non-native speakers) are examples of the view of English as being owned by native speakers.

The theoretical cow is related to the acquisitional cow but expands it by inviting language policy makers, users and implementers to review the notion of native speaker as well as the view of English as a foreign, second or international language. In that sense and so as to use a neutral and all encompassing term in reference to English in this study the term additional language (hereafter L2) will be used to refer to any language acquired or learned after the first language (L1). By adopting the terms first and additional language we are beginning to slaughter the acquisitional and theoretical cows by avoiding the use of terms such as native, foreign and or second language.

The slaughter of the pedagogical cow, as the name suggests, is more related to pedagogical implications of material designers' and teachers' reflection and action regarding the use of English. These implications and reflections imply the critical use of methods and materials that consider both global and local contexts. Thus, slaughtering the pedagogical cow means preparing, selecting and using teaching materials in a critical way.

The slaughter of the sociolinguistic cow depends on the slaughter of the acquisitional and theoretical cows with their notions of native speaker and second or foreign language users and assumes the acknowledgement of new Englishes and owners in relation to the use of the language rather than to the context where the language is learned or acquired. In that sense, this paper suggests that the adoption of the view of English as an international language not owned by native speakers is a move towards this direction.

Finally the slaughter of the ideological cow implies fighting against the symbolic and hegemonic power of English. This fight involves the critical use of the language materialized in propositions of positive applications of the power of English such as the construction of social capital (Finardi, Prebianca, & Momm, 2013).

While the global spread of English may bring about a positive effect on global communication, it may also work as a form of social exclusion for those who cannot afford to learn it locally (Finardi, Prebianca & Momm, 2013), thus constituting a form of linguistic imperialism as described by Phillipson (1992) and later on by Kumaravadivelo (2006). Though the proposal of linguistic imperialism has served to establish the discipline of Critical Applied Linguistics, it has done little more than monitor the spread of English counteracting some of its negative side effects (Cain, 2008; Finardi & Porcino, 2014). One reason for this is that theory does not always walk hand in hand with practice (Finardi & Dalvi, 2012) nor does it reach classes with the same speed and depth as it reaches the academia (Finardi & Prebianca, in press). Another reason is that teachers' beliefs seem to have a stronger hold on their practice than the theory they access during their education (Finardi & Dalvi, 2013).

So as to reflect about the implications of different views of English in Brazil and how these views relate to Kachru's notion of the slaughter of the five sacred cows of English in a given context, the next section will offer a brief contextualization of language use in Brazil and then review language policies regarding the use and teaching of additional languages in that country to suggest that Brazil is not by chance one of the world's top countries for cattle raising and has yet many cows to slaughter in the way to use English (and other additional languages for that matter) in a more critical way.

2. Language Context in Brazil

Although some foreigners outside Latin America may think that Brazilians speak Spanish, there is only one official language in Brazil, namely, Portuguese, which is also the only language that most Brazilians speak. The geographical and linguistic situation of Brazil is that of a country physically surrounded by Spanish speakers and economically pressed by the need to learn English as an international language (Note 2) but that nevertheless continues linguistically isolated by the almost exclusive use of Portuguese. Despite the pressure to learn Spanish or English as additional languages (Note 3) in that country, language policies in Brazil view all languages except Portuguese as foreign languages (Note 4) and determine that schools should offer at least one foreign language from 5th grade

on. As it is, the educational law guarantees the teaching of one foreign language in schools though the decision of which language should be offered and how this language should be taught is made by the school community.

A superficial analysis of this language policy may give the idea that Brazilians are very democratic in terms of language choice, yet, there are more than 200 minority languages in Brazil that hardly stand a chance of being taught as a foreign language given the pressure to include English first and Spanish second in the linguistic repertoire in schools. What is more critical is that though Brazilians fear the spread of English as an international language resisting this trend as they can (Note 5), they do not seem to be aware of the implications of having only one national language recognized and taught, threatening hundreds of minority languages by the use of Portuguese as the only national language.

In this scenario and in line with Leffa (2013), we suggest that it is important to fight against the linguistic isolation, omission and discrimination of minority languages in Brazil while also learning majority languages such as English (as an international language) and Spanish (the language of our neighbors). In that sense, it is important to reflect about and propose language policies that guarantee the survival, understanding and tolerance of all languages, including those charged with negative ideological connotations such as is the case of English in Brazil, seen as a hegemonic language that threatens Portuguese. This study represents an attempt to do that by analyzing the view of English materialized in language policies in Brazil and against the backdrop of the notion of the slaughter of Kachru's five sacred cows. With that aim and in what follows the study reviews linguistic policies concerning the use and teaching of English as an additional language in Brazil.

3. The View of English in Language Policies in Brazil

Lagares (2013) and Rajagopalan (2006) claim that language education is clearly a political matter once methodological and theoretical issues that affect language teaching and use are decided by language planners (and in some cases such as in Brazil by politicians who are not linguists) outside the classrooms. In Brazil and by way of example, the idea that all languages but Portuguese are "foreign" represents one such issue which is prescribed and declared in the National Law of Education (Note 6).

