ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PUBLIC SCHOOL: REPRESENTATION AND EVALUATION IN STUDENTS' DISCOURSE

LÍNGUA INGLESA NA ESCOLA PÚBLICA: REPRESENTAÇÃO E AVALIAÇÃO NO DISCURSO DOS ALUNOS

EL IDIOMA INGLÉS EN LAS ESCUELAS PÚBLICAS: REPRESENTACIÓN Y EVALUACIÓN EN EL DISCURSO ESTUDIANTIL

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ABSTRACT

The Federal Institute of the Southeast of Minas Gerais in Rio Pomba receives students from different municipalities in the Zona da Mata Mineira to attend high school integrated with technical courses, concurrent and subsequent technical courses, as well as higher and postgraduate courses. Public schools began to receive English language textbooks, through the National Textbook Program (PNLD), in 2011 and 2012 for elementary and high school, respectively (Brasil, 2008; Brasil, 2009). Considering these facts: students from different cities, the inclusion of the English language in PNLD, and the paradox of the importance attributed to this language in official documents and society versus the school environment, this study reflects on teaching/learning English through students' speech. The instruments used to collect the student discourse were two questionnaires. The analysis was conducted using Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994) and the Appraisal System (Martin and Rose, 2007). Despite some negative evaluations regarding teaching/learning English, the students pointed out preferences for some activities, allowing questions that lead to reflection and search for the valorization of the language in public schools.

Keywords: English Language. Student Discourse. Language Appreciation.

RESUMO

O Instituto Federal do Sudeste de Minas Gerais em Rio Pomba recebe anualmente alunos de diferentes municípios da Zona da Mata Mineira para cursarem o ensino médio integrado ao técnico, técnicos concomitantes e subsequentes, cursos superiores e de pós-graduação. As escolas públicas passaram a receber livros didáticos de língua inglesa, por meio do Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD), em 2011 e 2012 para o ensino fundamental e médio respectivamente (Brasil, 2008; Brasil, 2009). Considerando estes fatos: alunos oriundos de diversas cidades, a inclusão da língua inglesa no PNLD, e o paradoxo da importância concebida a esse idioma nos documentos oficiais e sociedade versus ambiente escolar, buscou-se neste estudo fazer uma reflexão sobre o ensino/aprendizagem do inglês por meio do discurso dos alunos. Os instrumentos usados para coletar o discurso discente foram dois questionários. A análise foi feita por meio da

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Linguística Sistêmico-Funcional (Halliday, 1994) e do Sistema de Avaliatividade (Martin e Rose, 2007). Apesar de algumas avaliações negativas quanto ao ensino/aprendizagem da língua inglesa, os alunos apontaram preferências por atividades vivenciadas em aulas, possibilitando questões que levem à reflexão e à busca pela valorização do idioma na escola pública.

Palavras-chave: Língua Inglesa. Discurso Discente. Valorização do Idioma.

RESUMEN
El Instituto Federal del Sudeste de Minas Gerais en Rio Pomba recibe anualmente a estudiantes de diversos municipios de la Zona da Mata Mineira para cursar estudios de secundaria integrados con formación profesional, formación profesional concomitante y posterior, educación superior y programas de posgrado. Las escuelas públicas comenzaron a recibir libros de texto en inglés a través del Programa Nacional de Libros de Texto (PNLD) en 2011 y 2012 para estudiantes de primaria y secundaria, respectivamente (Brasil, 2008; Brasil, 2009). Considerando estos factores: estudiantes de diferentes ciudades, la inclusión del inglés en el PNLD y la paradoja de la importancia atribuida a esta lengua en los documentos oficiales y la sociedad frente al entorno escolar, este estudio buscó reflexionar sobre la enseñanza/aprendizaje del inglés a través del discurso estudiantil. Se utilizaron dos cuestionarios para recopilar el discurso estudiantil. El análisis se realizó mediante la Lingüística Sistémica Funcional (Halliday, 1994) y el Sistema Evaluativo (Martin y Rose, 2007). A pesar de algunas evaluaciones negativas sobre la enseñanza/aprendizaje del inglés, los estudiantes mostraron preferencia por las actividades en el aula, lo que generó preguntas que incitan a la reflexión y al fomento de la apreciación lingüística en las escuelas públicas.

