

English in Brazil: Between Passive Acquiescence and Insurgent Chauvinism

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Rajagopalan, Kanavillil and Freitas, Alice Cunha de. 2002. English in Brazil: Between Passive Acquiescence and Insurgent Chauvinism. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 10(2), 85-110. The imperialist pretensions of the English language across the globe have increasingly been the focus of attention ever since the publication of such classics as Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994, 1998) and others. Whereas these early writers did issue a wake-up call to all those interested in the subject in one way or another, the larger picture they succeeded in portraying—whether or not they actually intended to do so—was one of utter helplessness in the face of a world-wide trend which had an inexorable internal purposiveness of its own and against which conventional deterrents seemed hopelessly inadequate. More recently, however, some scholars have looked at the same phenomenon from the standpoint of those on the periphery and pointed out ways and means by which resistance can be and often is offered under even the most trying of circumstances (Canagarajah, 1999). This paper is an attempt to take stock of the situation in Brazil. We claim that the situation of EFL is, as of now, one of stalemate: caught in the middle of contradictory trends and ambiguously poised between the extreme responses of total acquiescence and outright rejection of English.

Key words: English in Brazil, linguistic chauvinism, nationalism, globalization, resistance education

1. Nationalism and language: juxtaposing two evolving cases

In the U.S., a privately run organization called 'U.S. English,' founded in 1983 as an offshoot of the 'Federation for American

Immigration Reform,' has actively promoted the cause of the English language ever since its inception. Along with other similar organizations such as the Virginia-based 'English First' and the Texas-based 'American Ethnic Association,'—as well as more recent ones such as 'Pro English'—it has kept itself busy over the years recruiting more and more members committed to its cause, spreading its message and raising funds mainly through direct-mail advertising. The U.S English alone has some 1.4 million members. And their agenda includes, among other things, mounting pressure on the U.S. Government to declare English as the official language of the country, putting an end to bilingual education across the country and limiting the use of languages other than English to strictly private or domestic spheres. So far, they have had mixed results. Up until today, some 26 or so states have declared English their official language, but a campaign to get the same thing done at the federal level suffered a major set-back when the 104th Congress adjourned without any Senate action on H.R. 123. Also known as the 'English Language Empowerment Act of 1996', H.R. 123 had been sponsored by Rep. Bill Emerson (R-Mo) and had passed muster in the House by a respectable 259 to 169 margin.

In Brazil, a bill that goes by the name *Projeto de Lei n^o1676/1999*, sponsored by Federal Deputy Aldo Rebelo (PC do B, SP)¹⁾, has just recently gone practically unopposed through the lower house and is currently under examination in the Senate. A similar, copy-cat bill, *Projeto de Lei n^o65/2000*, by the State Deputy Jussara Cony, is under examination in the state legislative assembly of Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state of the Brazilian Federation. If, as, and when these bills are passed by the respective law-making bodies, Portuguese will be declared the official language of the country (which, incidentally, it already is) and tough penalties imposed on the use of all foreign languages as well as 'foreignisms'²⁾ while speaking or writing the

1) The initials stand for the Communist Party of Brazil (a rump, largely anachronistic, political party with negligible representation in the federal and state legislatures) and the State of São Paulo, the Deputy's home constituency, respectively.

vernacular. The federal law will, in addition, stipulate exactly 90 days as the period in which newspaper columnists, advertising agencies, text book writers, packaging industries, sign-board painters etc. will have in order to make the appropriate changes in accordance with the law, and a year as the period in which all foreign nationals residing in the country will be required to learn enough Portuguese to be able to use it at work and in all public places³⁾.

2. Similarities and dissimilarities between the two cases

There is quite a lot in common between the English-only movement in the U.S. and the Portuguese-only movement in Brazil. Both are supported by persons who claim to be prompted to act by the noblest of nationalist sentiments and are convinced that they are fighting to safeguard the integrity of their nation. That language and nationalism go hand in hand has been known for long. Buck saw it as early as 1916. In his own words,

Of all the institutions which mark a common nationality, language is the one of which a people is most conscious and to which it is most fanatically attached. It is the one conspicuous banner of nationality, to be defended against encroachment, as it is the first object of attack on the part of a power aiming to crush out a distinction of nationality among its subject peoples (Buck 1916; cited in Greenfield 1998, p. 635).

The supporters of their respective causes, both in the U.S. and in

2) By foreignisms is meant words of foreign origin, either in the form of straightforward borrowings or in their vernacularized forms i.e., adapted to the system of Portuguese in spelling and/or in pronunciation.

3) In the draft version of the bill originally presented by the Deputy, a fine of up to U.S. \$ 2,000 and 6,500 was stipulated as penalty for violation of the law by individuals and corporations. But the House of Deputies ruled that these matters were better decided by the committee in charge of implementing the law.

