Between Acquiring and Learning a Language: Subjectivity and Polyphony / *Entre adquirir e aprender uma língua: subjetividade e polifonia*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at discussing and deconstructing dichotomies such as learning/acquisition, mother tongue/foreign language, drawing upon a corpus extracted from reports of ten foreign language speakers. In general, they learned (grasped) those languages in informal situations or, as they say, in autodidactic ones. The analysis was based on the discursive-deconstructive perspective, which includes thinkers such as Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan, who share concepts of language, subject and culture. The analysis has allowed us to realize that when talking about how they learned the foreign language(s), the majority of the participants only consider strategies, (formal and informal) methodologies, the means used to have access to the other person's language-culture, forgetting that entering the other's language presupposes the desire that manifests itself in the love for the language(s) and for the other.

KEYWORDS: Dialogism; Foreign Language; Mother Tongue; Deconstruction; Discourse; Subjectivity

RESUMO

Pretende-se discutir e desconstruir as dicotomias aprendizagem/aquisição, língua materna/língua estrangeira, a partir de um corpus *extraído de relatos de dez falantes de língua(s) estrangeira(s). Em geral, eles apre(e)nderam a(s) língua(s) em situações informais ou, como dizem eles, em situações autodidatas. A análise efetuada tomou por base a perspectiva discursivo-desconstrutivista, que inclui pensadores como Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida e Lacan. Todos eles partilham concepções como língua(gem), sujeito e cultura. A análise empreendida permitiu perceber que, ao falarem de como aprenderam a(s) língua(s) estrangeira(s), a maioria dos participantes da pesquisa só consideram as estratégias, as metodologias (formais e informais), os meios utilizados para terem acesso à língua-cultura do outro, esquecendo que adentrar a língua do outro pressupõe o desejo que se manifesta no amor da(s) língua(s) e do outro.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dialogismo; Língua Estrangeira; Língua Materna; Desconstrução; Discurso; Subjetividade

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This paper aims at discussing the assumption disseminated by schools and foreign language teachers that in order to teach and, therefore, to learn a language, it is necessary, on the one hand, to know that language grammatically (i.e., its lexicon, morphology, and syntax) and, on the other hand, to have a well structured methodology for teaching it such as the one that may be supposedly found in textbooks. Textbooks are acknowledged by their publishers and authors and, consequently, by educational institutions and bodies involved with the national policy on education as well as by many researchers, who are usually authors of those textbooks that are oftenly (if not always) accompanied by the teacher's handbook or teacher's guides (whether as a part of the textbook or as a supplementary material). The designation given to this material can also demonstrate that it is taken as the highest authority, which serves as a mirror for the teacher who is advised, guided and supported by it daily. A handbook is what the teacher handles, and it is at his/her fingertips, guiding him/her on what gestures to make and on what answers to give.

However, this paper does not aim at approaching textbooks, even though it indirectly appears as a ghost that hunts us all who are first and second language teachers. What drives us is inquiring what conception of methodology should be adopted in a foreign language lesson, especially in the beginning of one's learning. How does one learn a language? Does everybody need well defined methods in order to learn/acquire a language? What do people who are interested in learning/acquiring a language need? These are some of the questions we intend to address throughout this paper by drawing upon reports of experiences of ten foreign language speakers.

From a theoretical perspective, we rely on discourse studies, with emphasis on Bakhtin and Foucault. The first is used in order to understand the polyphony found in the researchees' speeches and the concept of ideology, which is one of the most important contributions of the author of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. The latter is used to comprehend the power relations implied in every human relation, which replaces (of course, not without differences) the concepts of ideology and subjectivation. We also rely on Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to bring up concepts regarding everything involving the subject and on Derridean deconstruction in order to discuss what seems to us as natural, true and real. In short, we are grounded in a perspective that we designated as discursive-deconstructive approach to differentiate it

from other discursive approaches. By having these scholars as references, one may think of a lack of scientific rigor because of the differences they have, which are sometimes great, but they also show similarities: They criticize the conception of science based on reason, on absolute truth, which is an end in itself, and on the absence of any and all subjectivity. They were contemporaries, and their conception of language and subject was against the rationality that prevailed in the Humanities until the 60s. They shared, each in their own way, a deconstructive perspective, which is opposed to a constructivist perspective, and similar conceptions of subject, subjectivity and language (opaque). Thus, it is possible to bring them together, and this is what we seek to do.

1 (De)naturalizing Beliefs...