Palabras clave: Lengua Inglesa. Discurso Estudiantil. Apreciación Lingüística.

1 INTRODUCTION

As an English teacher, I have been experiencing the many obstacles that language teaching/learning faces for a long time. Among some, the reduced number of classes, the crowded classes, the low hierarchy of the discipline. I then decided to look for the students' views on English classes in the students' discourse. This choice results mainly from three aspects related to my work environment and that, in my view, deserve research and discussion. The first of them is anchored in the first distribution of English language textbooks to public elementary and high schools in 2011 and 2012, respectively. This distribution is made by the National Textbook Program – PNLD (Brasil, 2008; Brazil, 2009). The second aspect is related to the fact that we receive students from the most varied cities in the Zona da Mata Mineira at the Federal Institute of Southeast Minas Gerais, in Rio Pomba, which implies different stories and learning experiences. The third reason that impels me to seek the students' discourse is precisely because it is in it that I hope to raise questions that lead to reflection and the search for the appreciation of the language in my school.

In this text I go through the three reasons mentioned, trying to focus more on the students' discourse that will be analyzed in the light of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (Michael Halliday, 1994) and the Evaluative System (Martin and Rose, 2007).

The discourse of most students who start high school at the Rio Pomba Campus implies different histories and learning experiences due to the variety of cities of origin. Hence, your choice to direct me in this study. In addition, the recurrent access to negative evaluations regarding the teaching/learning of the English language impels me to reflect and search for ways to value the language in the school environment. In the same way, other readings corroborate this thinking and discuss the role of the public school in the teaching of foreign languages. In Lima (2011), sixteen experts analyze the discourse of "English in public schools does not work". The answers "offered by the multiple perspectives" point out the purpose of teaching other languages as a way to broaden the linguistic horizons of students "for the development of their citizenship, which, even far from the big centers, plays a role in local and global society" (Lima, 2011, 4th cover). The narrative unveiled to the eyes of the experts is of a student who was unsuccessful in learning the language in public school.

It is not new, for those involved with the teaching/learning of the English language in public schools, to face problems arising from the low valuation of the subject. This, unfortunately, occurs both in relation to students and to their own colleagues and managers, despite the fact that official documents exalt the importance of the language.

I will then move on to an overview of the reasons that led me to develop this study, starting with the first aspect.

2 THE NATIONAL PROGRAM OF BOOKS AND DIDACTIC MATERIAL

The Ministry of Education – MEC, through the National Book and Didactic Material Program – PNLD, distributes textbooks and collections of literary works, complementary works and dictionaries to students and teachers of basic education, including special education and Youth and Adult Education. To receive the books, federal, state, municipal and Federal District public schools must be registered in the program.

According to the MEC portal, the main objective of the PNLD is to subsidize the pedagogical work of teachers. The books delivered to students are returned at the end of the school year and reused by other students over a period of three to four years. Therefore, the distribution of new books occurs separately for each segment of education (Elementary School, initial and final years and High School).[2]

To participate in the PNLD, publishers and authors must follow the regulations required in the notices. These are comprehensive and present both general and specific criteria for each curricular component in order to facilitate the selection of didactic material. The pedagogical evaluation is done by technical teams formed by specialists from different public institutions. The specialists prepare reviews of the approved books to constitute the Guide to Textbooks. This Guide, with reviews and other important information, "is a document prepared to support the selection process carried out by the group of teachers of each school", according to page http://www.fnde.gov.br/pnld-2017/.

 Despite the existence of the PNLD since 1985 and other previous programs with the same purpose, the first distribution of foreign language textbooks (English and Spanish) to public elementary and high schools took place in 2011 and 2012, respectively.

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[2] The 2019 PNLD brought changes such as: didactic materials aligned with the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), all works from the early years of Elementary School will be consumable, maintaining the three-year cycle of title change. On the other hand, the final years of Elementary School will move to the cycle of changing titles every four years (http://www.fnde.gov.br/programas/programas-do-livro/livro-didatico/escolha-pnld-2019).

Since then, the number of didactic collections that meet the notices has been increasing, which shows the importance of studies on didactic material.

Thus, in the educational context, the inclusion of English didactic material in the PNLD can be considered recent and requires research, especially on its reception and use by teachers and students. The student users are related to the second aspect that leveraged this study. I now make a brief presentation of the Rio Pomba Campus and its student body, the context of this study.