Brazil, cover an entire spectrum of political activism, and are impelled to act the way they do by mental states ranging from outright paranoia to sober commitment and calculation.

Understandably, both attempts, the one in the U.S. to declare English the official language of the country and the one in Brazil to force the government to declare Portuguese the country's official language, with little tolerance for the use of other languages, have met with stiff opposition from many quarters within their respective countries. "By and large," wrote Nunberg in 1989 when the U.S. English was just beginning to catch public attention, "the successes of the movement have been achieved without the support of establishment politicians and organizations." (Nunberg, 1989: 581). As a matter of fact, at the federal level at least there has been tremendous resistance to the English-only movement. On August 11, 2000, an Executive Order numbered 13166 was signed by the then President Bill Clinton and it bore the title 'Improving access to services for persons with limited English proficiency' and stated in unequivocal terms⁴⁾ that "[t]he Federal Government provides and funds an array of services that can be made accessible to otherwise eligible persons who are not proficient in the English language."

Likewise, in Brazil, there has been quite a hue and cry against the Rebelo bill, mostly from academics, especially linguists. Thus, the claim made by the 'U.S. English' that 'no one is for us but the people' (cited in Nunberg 1989) is, in large measure, equally true of Rebelo and his pro-Portuguese enthusiasts as well. As in the U.S. too, the proposed legislation has attracted a lot of attention from the readers of newspapers and popular magazines, with the 'Letters to the Editor' columns regularly receiving a barrage of spirited missives from perplexed readers, unable to understand why there should be so much opposition from individuals who they otherwise consider reasonable to a bill that, in their view, only seeks to legally protect what is theirs by

4) Curiously enough, though, the same Bill Clinton, when he was the governor of Arkansas, is reported to have been one of the willing signatories of a petition to make English the official language of the nation.

tradition and right.

Yet, another interesting point of comparison between the U.S. case and what is happening in Brazil is that, despite all the rhetoric to the contrary, it is clear that in each case it is one ethnic group or language that has been singled out as the target of their fury. Thus, S.I. Hayakawa, cofounder and honorary chairman of the U.S. English until his death in 1992, once came up with the following remark which clearly illustrates who the U.S. English are most concerned with:

Why is it that no Filipinos, no Koreans object to making English the official language? No Japanese have done so. And certainly not the Vietnamese, who are so damn happy to be here. They're learning English as fast as they can and winning spelling bees all across the country. But the Hispanics alone have maintained there is a problem. There [has been] considerable movement to make Spanish the second official language. The Hispanic lobby said we're going to teach the kids in Spanish and we'll call that bilingual education (cited in Crawford, 1992).

If the English-only movement in the U.S. is fueled by what has been called 'Hispanophobia', the Portuguese-only movement in Brazil is a veiled attempt to control the rising prestige of English in the country. In an appendix to his proposed legislative measure, Deputy Rebelo seeks to justify his bill with following words:

In point of fact, we are witnessing a veritable deformation of the Portuguese language; such is the indiscriminate and unnecessary invasion of foreignisms—such as *holding*, *recall*, *franchise*, *coffee-break*, *self-service* and such Portuguesisations of dubious taste, in general with no justification, such as *startar*, *printar*, *bidar*, *ataca* and *database*. And this is happening with such breath-taking speed and voracity that it is no exaggeration to suppose that we are about to jeopardize oral and written

communication with the simple man in the street who is unaccustomed to the words and phrases imported, generally from North-American English, that rule our daily lives, above all the production, consumption and marketing of goods, products and services, not to mention those foreign words and phrases that come to us through information technology and through the media of mass communication and popular trends and fashions (Rebello, 2000, p. 13).

Speaking at a conference specially convened in July 2000 to discuss the language situation in the country, Fernando Segismundo, a member of the Academy of Letters of Rio de Janeiro, made a clean breast of his grievances when he argued:

It is admitted that the Spanishisms, Frenchisms, and Italianisms present in our national language were and will be well received, thanks to their common origin shared also by Portuguese, all derived from Vulgar Latin. But the Germanic lexicon and the English vocabulary derived from it, are far too alien to our traditions and our reality, considering, especially, the orthography and the pronunciation. Whereof the conclusion: the foreignisms to which the announcement of the present symposium refers are confined to those of an English origin, through its North-American variety... (Segismundo, 2000).