The Brazilian national orientations (Note 7) and parameters (Note 8) for foreign language teaching are subjected to the national law of education and prescribe that one foreign language should integrate the mandatory curriculum of schools. Moreover, these documents suggest that the role of foreign languages is to allow Brazilians to learn about other cultures (mainly through the reading of texts in the target language) and suggests that the teaching of foreign languages focuses mainly on the development of the reading skill.

Though these documents predict the inclusion of one foreign language in the curriculum, Lagares (2013, p. 185) claims that the teaching of foreign languages in Brazil has been treated as an extracurricular component following the general belief that nobody learns a foreign language well at school. This belief affects language policies to a point that the teaching of foreign languages has been

delegated to private language institutes that abound in that country and that are not regulated by national educational laws. The belief that schools are not responsible for foreign language education has also created a gap between the public and private sectors in Brazil where we have, on the one hand, public schools (which are non-profit) choosing foreign languages other than English to be included in the curriculum and which are taught following national educational guidelines and mainly focus on reading, and the private sector (through for-profit private language institutes) which offers mostly English as a foreign language classes without any control from educational policies and only for those who can afford to pay for these courses. While the teaching of foreign languages focuses mainly on the reading skill in regular schools which have to follow national educational guidelines, in private language institutes where classes are smaller and separated by language proficiency level the focus is more on the development of oral skills, specially speaking.

The belief that it is not possible to learn to speak foreign languages well at school is also corroborated by authors (e.g., Tilio, in press, cited in Nicolaides & Tilio, 2013, p. 294) who claim that just as schools do not have the responsibility to form mathematicians, historians or physicists, to give some examples, they do not have to form proficient foreign language speakers. This view is also materialized in the prescription made by linguistic policies in Brazil regarding foreign language teaching to concentrate on the development of reading skills.

Gimenez (2009, cited in Maciel, 2013, p. 238) claims that there are two parallel worlds in Brazil: the world of language policies and that of language classes. Regardless of the role of schools (and private language institutes) concerning foreign language education and training, language policies must be reflected upon and taken into consideration once they affect language education, training and use. One example of this is seen in the number of scientific publications in Brazil. The Brazilian academic production is robust and so as to write scientific papers Brazilians have to read many publications in English. Yet, most of the Brazilian scientific production is in Portuguese showing that Brazilians can read but not write in English.

Regarding the role of English speaking in Brazil, Gimenez (2013, p. 202) reports on a survey of Brazilians' proficiency in English which places Brazil in 46th position in a ranking of 54 countries and which claim that only about 5% of Brazilians speak English fluently. Despite these statistics and strengthened by globalization and the 2014 World Cup, Brazilians view English as an international language which they want and need to speak fluently as is shown in the number of private language institutes that offer English classes in Brazil. Yet, language policies in Brazil do not recognize the status of English as an international language nor the role of schools in guaranteeing this language education and training thus creating a social gap between those who can afford to learn English as an international language and those who cannot.

Learning English as an international language entails the development of both receptive and productive skills so as to equip language learners to access and produce information to exercise a local and global citizenship. Moreover, learning English as an international language requires a paradigm change in

Brazil to move from the view of English as a foreign language which can (or not) be taught at school and mainly for reading to a view of English as a mandatory component in the school curriculum so that all Brazilians have the right to learn it. So as to achieve this goal, language policies must be revised in Brazil.

Policies that are not supported by people's beliefs can have serious social consequences as became evident in the protests outbreak that initiated in Brazil in June 2013 with the Free Pass Movement for improvements in public transport and that extended to protests for improvement of all public services. One such consequence in the case of language policies in Brazil is the gap between those who can and those who cannot afford to learn English fluently creating a social divide. The right to receive language education is guaranteed by articles 23 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Rights though the right to learn English as an international language in schools in Brazil is not always guaranteed given the legal prescription that English has the same status as any other foreign language and as such, may or may not be offered in schools and also the belief that the spread of English may threaten the national language—Portuguese or other non-dominant foreign languages.

Whereas language policies consider English a foreign language which can (or not) be offered with a minimum number of hours in schools and mostly for reading, the population seems to be divided between two conflicting views of English in Brazil. One of these views is that of English as a dominant and colonizing language that must be resisted because it threatens the national language and other foreign or minority languages and the other is that of English as an international language that must be learned if one can afford to pay for private language courses.

This gap regarding the view of English is also found in the academia where some Brazilian educators and linguists view English as a language of social inclusion for the possibilities it offers in terms of access to information and construction of social capital (Note 9) (e.g., Finardi, Prebianca & Momm, 2013) while others (e.g., Maciel, 2013; Rojo, 2013) suggest that English is associated with negative forces of globalization that strengthen capitalism and language colonization.

So as to offer a peace treaty between these opposing views of English in Brazil I propose that we return now to Kachru's cows to suggest that the solution to these conflicting views of English in Brazil lies in the critical use and teaching of English as an additional language in that country which in turn assumes the slaughter of Kachru's five sacred cows. In a country where beef barbecue disputes with rice and beans the national preference, the next section proposes locally contextualized slaughter techniques for these cows.