3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The Rio Pomba Campus of the Federal Institute of Southeast Minas Gerais is located in the Zona da Mata Mineira, which is made up of 142 municipalities. As stated on the official campus page, the school founded in August 1962 comes from a tradition of Agricultural School. With a methodology adapted to the school-farm system, it aimed, at the time, to meet the needs of the rural environment and the schooling of the children of small landowners and rural workers.

Notwithstanding the courses aimed at the initial objectives, the school participates in the socioeconomic changes arising from the development of the region, expanding and diversifying the courses in order to ensure professional qualifications adequate to the regional market demand. Periodically, courses and curricular content are reviewed without, however, disregarding sustainable development.

With this profile, the institution offers High School Integrated with Technician in Food, Agriculture, Environment, Animal Science, Informatics and Chemistry. The school also offers concurrent and subsequent Technical Courses, Undergraduate and Postgraduate. The faculty is composed of specialist professors, masters, doctors, and post-doctors. The student public, for the most part, comes from the surrounding cities.

The classes of the 1st year of Integrated High School are heterogeneous with a mixed socioeconomic situation. The age of the students varies between 14 and 16 years old and each class, in general, holds 35 to 40 students. There are 35 vacancies open in the public notice for each class, not including students who may repeat the grade.

As seen in the characterization of the school, it receives students from various cities, and until 2014 they were offered school accommodation. Therefore, many leave their homes for the first time and start living far from their families, today in student

dormitories, houses and apartments shared with colleagues. Others, from the nearest municipalities, make the daily trip, via school transport.

At first, I reflected on the little exposure to the language that students in the interior region would have. However, the media and technologies, in a way, act to reduce the distance of this public, bringing it closer to the international contact most common in large centers. Notwithstanding the fact, it is also noted that, when they reach high school, many still do not have modern cell phones, *tablets* or notebooks. Thus, contact with these tools and foreign languages begins to intensify with the entry into high school, with greater interaction with people other than the family and with a full-time study environment.

The third aspect, which is the discourse of students who start high school at the Rio Pomba Campus, is analyzed by Systemic-Functional Linguistics (FSL), whose main representatives are Halliday (1979, 1985, 1994, 2004), Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1989) and other scholars who have developed theories based on the framework of SFL, such as Martin and Rose (2007).

I present below a brief overview of the LSF in order to facilitate the understanding of the analysis to be made later.

4 ON SYSTEMIC-FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

LSF was initially developed by the British linguist Michael Halliday in the 50s and anchored in the functionalist approach. Halliday developed the so-called Systemic-Functional Grammar that differs from traditional grammar. The first analyzes the entire communicative situation, understanding that any utterance is inserted in a context of use, while traditional grammar is normative, it studies the internal structures of the language in decontextualized sentences. Thus, the precursor of the theory presents how the speakers of a language use it to represent the human experience and relate to other people through messages organized according to the purpose of the communicative event, that is, the functions that language performs. It is the functionality of the language. It is also systemic "because it sees language as networks of interconnected linguistic systems, which we use to construct meanings and do things in the world" (Fuzer; Cabral, 2014, p. 19).

From these concepts, other researchers and Halliday himself expanded the theoretical principles by developing other analyses of language and other semiotic systems as communicative, multimodal, and culturally significant phenomena.

For Halliday (1994), the grammar of a language is not a set of rules for the production of correct sentences, but a resource for the production of meanings. The manifestations in the linguistic system of the purposes that underlie the use of language are the metafunctions, namely: ideational, interpersonal and textual.

In the ideational metafunction, prayer is seen as a representation of the experience in which we act in the external world or in the world of our consciousness. To represent these experiences through language, we use lexical-grammatical aspects. Experiential meanings are manifested in grammar through the transitivity system, "which accounts for the construction of experience in terms of the configuration of processes, participants and circumstances" (Fuzer; Cabral, 2014, p. 33).

We use three types of processes, material, mental, and relational, to represent our external experiences (actions and events), internal experiences (memories, reactions, reflections, and states of mind), and relationships (identification and characterization). On the border of these processes, there are other secondary ones: behavioral, verbal and existential (*ibidem*, p. 42, 43).