But the similarities between what is happening in the two countries end right there. There are also important differences which are as interesting as the similarities. A major difference between the two is that, whereas the advocates of the English-only movement in the U.S. are addressing what they see as a challenge to the integrity of their nation from within, the Portuguese-only enthusiasts in Brazil have as their prime target what they see as an *external* threat to their language and ultimately to the *sovereignty* of their nation. Thus, although Rebello

and his defenders do not state it explicitly, it is amply clear that, as just noted, what they are interested in is putting a damper on the triumphant march of English into practically all walks of life in Brazil. And, for reasons that have ultimately to do with the highly complex geo-politics underpinning North-South relations in the Americas, English is very often seen as the one visible symbol of multinational corporate interests, the unbridled advance of globalization (often disparagingly referred to in Brazil, following an original French coinage, as “*estadunização*“⁵⁾), and what is resentfully referred to by opposition politicians in Latin America as the “big stick“ tactic of “disciplining“ the economies in the region by international agencies such as the I.M.F. and the World Bank, acting—as it is widely believed—as the mouth-piece for U.S. vested interests.⁶⁾ As José Luiz Fiorin, an influential linguist in Brazil, was quick to point out, “[w]hat the [Rebello bill] aims to do is to treat language as an arena for anti-imperialist struggle.“ (Fiorin, 2000, pp. 71-72).

5) >From “*Estados Unidos (da América)*“ which is the Portuguese translation of “United States (of America)“. “*Estadunização*“ could thus be roughly translated as “Americanisation“ where America is narrowly understood to mean just the U.S.

6) Just how strongly the Brazilian intelligentsia feels about the big stick diplomacy of the U.S. in the region is best illustrated by a remark by Clovis Rossi, a highly respected Brazilian journalist. Writing in his daily column in the prestigious national daily newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, he referred to the visit in April 2001 by the Chinese Jian Zemin to the country and the interest shown by his Brazilian host President Fernando Henrique Cardoso in acting as an intermediary between the U.S. and the P.R.C. in order to ease the stand-off between the two over the American spy plane that had collided with a Chinese fighter jet in mid-air and been forced to land on Chinese territory. Commenting on the fact that official communiqué from the Presidents office had highlighted Cardosos gesture and the fax message of thanks he subsequently received from his North-American counterpart, Rossi argued that, if anything, it was from the Chinese that Brazil had a lesson to learn: that of national self-respect and courage to face up to the worlds number one super-power. The text, entitled Ridiculous servility contained the following concluding remark: It has become trendy to say Yes, Sir to whatever the U.S. wants, or, worse still, to what the local lackeys think the U.S. wants. It is not trendy, it is just ridiculous (*Folha de São Paulo*, April 14, 2001, p. 2)

There is also another important difference between the anti-purist struggles in the U.S. and in Brazil. The English-only movement has met with stiff opposition from large segments of the intelligentsia in the U.S.⁷⁾ In Brazil, on the other hand, it is probably true to say that the scholarly community is somewhat divided on the Portuguese-only issue. The project has many staunch supporters among traditional grammarians who are still highly respected in Brazil, and also among members of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. The late Celso Cunha, a former diplomat and well-known traditional grammarian was specially invited as a language consultant by the constituent assembly in charge of drafting the final version of Brazil's 1988 constitution.⁸⁾ Even some linguists have occasionally expressed opinions that ultimately work in favor of Rebelo's xenophobic stance. The vast majority of linguists, it is true, have nevertheless dismissed the whole attempt as muddle-headed, counter-productive or fascist in its pretensions.

But the Brazilian linguists as a class, in their capacity as an academic task-force, have so far been by and large woefully unsuccessful in bringing the weight of their considered opinion to bear on the course of events, as indeed their colleagues elsewhere in the world also have been when faced with similar challenges (cf. Rajagopalan, forthcoming). This only goes to prove that things have not changed much since Robert Di Pietro commented, more than a quarter of a century ago, on the relative ineffectuality of professional linguists in the world of practical affairs. In answer to the question "How does a linguist win the Nobel Prize?" rhetorically posed by himself, he went on to comment that a linguist might some day very well win the coveted prize, adding

7) As with any rule, there are important exceptions. It is significant, thus, that the late Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa, one of the two founders of the 'U.S.English', was a linguist, who later on became a U.S. Senator on a Republican Party nomination. He also wrote a book called *Language in Thought and Action*.

8) And, as widely reported by the newspapers then, he apparently made a mess of it by practically rewriting sizeable chunks of the text of the constitution in order to make it more elegant stylistically, often paying scant attention to the minutiae of the contents.

... but he would have to qualify for the Prize on other grounds. If, for example, a linguist were to find a way to stop wars for all times, he would certainly deserve a Nobel Prize, not to mention many other honors, perhaps even sainthood. In such a case, being a linguist would have no more relevance to the candidate than being a truck driver or a trapeze artist (Di Pietro., 1977, p. 3).