In the 80s, Krashen (1987; 1988) distinguished acquisition from learning by advocating the idea, which, until nowadays, has underlain researches and textbooks that claim to be communicative, that only a language considered as one's mother tongue is acquired and the others are learned. It means that one's first language is what defines him/her as a subject, and it is acquired without its grammar knowledge, better yet without one's formal knowledge of it. The other languages, which are best known as foreign languages, are learned (grasped) in formal contexts, once the learners are not directly in touch with the speakers of those languages or in an immersion situation. One's first language is unconsciously acquired without his/her awareness, whereas the other languages are consciously learned. In fact, according to Krashen (1998), the more one is aware of learning strategies, the more and the better the process of learning and its results are. This explains the studies on didactic and pedagical (cognitive and metacognitive) strategies, which are supported by researches with learners as subjects and carried out for enabling this learning.

This dichotomy was also reinforced by psychoanalyst Melman (1992), who lived in Paris. According to him, it is only possible "to understand" a mother tongue; the others are "known."[1] More recently, in his lectures[2], he stated that one can only

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[1] TN. Usually both verbs "saber" and "conhecer" in Portuguese are translated into English as "to know." However, taking into consideration the distiction made by Melman, we opted to translate the first as "to understand" and the latter as "to know." We employed these verbs in English because they are slightly

count on his/her mother tongue, while, in a foreign a language, one can only consciously "count (numbers, for instance)."[3] However, how should one comprehend the difference between understanding and knowing as stated by Melman (1992)? To understand seems to us to be related to acquisition and to be constituted by and in a language (that is always a cultural aspect): a language that hosts the baby even before birth. It talks about and to the subject. In another work (CORACINI, 2011c; 2014a), I refer to the verb "saber"[4] [to understand] relating it to one of its dearest Portuguese meanings, which is "sabor" [taste]. A sabor [taste] gives one pleasure; it fulfills one's thirst and hunger. For example, somebody is eating (saboreando [tasting]) a fruit and says "Isso me sabe" [It understands me]. Following this perspective, this mother tongue would be blended with the culture that hosts the baby, protecting him/her, although in an illusionary way; it is like a mother that protects her child and embraces his/her discursive memory in tradition and in historicity (a historical and social moment and, therefore, also a cultural one in which the mother and the baby are involved).

What is there to say about the so-called foreign language[5]? According to Melman, in the aforementioned book, it is only possible to know it. This point of view is related to the concept of learning found in Krashen (1987; 1988). For Melman (1992, p.15)[6]:

> To understand a language is very different from knowing it. To understand a language means to be spoken by it, and what it speaks of one comes from one's mouth and it is stressed by the use of "I."
> To know a language means to be able to mentally translate the language that is understood into the language that is known. Thus, one speaks from a different place, i.e, one communicates.

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different and the same happens in Portuguese. To understand something is more than knowing something, because it recquires a deeper level of familiarity with it and involves being under a particular stand.

[2] I refer to the lectures that I attended in Paris in 2006. In these lectures, the psychoanalyst commented on a microfilm about being/staying between languages.

[3] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: "contamos (números por exemplo)".

[4] TN. Once the analysis regards a very specific meaning of the verb "saber" [to understand] in Portuguese that does not occur in English, I opted to use the verb and its meaning in Portuguese followed by brackets with the English translation.

[5] In order to understand why I use "so-called" mother tongue and foreign language, see Coracini (2010).

[6] Excerpt translated from the Portuguese version: "Saber uma língua é muito diferente de conhecê-la. Saber uma língua quer dizer ser falado por ela, que o que ela fala em você se enuncia por sua boca como destacado a título do "eu". Conhecer uma língua quer dizer ser capaz de traduzir mentalmente, a partir da língua que se sabe, a língua que se conhece. Desde então, não falamos mais do mesmo lugar, nos comunicamos".

Therefore, the language that is understood is the mother tongue, which talks about one. The language that is known is the foreign language, the other person's language. The latter is only comprehended by relating it to the first, which constitutes one as a subject. For Melman (1992), a foreign language would be a language for communication, which would have its function. However, it would be external to the subject itself, working like a tool.