The interpersonal metafunction enables people's interaction and establishes their social and identity roles. This is, according to Halliday (1979, p.148), "the participatory function of language, language as something that is made; it is the component through which the speaker includes himself in the context of the situation, both when expressing his own attitudes and judgments, and when influencing the attitudes and behaviors of others". The grammatical resource that makes this metafunction possible is the MODE system. In this system, sentences perform the functions of speech, that is, language is used to give or request information or goods and services, influencing the behavior of the interactors.

In the textual metafunction, the sentence is seen as a message where the experiential and interpersonal meanings are organized in a coherent way. There are two systems that organize the message into text: the structure of the information with the information given and the new information; the thematic structure with the theme (chosen as the starting point of an utterance) and the rema (the rest of the message).

Thus, ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions are the functional components of language and happen simultaneously. In summary:

Using language implies the production of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings together at the semantic-discursive level, and these meanings will be realized at the lexical-grammatical level through systems of signification, and materialized at the level of expression by phonetic-phonological or graphological aspects (Silva, 2016, p.34).

These functional components of the semantic system are, therefore, linked to the various types of grammatical structure. However, there is still a relationship between them and the social context. Language is only one of the many semiotic modes that express the social context.

It is due to the link between the social context and the metafunctions of language that cultural and situational aspects are represented. Thus, scholars Martin and Rose (2007) developed, based on the assumptions of the LSF, the Evaluative System.

This system aims to investigate and describe the construction of interpersonal meanings in texts. The resources of evaluativeness are used to negotiate our social relations, our attitudes towards people and things. The subsystems of the Evaluation System are: attitude, gradation and engagement, through which the speaker expresses feelings, judgments or appreciation, expanding or softening them, and incorporating or not additional voices into the discourse.

LSF is a complex and comprehensive theory, and it is not possible to detail it here. However, as I present the students' discourse, the relevant meanings are commented on in a more enlightening way.

5 THE STUDENTS' DISCOURSE IN THE LIGHT OF THE LSF

As mentioned in the introduction of this text, the Rio Pomba Campus welcomes students from the various municipalities of the Zona da Mata Mineira region. His speeches, therefore, reveal a little about the work with the English language in these different municipalities. The intention of raising reflections that lead to the valorization of the discipline in public schools and on *campus* itself was the initial trigger for this study.

Two questionnaires were applied to the beginning classes in the Integrated High School, with the spontaneous participation of the students. The first aimed to list their schools and cities of origin. I also tried to find out which textbook was used in elementary school, the number of weekly English classes, activities done to learn and practice the language, and what motivated them the most in English classes. A total of 114

questionnaires were collected, listing 32 cities in Minas Gerais and one in the State of Rio de Janeiro.

The first questionnaire, applied in May, brought positive responses. In the question about what they liked most about elementary school English classes, the answers varied between: activities with songs (24 answers), assignments (13), oral activities (9); 14 students reported liking the teacher or her way of teaching. Other answers in smaller numbers were: homework, activities on sheets, translations, movies, vocabulary, games, reading, homework, video, grammar, verb *to be*, using the textbook, learning more, knowing a new language, everything, not much. In 7 (seven) questionnaires, the answers were blank. Of the only 11 negative answers, "they didn't like anything", comments such as: the teacher didn't teach, didn't explain, couldn't teach, only had texts translated, or only showed movies.

The second questionnaire basically consisted of a detailed report on English classes in previous years. The report, made in retrospect, offered relevant data, given the number of municipalities represented. I've added a few *prompts* to help them guide the writing in hindsight. In this questionnaire, I quantified a larger number of responses that commented on the students' low participation and respect for the discipline. Although they reported good interaction with teachers and classmates, for many the participation was "little, none, little interest".

Regarding the preferred activities (1st and 2nd questionnaires), few left blank. This indicates that they have a preference for certain teaching/learning activities, although they do not judge that they have learned the language from the lessons in other considerations. Some voices emphasize learning in free language courses.