Now, it might indeed turn out to be a rewarding exercise to inquire into the reasons why linguists have precious little to celebrate in matters of state decisions involving language—to wit, language planning, bilingual education, framing of policies concerning minority languages, preparation of census questionnaires, etc.—or, for that matter, even language teaching.⁹⁾ But this is beyond the scope of this paper. What we are interested in is looking at an obvious fall-out of the emergent linguistic chauvinism triggered off by controversy over the Portuguese-only bill currently under discussion in the upper house of Brazilian legislature.

3. The objectives of this paper

Our aim in this paper is to look into the impact of the ongoing debate on the ordinary people's perception of their own role vis-à-vis the English language. We are interested in such specific questions as: How do the common men and women in Brazil see the role of English, its potential usefulness to Brazil's long-term interests as well as the threat posed by the language to their own national language and, with it, the integrity of their nation? What do teachers and students of EFL feel about being, so to speak, guilty of complicity in what could be

9) Thus, it is not at all uncommon to come across outbursts of lamentation such as the following by Cook (1985, p. 16): "A recent characteristic of applied linguistics has been its dissociation from contemporary theoretical linguistics; a bare handful of articles have attempted to relate the Chomskyan position to applied linguistics..."

thought of as a gigantic and well-orchestrated effort by a mostly invisible enemy to ensnare them and their countrymen to linguistic and cultural serfdom? To what extent do they think it is legitimate to control a people's language behavior by appropriate legislative measures? And, finally: What do they think is going to happen to their language and their country in the light of the expansion of English all over the world, in the event current attempts to stem the tide turn out to be of no avail?

4. Methodology

The data used for this study were collected through a questionnaire, to which 162 subjects (randomly selected from a universe comprising, initially, several hundreds of students and their families and friends, and, subsequently expanded to include persons from other walks of life, again selected at random) were encouraged to react freely to the following four questions:

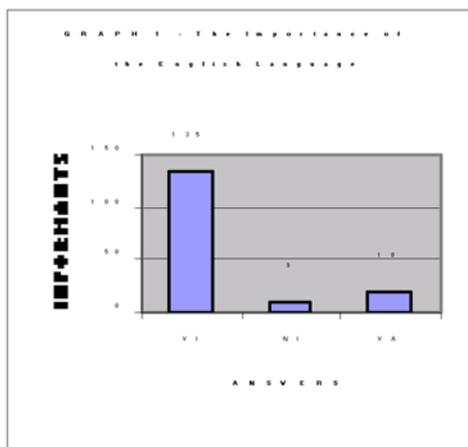
- What, if any, is the importance of the English language in your daily life?
- What do you expect to happen in the future, concerning the use of the English language?
- Do you see the increasing use foreign words and expressions in Portuguese see it as perfectly normal or as a threat to the language?
- Have you heard of the *Projeto de Lei n^o 1676/1999* by Federal Deputy Aldo Rebelo? If so, what is your opinion about it?

The respondents were asked to express their opinions in a clear, but concise way, so that their answers could be grouped for the analysis, which was qualitative in its orientation, although the results were also computed for their quantitative significance as and when their answers lent themselves to such analyses. The answers were given in their entirety in Portuguese, Brazil's national language.

5. A quick glance at the results of the survey

One thing that became immediately apparent as we sat down to tabulate the results was that an astonishing number of the subjects interviewed were unsure of their responses or were making up their responses even as they were answering the questions posed in the questionnaire. Many, as it soon turned out, had given little previous thought to some or all of the questions. Confronted with the questions, many respondents were either happy to come up with vague, non-committal answers that betrayed lack of firm conviction, or to just leave the answers in blank. Others, it soon became clear, were happy to reproduce what they had read in the newspapers or heard on the radio etc.

In spite of the difficulties alluded to in the foregoing paragraph, certain patterns did begin to emerge and soon became quite clear and unmistakable. For instance, an overwhelming 83% (135 informants among 162) of the subjects were enthusiastic in their recognition of the importance of English in their daily lives.



In the graph above, VI stands for “Very Important”; NI for “Not Important”, and VA for “Vague Answers”.

The reasons pointed out included access to entertainment, including world literature and movies (12%), communication with the world at large (15%), globalization (7%), ELT (English Language Teaching) (20%), better academic and job opportunities (a whopping 46%). Of course the last two categories are overlapping ones (actually, they may even be collapsed to form a single category under the rubric of ‘social ascension’ or something like that—which would in fact raise the percentage to 66 or two-thirds of the universe surveyed) since ELT is often seen as a first step to a more promising teaching career at universities etc.