Thereby, it seems to us that the standpoints of these scholars (Krashen and Melman, each one with his own way) advocate that (a) foreign language(s) cannot be assimilated (this verb derives from Latin *assimulare*, *ad-* + *simulare*, and it means to make similar, to simulate), acquired, grasped by the subject. Differently from the so-called mother tongue, a foreign language cannot involve the subject and be embodied by him/her. Futhermore, as a result, they ascertain that foreign languages demand a conscious, a rational, a formal learning. In a way, this conception points to the need of a well thought of and planned methodology by someone who is a competent authority for "producing" a sort of school material. In a world like ours, which is ruled by economy, such methodology needs to be sold, either electronically or in paper format. Publishers and websites sell their textbooks, which are often commissioned by certain authors, who also happen to be teachers of this(these) language(s), relying on the argument that it is necessary to make easier the work of the teacher, who is underpaid and under a heavy workload that does not allow him/her to have enough time to plan his/her classes. Thus, something is left out: the real reason why these textbooks are adopted by teachers and schools, which is the poor training of teachers, who often do not feel or are not considered (well) prepared for teaching.

Be that as it may, there seems to be a common sense that a foreign language needs to be learned in formal or institutional settings, even though it is repeatedly stated that "a language cannot be learned at school" (school here refers to primary and secondary education), as it is said by one of the research participants (see R1, hereafter). This common statement favors learning at language schools or institutes. However, how can it be explained that some people are able to learn a foreign language by themselves without any help from experts/teachers? Would there actually be self-taught foreign language learners? This subject will be further addressed in this paper.

Before we start the next section, it is worth recalling that, despite everything, there are researchers who do not present a dichotomy between acquiring and learning, which can be related to understanding and knowing. This latter dichotomy is regarded by both Melman (1992) and Foucault (2001)[7]. By approaching this dichotomy, Foucault did not intend to debate over the issue of language, but he aimed at distinguinshing the following conceptions: To know points to formal environments, where reason and, therefore, awareness prevails, whereas to understand is related to unconscious processes, life experiences that, therefore, take place in informal contexts. Among the authors who do not make such a distinction are Poyau (1987), Porquier & alii (1987), Derville & Portine (1998), and Pekarek (1998). Their texts stem from the International Colloquium "Acquisition d'une langue étrangère: perspectives et recherches" [Acquiring a foreign language: prospects and researches][8]. Those researchers refer to a foreign language learner as someone who acquires a language, making no distinction between learning and acquiring.

2 Is It Possible to Learn Foreign Language at School or Outside of It?

In order to discuss the formal learning of a foreign language, online interviews have been conducted with 10 students from different areas of knowledge, who consider themselves as self-taught in at least one language, allowing the hypothesis that it is possible to assimilate one language without going through the formal aspects of learning, which presupposes, above all, the knowledge (thus, conscious) of that language. This hypothesis was supported later by Gee (2004,) who, in the "Introduction" of his work *Situated Language and Learning: A Critic of Traditional Schooling*, after briefly presenting the shift in his position as a teacher and researcher, argues that, first, he approached the most relevant grammatical aspects for English teaching and now, he focuses on other less "school like" aspects. He assumes that

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[7] TN. Here, differently from the paper in Portuguese, I opted to refer to the English translation. Therefore, the full reference is: FOUCAULT, M. *Power*. Essential Works of Michel Foucault – 1954-1985. Vol. III. Edited by James D. Faubion and translated by Robert Hurley. New York: The New Press, 2001.

[8] The International Colloquium was held in Besançon in 1996. A Colloquium under the same title took place in Aix-en-Provence in 1986. The latter's theme was about "Appropriating a foreign language" (*S'approprier une langue étrangère*).

> [...] there are [...] new ways of learning, afoot in the world—ways not
> necessarily connected to academics or schools. These ways are, in
> their own fashion, just as special, technical, and complex as academic
> and school ways. But they are motivating for many people for whom
> school wasn't (GEE, 2004, p.1-2).

In the online interviews we conducted, we wanted accounts of experience, very similar to life stories, which focused solely on the key aspects of our concern. Thus, as a stimulus, the following questions were asked: "What languages do you know? Did you learn them at school? Please, write as if you were talking, with all the details, how you learned that (those) language(s). How did you go about it? (Please write eveything you can remember)." The answers obtained are at the same time similar and different from one another. They are similar, because all of them mentioned self-teaching one or more languages, because all of them, taking into consideration that self-teaching refers to learning (a) language(s) ouside the school setting, mentioned that they taught themselves one or more languages. They are also similar due to the fact that, although they did not learn it/them at school (a formal context for learning), the participants of the research have used strategies close to those employed in such contexts; for instance, three respondents attended (the same) online course and the others, although not recognizing the importance of what they had learned at school, used, somehow, the grammatical aspects that they had been taught in an institutional context. Let's observe the following excerpt:

> R1: Of course I attended English classes in primary and secondary
> school, but nobody learns much with the "English taught at school,"
> although I cannot deny that I have learned how to write sentences in
> the interrogative, negative and affirmative forms. For example, I
> learned at school that in some cases it is necessary to use the auxiliary
> verb "do" in order to ask a question. But I never took an English
> course at private language schools like Cultura Inglesa, Fisk, etc.
> (Valério)[9]

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[9] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: R1: "É claro que eu tive inglês no ensino fundamental e médio, no entanto não se aprende muita coisa nesse "inglês de escola", apesar de que não posso negar que tenha aprendido como escrever sentenças nas formas interrogativa, negativa e afirmativa, por exemplo, eu aprendi na escola que em alguns casos é necessário usar o auxiliar "do" para fazer uma pergunta. Mas nunca fiz curso de inglês em escolas pagas como Cultura Inglesa, Fisk, etc." (Valério)

We can notice that the argumentative use of concessive structure - of course ... but...- indicates, in the linguistic materiality, that there are at least two voices: one that would admit to learning English in primary and secondary school and another one that simulates to be the enunciator's own opinion, by stating that one does not learn a foreign language at school. As we know from other researches' findings, this proposition has become a commonplace, an unquestioned idea, a naturalized thinking, which suggests that courses in private institutes are the ones which enable people to properly learn a language. This voice clearly appears in the previous excerpt, when Valério explains what he calls self-teaching (in his answer to the first question), which is not taking an "English course at private schools like Cultura Inglesa, Fisk, etc." Even unintentionally, he argues for these courses, but recognizes the importance of the formal aspects learned at school.

Thereby, this excerpt and the others also point to another similarity: They are composed by many voices, which were produced by others and echo in the words of each respondent. This relates to what Vološinov (1986)[10] calls dialogism and polyphony[11]: Sayings are embodied by several voices that stem from previous sayings, which are at the same time always repeated and always filled by new meanings brought by the utterance's situation, just as we could observe in the first excerpt.

Relying on Bakhtin, Todorov (1984)[12] states that:

> In the later writings, Bakhtin will particularly insist on another patent fact: whatever the object of speech, this object, in one way or another, has always already been said, and it is impossible to avoid encountering the discourse previously held upon this object (p.62).

Similarly to the above, Foucault (1972[13], p.221) approaches the "already-said," stating that every utterance produces new meanings (or rather, sense effects). Foucault

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[10] TN. Here, differently from the French translation of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* [*Marxisme et philosophie du langage*], which was refered by the author of the paper in Portuguese and in the references, my reference is the English translation. In the French translation Bakhtin and Voloshinov appear as authors, and in the English translation only Vološinov's name appears. The complete reference of the English translation is: VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridege: Harvard University Press, 1986.
[11] According to Todorov (1984, p.60), dialogism refers to intertextuality. This latter concept is introduced by Kristeva, and it is prefered by Todorov.
[12] TN. Here, differently from the paper in Portuguese, I opted to refer to the English translation. Therefore, the full reference for this excerpt is: TODOROV, T. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle.* Translated by Wlad Godzich. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

pinpoints it in the following sentence: "The novelty lies no longer in what is said, but in its reapperance." This is also close to Derrida (1981[14]), who refers to the *same* as being always different in each utterance, but not so different to the point of not bearing similarities and not so similar to the point of not being aware of these differences. In the wake of Bakhtin, Authier-Revuz (1998) proposes a constitutive heterogeneity of text that occasionally emerges or is found represented in linguistic materiality.

Following Vološinov's point of view (1986)[15], it is worth remiding that every speech offers itself to another subject, as something to be interpreted, according to the context (contextual, social and, therefore, cultural aspects) in which it lies. Indeed, there is no language use which is not intertwined, constituted by culture, if we understand culture as social-historical aspects, or even better, as ideological aspects (i.e., ways of seeing the world, each other and oneself) that characterize a given people, nation or group (e.g., family members, work colleagues, friends ...). We could also understand culture similarly to what Vološinov (1986, p.14)[16] calls ideology: a set of ideas that constitutes all and any dialogical relationship. For Vološinov (1986), human communication in everyday life is performed inescapably by ideas (indeed, we cannot do it differently). These ideas can only be offered to the other person (partner in dialogue) through (verbal or non-verbal) signs. Thus, any communication is ideological, taking in consideration that every and any sign, every and any utterance lay deep in an ideological dimension (literature, politics, art, etc.) and, by being aprehended by the human being, they embody the evaluative tone that stems from the subject's conception of their meaning. Vološinov (1986) assumes that where there is a sign, there is also ideology ["Everything ideological possesses *meaning*: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a *sign*. *Without signs there is no ideology*" (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.9, italics in the original)[17]]. Chaguri (2010, p.226-

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[13] TN. Here, differently from the paper in Portuguese, I opted to refer to the English translation. Therefore, the full reference is: FOUCAULT, M. *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discouse on Language*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon books, 1972.