There is no way to consider the students' discourse without positioning it in the basic concepts of language, text and context. The profile of the students who enter the beginner classes of the integrated technician has already been presented here. Therefore, we understand that the context of speech of these students, in retrospect, is smaller schools, in the Zona da Mata Mineira, young people from 13 to 14 years of age, mixed social class, tending to the lower-middle class, according to the IBGE salary classification.[3]

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[3] The social classes by minimum wage ranges in the family income, according to IBGE criteria, correspond to: class A, above 20 MW; class B, from 10 to 20 MW; class C, from 4 to 10 MW; class D, from 2 to 4 MW; class E, up to 2 MW. Source: https://folhago.com.br/blogs/guia-do-ex-negativado/financas-

They are also young people belonging to a much more technological generation than many of their teachers. These are important data to be considered, because "in real life, contexts precede texts. The situation is prior to the discourse that reports it", as Halliday and Hassan (1989, p. 5) rightly cite. The same authors understand language as systemic-functional, whose primary function is to produce meanings through choices that are related to a given situational context.

As for the textual component, the students created, in the second questionnaire, reports through a single text or short answers to the suggestions offered for reflection on elementary school English classes. They are texts narrated in the first person, with verbs in the past tense, of a subjective nature about their experiences. Stories are common in everyday life and have a simple structure, therefore, a genre that is easy to produce for them.

Let us therefore see some excerpts from the second questionnaire applied. Of the 122 answered, 77 were selected and 45 excluded because they were reports from private schools or with a yes or no response format to most of the suggestions made. Some spelling errors, especially accentuation, backtick, were corrected by the Windows system itself. To facilitate the indication and consultation of the reports, they have been numbered and appear in parentheses in each excerpt presented:

In my class, the book was little used, because most of them did not like English and the class. (1)

The class, most of the time, was not interested in the subject. (5)

Many people were disinterested in the subject and did not have a good behavior. (12)

It was good, although few people were interested, because we thought that English did not repeat. (32)

More or less, because we only learned the verb to be. We participated very little. (53)

Lots of side talk (62)
I didn't like the English classes, the teacher gave us activities that we didn't know how to do, read texts in English that no one understood and a CD to play with answers to the activities. (68)

[...] There was a great lack of interest in the class. (74)

As it is a public school, not everyone was interested in the classes [...] (75)

It is possible to perceive in discourses 1 (one), 5 (five), 12, 68 and 75 that students express their memories and reflections through affective mental processes (liking, interesting), when the representation of the experience is verified at the level of consciousness. The enunciator in this process is called the experiencer. Also through the cognitive mental process (32, 53) by not thinking that the discipline failed, and limited learning. Fuzer and Cabral (2014, p.54) clarify that "mental sentences change the perception one has of reality (and not the actions of reality)".

In Lima (2011), the author reinforces the expectation of contribution to the planning and execution of English classes through the textbook distributed by the PNLD. The first public notice launched demystifies the privilege of favored classes in language learning. However, the student discourse presented here reproduces the neglect of the English language in public schools. This contempt for language teaching has historically been built in schools while free language courses proliferate.

The clauses of reports 32, 62 and 74 indicate the existential process, making use of verbs, even if subtended, of having little frequency, little interest, a lot of conversation and bad behavior. Existential prayers represent something that exists or happens.

A second sentence of the report 53 - *We participated very little.* - indicates a process of behavior. This process may contain characteristics close to others – material, mental and/or verbal – and the typical participant is a conscious being, the Behaviorant.

These are examples of reports showing how students represent their experiences through language. However, in this first block we find that the representation of experience is expressed in a negative way. If we consider that the students attended elementary school during the period when the books were received by the PNLD, we will see that, by itself, this program does not guarantee an improvement in the teaching/learning of English. Textbooks are considered by specialists as reference material (Jorge and Tenuta, 2011), with content based on theories of language development, widely researched in applied linguistics. The students, however, reinforced their lack of interest in the discipline, whether due to its low hierarchy, lack of motivation or difficulty in understanding the content. Textbooks were not mentioned as facilitators or motivators of learning.