One informant was categorical in his outright rejection of English. “The English language has no importance whatsoever as far as my personal life is concerned,” he boasted, “It is the romance languages that I am more interested in, along with their corresponding literatures. And it is to Europe that I look for culture, by Europe I mean the Latin part of it.” Incidentally, remarks such as this are very revealing of certain deep-seated assumptions that inform the informants’ convictions in the Brazilian context. Firstly, the English language is typically viewed as a visible sign of the hegemonic presence of the U.S. in their daily lives. Most Brazilians are likely to invoke their European roots (real or presumed—given that recent studies based on DNA sampling show that as many as 70% of the country’s population may qualify as the progeny of miscegenation) as a deterrent to what they see as the wayward and arrogant advance of English. The idea of “Latinness” becomes an ideal shield with which to defend themselves against the onslaught of a Germanic language like English.

As already noted, however, the vast majority of the persons who were interviewed were enthusiastically in favor of English. One of the respondents expressed his/her approval of the spread of English in the following words: “With the globalization in full swing, we must all adapt ourselves to the new demands of the society we live in. The

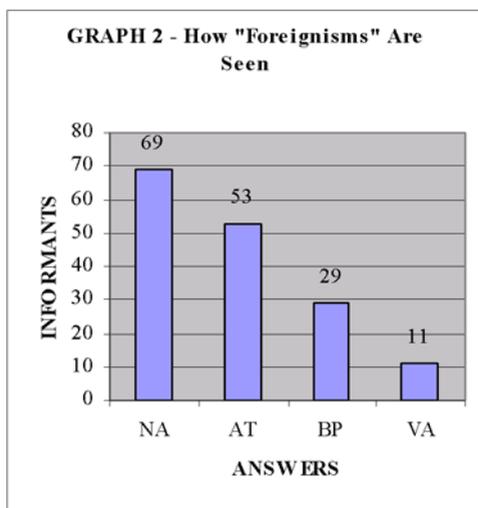
English language is very much part of our daily lives today. It must not be seen as an alien incursion but a matter of absolute necessity.“ More restrained responses included “English plays an important role because, in our globalized world, most of the information comes in English, through the internet, for example“ and “English is a global language and no one who wants to interact in this globalized marketplace can afford to ignore its importance. No doubt, it has been imposed upon the world, but it is a good language to study and may open the door to knowledge that we so badly need.“

The fact that the initial survey results (based on the more restricted universe of informants) were heavily skewed in favor of those who applauded the growing presence of English in their daily lives should not be taken as indicative of an all-clear bill of entry for the foreign language in the overall cultural scenario in Brazil. Rather, what it shows is that the segment of the population targeted in the pilot survey was far from being representative of the universe relevant to the kind of questions we were seeking answers to. To our surprise, though, even with the expanded universe, the percentages were not significantly different, showing that the dominant discourse about the role of English does spill out to the public at large.

When asked whether or not they saw “foreignisms“ as a threat to the Portuguese language, again, the majority of the informants classified them as absolutely normal (even expected). As graph 2 shows, among the 162 informants who took part in the survey, 69 take “foreignisms“ as something natural (NA 9n the graph), whereas 53 take them as a threat (AT in the graph). Many of the informants (29) tried a balanced position (BP in the graph), showing that, although they do not see them as a threat, they fear the exaggerated use of borrowings from the English language. Here too a significant number of informants (11) demonstrated a high level of hesitation, and failed to give a clear opinion about the issue.

On the other hand, the initial results did confirm what we had suspected from the very beginning: that the people belonging to the middle and upper classes in Brazil have long resigned themselves to the

irreversibility of the advance of English. Some of the answers given to question 3 reveal total subservience: “I see them as something positive. They are the final proof of the expansion of the English language, and of its establishment as a universal language.” Foreignisms are also seen by many as a symbol of sophistication: “I think it is sophisticated to see English words to indicate sales and promotions in the shopping centers.”



Among those who see foreignisms as a threat, many justified their answers pointing out that “...they threaten our identity and the identity of our national language.” Others condemned the use of foreignisms in public places, because many people, mainly those from poor families, will not be able to understand them, as they do not have access to English in the context of the public schools in Brazil.

Many, in fact, have been quick to realize that, in an increasingly competitive world such as the one they currently find themselves in, a working knowledge of English may in fact give them a head start in the rat race for jobs. Brazil’s historic role as a U.S. satellite and the