4. The Slaughter of the Sacred Cows in Brazil

Recall that Kachru (1996) proposes a change in paradigm by the slaughter of the five sacred cows of English, namely: the acquisitional cow, the theoretical cow, the pedagogical cow, the sociolinguistic cow, and the ideological cow. This study aimed at reflecting about this possible change of paradigm in Brazil. With that aim the present study described the language context in that country and now attempts

to relate it to Kachru's invitation to slaughter the cows.

Regarding the slaughter of the acquisitional cow with its notions of interference errors, interlanguage system and fossilization I propose that this can be achieved in Brazil by the adoption of the view of English as an international language which has no native speakers and so no L1 against which to judge errors and language proficiency eliminating with this view the notion of interference errors, interlanguage system and fossilization as well as the notions of target language and the ownership of English by native speakers. Moreover, I suggest that the view of English as an international language may serve to kill all of the sacred cows of English in Brazil by eliminating these concepts and notions and by linking, instead, the English language to its function of communicative tool rather than to its role of dominant language associated with target cultures and models of native speakers.

Recall that the slaughter of the theoretical cow implied the review of the notion of native speaker which can also be achieved in Brazil by the adoption of the view of English as an international language since, as previously mentioned, the adoption of this view kills the notion of native speaker together with its theoretical underpinnings. The international language having no native speakers solves this acquisitional and theoretical dilemma.

The slaughter of the pedagogical cow was related to the critical use of methods and materials that considers the use of English in both global and local contexts and that can also be achieved by the adoption of the view of English as an international language which is spoken by more non-native speakers than by native speakers. In Brazil this sacrifice would imply the selection of methods and materials that prepare students to use English in national and transnational contexts with native and probably more non-native speakers of that language.

The slaughter of the sociolinguistic cow entails the acknowledgement of new varieties of English which in turn can also be achieved in Brazil by the adoption of the view of English as an international language learned and used in relation to its function rather than to its proximity or distance to a target language. In this scenario we could think of Brazilian English as just another variety of English or as an international language.

Finally the sacrifice of the ideological cow implies fighting against the ideological and symbolic power of English encouraging positive applications of its power such as the construction of social capital (Finardi, Prebianca, & Momm, 2013) and once more this can be achieved in Brazil by the adoption of the view of English as an international language for this view empowers Brazilian speakers of English by giving them a global voice and ears as well as the ownership of the language. By adopting the view of English as an international language which must be learned to access and produce information globally, Brazilians may fight the hegemonic power of English by including their voice and pens in global discourses and discussions.

If people's beliefs and language policies in Brazil were aligned and adopted the view of English as an international language these sacred cows of English would be eliminated from language education and use in that country. Moreover, without these cows, language education could guarantee the right of

Brazilians to learn English fluently in schools so as to access and produce information both globally and locally, thus fostering the construction of social capital and a global citizenship.

5. Conclusion

This study was motivated by the belief that a change in paradigm regarding the role of English in Brazil was necessary. The study was also based on the assumption that Kachru's notion of the slaughter of the five sacred cows of English applied to global and local contexts could be used as a backdrop against which to reflect about possibilities of eliminating these cows in Brazil. So as to foreground this reflection the study reviewed the role of English materialized in language policies in Brazil suggesting that there is a gap between popular aims and policies in that country. Moreover, the study suggested that the view of English as a foreign language on the one hand, in public schools and the view of English as an international language on the other hand, in private language institutes in Brazil creates a social divide between those who can afford to exercise their right to learn English and those who cannot.

Finally, the study concluded that one possible way to slaughter the five sacred cows of English in Brazil is to adopt a view of English as an international language which has no native speakers or target culture and as such, can be appropriated and used by Brazilians as a communication and empowerment tool to exercise a global citizenship without threatening their identity or the role of their national language other additional languages there.

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Notes

- Note 1. For a complete and current review of these terms see Jordão (2014).
- Note 2. Social capital is defined by Warschauer (2003) as the individual's capacity to generate benefits for them or their communities through their social relations.
- Note 3. The term international language is used here to refer to a language spoken both by native and non-native speakers of that language in national, international and transnational contexts as a tool for communication and without any reference to the culture or country of its native speakers.
- Note 4. The term additional language is used here to refer to any language except the first and so as to avoid terms such as foreign or second language which refer to the context where the language is learned and/or used.
- Note 5. The term foreign language refers to a language learned in a context where it is not spoken entailing a geographical and ideological distance between the language spoken and learned in a particular community.
- Note 6. Brazil is in the 13th position worldwide for scientific publications though the Brazilian

production is hardly read outside Brazil because it is written mainly in Portuguese (e.g., Finardi & França, in press).

Note 7. In Portuguese *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* (Brasil, 1996).

Note 8. In Portuguese *Orientações Curriculares Nacionais* (Brasil, 2006).

Note 9. In Portuguese the *Parametros Curriculares Nacionais* (Brasil, 1998).