The positive discourse was linked to another category, which was that of an approach considered by the students as captivating and varied. This is presented below and analyzed according to the types of processes present in the sentences:

The classes were very good, because they had theaters for us to learn English. (14)

[...] I loved my English teacher and she explained it very well, she always had work to be presented. (11)

The teacher was very nice, always doing dynamics ... (34)

The teacher set up theater groups... We sang international songs to help with speech. (65)

Everyone communicated well and was free to give opinions. I liked to make the models and they helped, because we put the names of the objects in English. (69)

One of the activities that everyone in the room liked was the international music video, we learned, with a photocopy of the lyrics of the song, other words. (67)

In elementary school, English classes were pretty cool. ... I had a good participation, the teacher liked us a lot [...] that's why I taught thematic work. I liked the work presentations, etc. In these classes I learned a lot. (50)

In this second block of excerpts, I select positive experiences whose representations through lexical-grammatical aspects are manifested through various processes.

The sentences in reports 11 and 50 accomplish the existential process by introducing the "existing" participant: *he had papers to be presented; he had a good participation.* The affective mental process constituted clauses 11, 50 and 67: *I loved my English teacher; we liked the international music video; the teacher liked us very much, I liked the work presentations.* Here, students are experiencers of processes and phenomena. Clause 69 indicates a behavioral process, which, as already mentioned, may contain characteristics similar to others. Thus, the sentence: *Everyone communicated well,* is located between the mental and verbal processes, however, it is the representation of the students' behavior in class.

Material prayers bring about a change in reality. These experiences of change are verbalized in excerpts 34, 50, 65 and 69, whose actors are sometimes the teachers: *I*

gave thematic works, *set up theater groups, always doing dynamics,* sometimes the students: *I liked to make the models, because we put the names of the objects in English.*

In prayer 65: *We sang international songs,* The process is verbal activity. The participant says: *We;* The Verbal Process: *we sang;* what is said, the Verbiage: *International music*; or indication semiosis: *She explained it very well* (11). The saying: she; The Verbal Process: *Explained*; The Condition Mode: Very *well.*

Processes that establish relationships between different entities are relational. "Relational clauses are commonly used to represent beings in the world in terms of their characteristics and identities. They help in the creation and description of characters and scenarios in narrative texts; they contribute to the definition of things, structuring concepts." (Fuzer; Cabral, 2014, p.65). According to these authors, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) classify relational clauses into three types, namely: intensive, possessive and circumstantial. They are presented in the following modes: attributive (one participant is an attribute of another), and identification (one participant is the identity of another). Thus, in excerpts 14: *The classes were very good;* 34: *The teacher was very nice*; 50: *the English classes were very nice;* they are intensive attributive relational clauses because one participant (attribute) characterizes the other (bearer) – the classes and the teacher are represented with the characteristics of cool, cool, good. In prayer 69: *Everyone communicated well and had the freedom to give opinions,* the relationship between the entities is one of possession. The possessor: *Everyone*; possessive relational process: *had*; possessed: *freedom to give an opinion*.

The excerpts presented emphasize the importance of the student's role from the various perspectives: identity, motivation, beliefs, autonomy, strategies, social and school interactions, collaboration, propitiations (Magno and Silva; Paiva, 2016). The positive discourse regarding the teaching/learning of the English language underlies the active role of the students. They perceive the language beyond a mere subject of the curriculum, when they recognize it in music, in the presentations of works, theaters, thematic presentations, dynamics, awakening the taste for learning.

For Jorge and Tenuta (2011, p.131), the public policy of distributing textbooks under a careful public notice and evaluation allows them to "expand the repertoire of learning strategies for students, promoting conditions for them to overcome what is proposed by the school's curriculum and by the possible limitations of their teacher's training". The collections present a variety of genres, project suggestions, cultural notes and, in the

teacher's manual, readings and reading indications for continuing education. Although textbooks were not protagonists in the students' reports, it is perceived that the teachers who were well evaluated by the students, whether they used them or not, left the commonplace, so contested, of only working on translations of text or verb *to be*.

These reports are also in line with the perspective of language education present in the National Common Curricular Base, BNCC.

According to the BNCC (Brazil, 2017), learning the English language implies "reviewing the relationships between language, territory and culture". Thus, English should be studied as a lingua franca, displaced from the standard of the ideal model of speaker or linguistic proficiency of one or another country in particular. Their learning must be seen from the perspective of multiliteracies and the rescue of knowledge for the exercise of citizenship. The strategies reported by the students in this section indicate the taste for participation, when they are led to exercise this participatory role in class.

In addition to representing their experiences through language, students use the resources of evaluativeness expressing their positive or negative attitudes about these classes, their classmates and teachers.