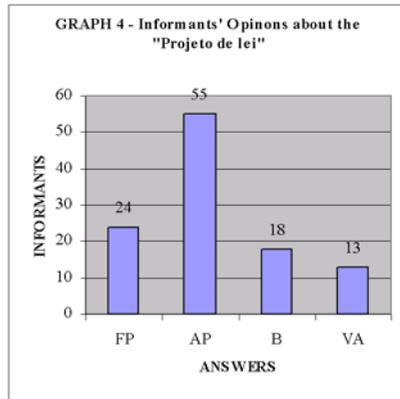
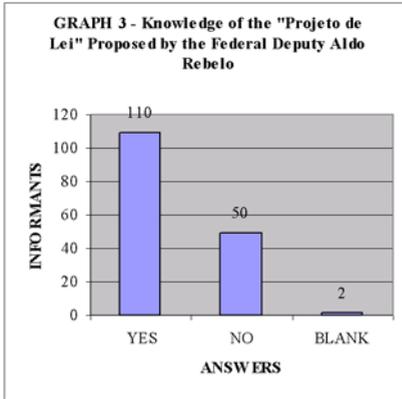
deep-rooted middle class mentality of looking to the North as the bastion of their material interests may in large measure explain the ease with which growing numbers of children, especially from the middle and upper classes, help swell enrollment numbers at the thousands of language schools that have sprung up all over the country in recent years. The U.S. is way ahead of the rest of the world as the number one tourist destination for upper middle class Brazilians (as well as the most preferred destination for intending illegal emigrants) who are outranked only by Canadians in the yearly statistics of influx of visitors to such attractions as the Disney parks and the like.

Even a preliminary glance at the results of the survey reveals that most informants somehow sense—surprisingly enough—that English is likely to be, in the long course, a divisive force in the country, contributing to the already widening digital divide between the English-speaking haves and the vernacular-only have-nots. Two of the informants were shrewd enough to observe that English is already a marker of social class distinction in Brazil in much the same way as it has been over the years in many of the former colonies of Great Britain in Asia and Africa. As Pennycook (1994, p. 23) has observed, “[...] a more critical analysis of the global spread of English reveals a broad range of questions about its connection to social and economic power with and between nations, to the global expansion of various forms of culture and knowledge, and various forces that are shaping the modern world.”

Several of the other respondents did recognize that English was driving a wedge between the haves and the have-nots, but saw no room for alarm in the developing situation. “One should sincerely hope,” confided one interviewee, “that more and more people gain access to English and that the state schools do all that they can to make English language lessons available to all and sundry, so that nobody is left behind for lack of command of the language.” Such remarks seem to betray not just a sense of complacency or an attitude of acquiescence. At their worst, they betray a naïve faith in the possibility of heaven on earth through socialization of the use of English

As only to be expected, the vast majority of those interviewed were of the opinion that English represented no threat to their language and much less to the integrity of their nation. Some did recognize that the advance of English may be detrimental to the interests of the vernacular tongue, Portuguese. But, overall, the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. As members of a social class that only stand to gain from the new economic order sweeping across the world, most of the informants were more than happy that the doorway was now open for them to become part of a transnational class of world citizens, untrammelled by tariff and travel restrictions that until recently stood in their way. If English helped them join the club more quickly, then so be it.

Question 4 was meant to investigate whether or not the informants were acquainted with (to?) the Projeto de Lei n. 1676/1999 (by the Federal Deputy Aldo Rebelo), and if so, whether they were for or against it. To our surprise, although most of the informants did say they had some knowledge about the project, a significant number (50 among 162) said they had no idea what it was about. Graph 3, below, shows how many of them knew the Projeto de Lei, and how many did not know it. Graph 4 gives us a picture in relation to how informants felt about it. The captions in graph 4 stand for the following: FP = In Favor of the Projeto de Lei; AP = Against it; B = Answers in Blank, and VA = Vague Answers.



6. English: an ambivalent symbol in Brazil

English has steadily gained its ever-increasing presence in the daily lives of ordinary Brazilians. Starting with the end of World War II, it has, following a world-wide trend, toppled French from its position of Brazil's preferred foreign language. Paris still exercises its perennial charm over much of the Brazilian elite, but English has wrenched from French the status of the most sought-after foreign language, as enrolment numbers at language schools and universities easily testify to.

The importance of English in Brazil may be gauged not only by the number of job vacancies being announced where a working knowledge of the language is a pre-requisite, but also by the hundreds of 'foreignisms' that have invaded the cultural life of the average Brazilian. Newspapers and magazines are full of them, as also the hundreds of shop signs and bill boards that line the streets. Pizza houses offer free 'delivery' and apartments and houses for sale or for rent offer 'balconies', 'bay windows', and 'closets' as added attractions. The interesting thing is that these English words have, in many cases, edged out usage of their Portuguese equivalents for the simple reason that the foreign words are believed to give the products and services being advertised an extra charm. For much the same reason, new

apartment buildings and commercial blocks are announced under fancy names such as ‘Beverly Hills Apartments,’ ‘Manhattan Mansions,’ ‘Continental Office Tower’ etc.