[14] TN. Here, differently from the paper in Portuguese, I opted to refer to the English translation. Therefore, the full reference for this excerpt is: DERRIDA, J. *Positions.* Translated and annotated by Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

[15] See footnote 10.

[16] See footnote 10.

[17] See footnote 10.

227)[18] reminds us that the Bakhtinian concept of ideology is not negative; on the contrary, it is fruitful, because it lays the foundations for any kind of knowledge:

> The Bakhtinian concept of ideology must not be understood as negative values and intentions, but as a broader area of the intelectual creativity/human culture. The foundations for the studies of the scientific knowledge, literature, religion, morality among others cannot set them apart from the concrete reality that holds them. Therefore, signs are intrinsically ideological, i.e., one will never be able to study signs apart from their realities.

It follows from what was previously stated that every saying is grounded in the enunciative situation in which this saying is found, which is designated by Chaguri (2010) as a "concrete reality," in a dialogical relation (because every saying is directed towards the other person, and even a monologue is developed through the creation of another person with whom one talks); thus, every saying is ideological. In the interviews, which are the *corpus* of this text, the researcher introduced herself as a professor at Instituto de Estudos da Linguagem [Institute of Language Studies] of Unicamp [State University of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil] and this surely influenced the gathered accounts, especially in the first minutes of interview. However, this seems to be inevitable because of the dialogical (ideological) aspect that characterizes every human relation. Futhermore, if one regards an ideological phenomenon, he/she necessarily regards a "sociological" one and vice-versa (TODOROV, 1984, p.52)[19]. This perspective allows us to think that acquiring a foreign language is stepping into the other person's language-culture (CORACINI, 2014b), into other discursivities that modify one's subjectivy without implying the withdrawal of one's first language-culture, which will always be present as voices that work as a parameter to comprehend and to acquire what is different from it.

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[18] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: "A ideologia em Bakhtin não deve ser compreendida como valores e intenções negativas, mas como uma área da expansão da criatividade intelectual/cultural humana. As bases para os estudos do conhecimento científico, da literatura, da religião, da moral e outros, não podem ser estudadas separadamente da realidade concreta que as abriga. Por isso os signos são intrinsecamente ideológicos, ou seja, jamais os signos poderão ser estudados separadamente de suas realidades".

[19] See footnote 12.

Even in one's first language, which is designated as a mother tongue, the plurality of voices are embodied by every and any saying, as it is possible to note in the first and in the following excerpts from the accounts gathered for this research.

> R2: French: I started to study this language by myself as a resolution for 2004. I started with a grammar book and I followed it through the end, but it did not assure me proficiency. I kept studying grammar in the following years and I also read vocabulary books, such as travel books in order to improve what I already knew. I started teaching this language in the middle of 2008 and afterwards I improved myself in it by reading books, magazines and newspapers. I speak it fluently, but not with same the ability that I have in the three other languages I already knew. I have been working as a translator. (Jonas)[20]

> R3: In 2006, I found an online course at Deutsche Welle for beginners (called Warum Nicht). In the course, there was a 20-minute audio lesson and a pdf document with grammar explanation, some vocabulary and short exercises. The latter was located at the top of the pdf. I used to listen to the 20-minute lesson 2 times and copy what was on the pdf file in a notebook. Only after this was done did I print the pdf document and answer the exercises. It usually took me 3 hours per day studying every day (I started studying on a Sunday). My German course was in the evening shift, so I used to spend the whole next day practicing what I had learned in the previous night. I read everything aloud and I talked and talked to myself in order to practice it. It was the only way. (Roberto)[21]

It is possible to see that every excerpt from this research, both the ones that were here transcripted (R1, R2 and R3) and the others that have been analysed, are constituted by school voices (because all of them are schooled and universty students), by the teaching-learning process of at least one language, which is (well or poorly) known by them and that was introduced to them at school, oftenly, with support of a