I present some examples using the excerpts already analyzed above.

5.1 ASPECTS OF EVALUATIVENESS IN STUDENTS' DISCOURSE

The Evaluative System (Martin and Rose, 2007) investigates and describes the construction of interpersonal meanings in texts. The subsystems of the Evaluation System are: attitude, gradation, and engagement, through which the speaker expresses feelings, judgments, or appreciation, amplifying or softening them, and incorporating or not additional voices into the discourse

Let us see how the students express their evaluation by pointing out and commenting on their lexical choice:

Many people were disinterested By the matter [...] (12)

It was good, although there were few people interested [...] (32)

Lots of side talk (62)

We participated very little. (53)

[...] There was a great lack of interest in the class. (74)

In these descriptions of English classes, students use attitude and gradation simultaneously in the Evaluation System. They intensify and enhance a negative evaluation of appreciation through quantification by choosing the adverbs "a lot and a little" and the adjective "big" to demonstrate the class's disinterest in the classes.

The three subsystems, attitude, gradation, and engagement, can occur simultaneously in the same sentence. We see that in the following excerpts, the attitude of affection is explicit and personal, showing admiration and praise for the teacher and for the classes and activities. At the same time, we realize that the source of the discourse is the student himself:

> [...]. **I** loved my English teacher and she explained very well... (11)

> In elementary school, English classes were pretty cool. [...] **I** liked the work presentations, etc. In these classes **I** learned a lot. (50)
> **I** particularly liked the music lessons so that we could listen to them and complete the lyrics [...] (46)

> **I** liked to make the models and they helped, because we put the names of the objects in English. (69)

Notwithstanding the dialogical nature of the discourse, in the excerpts presented, the subject I clearly introduces the evaluations, so the engagement is monoglostic. Only in excerpts 46 and 69, the informant declares his affection for the activity at the same time that he clarifies how all other colleagues should act: listening to and completing the lyrics of songs and naming objects in the models. Although the subject change in the second clause, the source remains monoglossia, a single voice.

The gradation that occurs simultaneously is expressed by adverbs and adjectives (*very well, always, very cool, very, very cool, always),* as in excerpts 11, 50 and 34.

For Miccoli (2011), emotions are part of the teaching/learning process. Students' confidence and participation are developed as students feel respected in their difficulties and find meaning in learning. The author rescues Aragão (2008) [4]in: "learning a foreign language does not happen in an emotional vacuum". The positive reports are reflections of the students' affection for the teachers, who certainly resignified their classes and demonstrated attitudes of affection as well.

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[4] ARAGÃO, R. Emotions and narrative research: transforming learning experiences. **Brazilian Journal of Applied Linguistics**, 2008, vol. 8, nº 2, p.296-320.

We see below some responses from the students, whose criticisms help in the reflection on the pedagogical practice and (de)valuation of the discipline by the teacher:

> [...] The classes were quite tiring because of the way the content was passed on to us (we usually translate extensive texts). ... We did not have a brief knowledge of the language, not even knowing everyday words. (54)

> We rarely used a book, because most of the time we listened to songs and later it was translated. ... Making film summaries in Portuguese was also common. (47)

> Poor teaching, I even had the book, but I used it very little, it was more translations of objects and texts, verb to be... (71)

> It was usually watching movies, summarizing it and translating huge texts. (42)

> [...] The jobs were to translate texts, one of the activities that helped the most was learning verbs, there were no other activities to improve learning. (38)

> I describe them as monotonous, they were always the same things, texts to translate, verb to be ... (52)
> More or less, because we only learned the verb to be. The book is more complicated, very difficult to use. We only did one activity in which the teacher passed on the board. (53)

> The textbook was rarely used by teachers, teachers taught practically all the subject on the board. (09)

> The content was all written on the board, an individual duty. (55)

As seen, we still have very traditional classes, based on translations, decontextualized teaching of grammar and little use of textbooks, despite the varied approaches and in line with the language teaching/learning research present in this material.