Such discursive domains as the one associated with the internet and (in Brazil) the fledgling e-commerce have literally been taken over by English vocabulary. ‘E-mail,’ ‘web-site’ (more often than not abbreviated as just ‘site’), ‘download,’ ‘software,’ ‘attachment,’ and so forth are on the lips of practically every internet addict. Shopping malls are referred to as ‘shopping centers’ and often abbreviated as shopping (pronounced ‘*shouping*’). People who use these words regularly, often do not have the faintest idea what they mean in their original language and often are unsure what they signify in their host contexts either. Lots of ordinary Brazilians are also exposed in their daily lives to English words through American, British, Canadian, and Australian pop music and also Hollywood films which are typically shown in Brazilian movie theaters with Portuguese sub-titles (with the original soundtrack often maintained for those who care). This last point often leads to interesting cases of wrong inferences as when a number of adolescent children in Brazil thought that the word ‘jaws’ meant ‘shark’, because of the association they erroneously made between the name of the famous Hollywood block-buster and the picture of the fearsome killer on the posters and bill-boards that were all over the town.

If it is an indisputable fact that English enjoys enormous prestige in the country, it is also equally true that more and more people are beginning to look askance at the advance of the foreign language into the routine patterns of life in the country, alarmed by the prospect of the Portuguese language being negatively impacted by the unrestrained use of English. These fears are made more complex by the ambivalent role played by the U.S. in the mind of the average Brazilian. On the one hand, Brazil, along with the other countries in South America, have historically played a rather subservient role *vis-à-vis* the U.S. Even the name of the federation used to be “the United States of Brasil” until it was changed in the late 1890s into “The Federal Republic of Brasil”.

On the other hand, as already noted earlier, many Brazilians resent

the 'big brother' attitude of successive American governments when it comes to handling bilateral relations with their "backyard", especially the way they think the U.S. takes them for granted. Visiting U.S. Presidents and vice-presidents have done precious little to ameliorate matters but have instead often contributed to deepening the already existing distrust by, among other things, committing unpardonable diplomatic gaffes—as when President Reagan, immediately after receiving his red carpet welcome on Brazilian soil heartily announced before live television cameras that he was very happy to be in Bolivia or when Dan Quail, on the eve of his departure from the U.S. for a lightning tour of several Latin American countries told a gathering of journalists in Washington how much he regretted not speaking Latin so as to be able to converse with his Latin American hosts in their own native language.

7. Language consciousness in Brazil: a quick look

“Even among the specialists on language,” says Edith Pimentel Pinto, “it is not rare to come across a certain indecision that often translates into an attitude of reserve, of refraining from referring to the language of Brazil as Portuguese, or, contrariwise, of clearly espousing a defense of Brazilian language.” (Pinto, 1981, p. xiii). Pinto was referring to the frequent habit among Brazilian scholars of evading the issue as to whether or not the language spoken in the country could be properly described as Portuguese. In 1937, the city of São Paulo hosted the *Primeiro Congresso da Língua Nacional Cantada*. Many, the author noted, preferred to refer to it as ‘*língua brasileira*’ (Brazilian language). The author went on to observe that alternative designations included neologisms such as *brasílina* (Monteiro Lobato) and *brasílico* (Roquete Pinto). On his part, Leite de Vasconcelos (cited by Pinto) argued that *Brazilian Portuguese* was the best description because it underscored the same sort of relation to its parent language as in the case of *Argentinean Spanish* and *American English*. Vasconcelos position was

later endorsed by Mario de Andrade, a great literary celebrity of the period.¹⁰⁾

8. Passive acquiescence vs. insurgent chauvinism

The imperialist pretensions of the English language across the globe have increasingly been the focus of attention ever since the publication of such classics as Phillipson 1992, Pennycook, 1994; 1998 and others. Whereas these early writers did issue a wake-up call to all those interested in the subject in one way or another, the larger picture they succeeded in portraying—whether or not they actually intended to do so—was one of total helplessness in the face of a world-wide trend which had an inexorable internal purposiveness of its own and against which conventional deterrents seemed hopelessly inadequate. More recently, however, some scholars have looked at the same phenomenon from the standpoint of those in the periphery, and pointed out ways and means by which resistance can and often is offered under even the most trying conditions. For Canagarajah (1999), a healthier attitude to the issue at hand would be one of refusing to be seduced by the charms of the foreign language and selling the interests of their fatherland, while at the same time avoiding the opposite extreme of rejecting all alien influence, thus depriving their nation of all benefits through contact with other cultures. To quote him:

Some have chosen convenient, self-serving resolutions to this conflict, by understanding the complex interconnection between the

10) Here we have yet another example of how Brazil has, all along its history, systematically sought to emulate the other countries in the continents of South and North Americas. From the name of their country (which used to be called 'The United States of Brazil') to the description of their national language, the U.S. has always played as the role model. The *bandeira provisória da República*, provisional national flag used from 15 to 19 november, 1889, immediately after the proclamation of the Republic was an imitation of the stars and stripes, the difference being the choice of colors: blue, yellow, and green.

two linguistic traditions. History is replete with examples of colonized subjects who have 'betrayed' the claims of the vernacular for the advantages of English, and who now feel they are in some sense outsiders in both Western and local communities. Others, especially in the period since decolonization, have rejected English lock, stock and barrel, in order to be faithful to indigenous traditions—a choice which has deprived many of them of enriching interactions with multicultural communities and traditions through the English language (Canagarajah, 1999, p. ix).

Preliminary investigation of the sort undertaken by the present authors have shown that the overall reaction to the advance of English in Brazil is, as of now, one of stalemate: caught in the middle of contradictory trends and ambiguously poised between the extreme responses of total acquiescence and outright rejection of English. On the one hand, English is fast replacing French as Brazil's first foreign language, in what many concede to be an irreversible trend. On the other hand, one also notices sporadic but increasingly more frequent and widespread outbursts of linguistic chauvinism, accompanied by clamors for rooting out foreignisms and strict legal measures prohibiting the use of languages other than Portuguese in a broad range of contexts.

In a newspaper article published recently, Aldo Rebelo, the Federal Deputy currently spearheading the crusade against the English language in Brazil vents his fury in the following words: "Grossly repugnant is the readiness with which are being incorporated into Portuguese words of alien physiognomy that only help corrupt the language." (Rebelo, 2001). The real target of the Deputy's fury is, as we have seen, not so much the corruption of the Portuguese language by massive borrowings, but the hegemony of the U.S. in the current global scenario as visibly made clear by the growing presence of English in Brazil's day-to-day cultural life. As a seasoned politician, he knows all too well that fighting it head on and single-handedly is like tilting against a windmill. So he has chosen to champion a cause that will attract a lot

of public sympathy--the cause of safeguarding the integrity of the country's national language. As a clever politician too, he knows only too well that national languages work like flags of allegiance and it is a relatively easy task to get people to rally behind them by raising the bogey of neo-colonialism (Rajagopalan, forthcoming-1).

9. Need for resistance education

Against the backdrop sketched above, we think a case can be made that there is an urgent need for revamping the whole approach to ELT in countries like Brazil. To begin with, it is perhaps about time we realized that there is nothing much to be gained by going on repeating ad nauseam that the English language is wreaking nothing but havoc in its relentless march onto center stage in current global geo-politics. Exaggerated use of such denunciatory rhetoric has only contributed to a growing sense of alarm and guilty conscience amongst all those involved in ELT in one way or another (Rajagopalan 1999). On the other hand, it is no use pretending either that the unbridled expansion of English is impacting local sensitivities and contributing to the already wide disparities between the urban rich and the rural poor and, possibly helping create a segment of the population with their backs turned on national interests (Rajagopalan 2000).

Until very recently, ELT professionals in Brazil mostly went about their routine business in total disregard for those aspects of their activity that are not of a strictly linguistic or pedagogic nature. This is perhaps also true of ELT professionals everywhere else in the world as well. As Corson was complaining as recently as 1997,

Applied linguistics began to flourish well before any hermeneutic, critical, or postmodern epistemology had become influential in setting the course for inquiry in the human sciences · Although many applied linguists are deeply involved with issues of human emancipation, these interests have been rather muted and have

had little abiding impact on applied linguistics generally. This is especially true of its central language teaching functions.... Indeed, just this perception that 'language teaching' is its central function, may have distorted the epistemological foundations of applied linguistics in general (Corson 1997, p. 167).

Exaggerated emphasis on teaching methodology meant relegating larger issues concerning the nature of language and its role in society to the margins and possibly to the care of those in theoretical linguistics and other disciplines. But things are slowly beginning to change, thanks principally to the fact that the field of Applied Linguistics has itself come of age in recent times and asserted its status as a transdisciplinary field with its own theoretical and practical concerns, no longer forced to the role of merely playing second fiddle to work done in academically more respectable fields such as linguistics and education (Rajagopalan, forthcoming-2).

In what may strike someone as profoundly ironic, the home-grown wisdom as contained in the teachings of Paulo Freire (1970; 1985) has only just begun to influence the attitude of ELT professionals in Brazil, thanks to the growing influence of Critical Discourse Analysis and other self-consciously emancipatory proposals in linguistics and language teaching. But the fact that more and more ELT professionals are conscious of the ideological and political implications of their work is a clear signal that significant changes may be on the way. To quote Canagarajah:

If language learning is ideological, ... the solution is not to run away from politics, but to negotiate with the agencies of power for personal and collective empowerment. If ELT is implicated in larger social processes and cultural practices, the corrective is not to eliminate that connection in favor of autonomy or purity, but to seek a holistic pedagogy that will enable learners to engage with those domains for a richer educational experience (Canagarajah

1999, p. 173).

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