Leffa (2009, p. 117) states that "the mandatory inclusion of the foreign language provided for in the LDB, by itself, does not guarantee effective learning". Thus, the inclusion of English in the PNLD created expectations of advances. However, with regard to the textbook, the disadvantage is due to the lack of teacher preparation to optimize its use. Normative Ordinance No. 7 of 04/05/2007, stipulates in its Article 3 an obligation that, it seems, remained only on paper:

Paragraph 1 - The following are the obligations of the MEC and the FNDE:

II. <u>promote</u> and support actions aimed at teacher training with a view to the choice and use of books in schools (emphasis added).

There is an apparent lack of knowledge of the PNLD procedures, possibly fueled by the turnover of English teachers. Some of them end up selecting books with which they do not work effectively, while others do not even participate in the selection process, making it impossible to use the material profitably.

It is important to contextualize these aspects because the divergence between official documents and school practice reflects the students' discourse.

Interest in the language also changes with the entry into integrated high school. This statement is due to the question in the second questionnaire about the importance of English, and most of the informants highlighted its importance. The reasons fluctuated between doing an exchange program, helping with the entrance exam, college, ENEM, professional training, curriculum, contact with other cultures, better understanding of texts, music and movies, travel, among other very specific reasons for the student, such as: *A lot, because I travel a lot and the future I want requires fluency in this language*. (27)

Of the questionnaires analyzed, only 4 (four) brought negative answers regarding the importance of the language:

No, my profession doesn't need to know how to speak English often. (37)

No, because I won't need it, it would have to be optional. (76)

For me it is not. Because I don't like the subject and I don't understand what is explained, I have a huge difficulty in the language, but I am aware that I will be missed in the future. (68)

No (64)

As seen, the reasons were limited to the more immediate context of the respondents and the taste for discipline, despite the contradiction at the end of the sentence 68.

I move on to the conclusion of the analysis, according to my initial perspective of seeking in the students' discourse questions that would enable means of valuing the discipline in the public school.

6 CONCLUSION

As I clarified in the introduction of this work, the interest in researching the teaching and learning of the English language arose due to the recurrent access to reports from students, from different cities in the Zona da Mata Mineira, about how difficult the foreign language is, about how they did not study much beyond the verb *to be*, the lack of knowledge they show about reading strategies, and, especially, in dealing with the little knowledge, appreciation and/or commitment of those in the study of the language. Added to this is the inclusion of English didactic material in the PNLD, signaling support for Brazilian legislation that emphasizes the importance of teaching modern foreign languages for the formation of the individual, his approximation to the various cultures, providing his integration in the globalized world.

Notwithstanding the historically constructed paradox that a language globally recognized as a lingua franca is nothing more than a marginal subject in public schools (Lima, 2011), it is possible to perceive, in the many reports received, that students have preferences for certain teaching activities, as well as criticism of others.

Knowing how to take advantage of the discourse of these students to think about changes in strategies in working with the English language is a step in valuing the discipline. Students like to be protagonists, to present work, as we have seen in some reports of positive evaluation, while they find monotonous classes in the translation of long texts and grammar, if they do not perceive a goal for the effort. Interdisciplinary projects are a good suggestion to optimize the restricted number of classes, the isolation of the discipline in the curriculum, and student motivation.

The student discourse also opens the opportunity for projects aimed at learning through music, or for the development of communicative skills. In this case, the classes are not configured as reinforcement of the regular discipline, but as a separate course. In small municipalities in the interior, English language courses are, in general, domestic, appearing more like school reinforcement and, even so, they have a small reach of the public. Projects at school can be counted as Module II that teachers need to complete weekly at the institution.

Although teachers are not part of this study, it is important to highlight the need for continuing education courses, the use of didactic material and linguistic development for the teachers of the discipline, given the turnover of these professionals and the hiring often as a complement to the Portuguese workload.

The discussion presented does not intend to dictate solutions, since the educational context is complex, broad and diverse, but to provoke reflection on how to appropriate didactic resources to link them to the demands of adolescents growing up in a more immediate and more globalized society.

The appreciation of the language, in fact, needs to go through a long hierarchical path. Listening to the student and having him as an ally in this process is a marked point, in the face of the many that are lost with the curricular rigidity of the discipline. And quoting Leffa (2016, p.169), "the student as a subject of the foreign language learning process is generally very little studied". Therefore, by allowing them to represent their experiences and make appreciations of the activities and teaching materials, we open a channel of dialogue to reflect and overcome the obstacles so deep-rooted in the teaching/learning of the English language.

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