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[20] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: R2: "Francês: Comecei a estudar esse idioma sozinho como resolução para o ano de 2004. Comecei com uma gramática e a segui até o fim, mas não me garantiu uma fluência. Ative-me a ela pelos anos seguintes e estudei livros de vocabulário, tais como guias de viagens para ampliar o que sabia. Comecei a lecioná-lo no meio de 2008 e o desenvolvi posteriormente através de leituras de livros, revistas e jornais. Falo-o fluentemente, mas não com a destreza das três línguas anteriores. Fiz e faço trabalhos de tradução". (Jonas)

[21] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: R3: "Em 2006 eu havia achado um curso da Deutsche Welle, on-line, para iniciantes (chamado Warum Nicht), sendo cada lição 20 minutos de áudio e um pdf explicativo com alguns termos, gramática e pequenos exercícios no começo. Eu ouvia a aula de 20 minutos umas 2 vezes e copiava o arquivo pdf inteiro em um caderno, só então o imprimia e fazia os exercícios, e isso me tomava cerca de 3 horas por dia estudando todos os dias da semana (comecei a estudar num domingo). Como eu estudava o alemão na parte da noite, eu passava o dia seguinte inteiro treinando o que eu aprendi na noite anterior, praticava em voz alta mesmo, falava e conversava sozinho para treinar, era a única forma". (Roberto)

textbook and/or a grammar book and a dictionary. In a certain way, the learners from this research followed that language teacher who refuses to daily use the textbooks available in the market, but who relies on an authentic material (produced with newpapers or magazines excerpts, songs and dialogues from real communicative situations) as if it were a textbook (CORACINI, 2011a). They did so by embodying this sort of material or methodology that was applied by the teacher at school in order to step into the unknown world of the other that they desire[22] without being aware of what it means. This happens even when they do it by themselves. Some strategies revisit certain practices that are common at school or that are suggested by the teacher: copying, listening to audios, oral repetition tasks, talking (even it is talking to oneself). The idea of practice, which occurs twice at R3's account and bears the meaning that is found in the school's and in the teacher's saying ("one must practice"), traces back to the behaviorist perspective that is related to structuralism in linguistics: to practice, to repeat, to copy are terms that this didactic and pedagogical approach is very attached to. Such approach was very popular in the 70s, and, nowadays, it is discreetly employed by textbooks that state to be relying in a communicative approach. The latter supposedly offers experts and teachers a methodology that is the opposite of the direct method (grounded in behaviorism and structuralism).

However, if the accounts bring similarities between them and the school practices, they also present strategic or methodological differences between them and the school discourses and, therefore, they make use of tasks which are uncommon or never addressed in formal learning contexts: seeing internet videos, joining chats with "native speakers" and, thus, exchanging messages with someone who does not know Potuguese, which, in regular basis, is similar (although also presenting diferences) to an immersion situation, when students, like Roberto, are intensively submitted to the other person's language-culture, to the discursivities that constitute this language-culture, thus, to the foreign country. In this kind of experience, the differences become more evident in the face-to-face reaction of the one who misunderstands or, sometimes, interprets the target language in an unforseen manner or in accordance to one's own

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[22] TN. In this entire paper, I opted to use the verb "desire" to translate "desejo," which could be translated as "desire," "wish" and "will," in order to express the idea of one's unaware wish, because in philosophy the verb "will" commonly refers to a property of the mind and it is an atribute of acts intentionally commited. My choice is also due to Lacan's perspective on the concept of desire, which is adopted by the author.

culture or ideology that is embodied by this one's language but not by the other's, which also embodies a particular culture and ideology. Let's observe some excerpts.

> R4: [...] I learned listening to English by listening to music and watching movies without subtitles, but still I could not speak it. I just learned how to speak it when I traveled to Canada along with a friend of mine for 20 days and it was already enough for me to learn how to speak English. Well, I recall learning it this way. (Vitor)[23]

> R5: I got no help from any teacher or anyone alike. However, through Livemocha.com, which provides a multiple languages "course" that is very elementary, I met people from several countries who spoke different languages and I've kept in touch with some of them until nowadays. Those people helped me out with some doubts I had. The strategy that I follow in order to learn any language is always the same: I search for songs, movies and books and I also try to meet people who are native speakers of that language. [...] I have always translated things, researched on grammar rules, on correct forms of pronunciation, on abbreviations and on common slangs. (Jonas)[24]

R4 highlights the audio ("music") and audio-visual ("movies without subtitles") activities that alongside his in loco experience, in Canada, represent authentic communication situations or, if one prefers authentic activities. The latter was used to designate those materials (of written or oral texts) produced for native speakers without pedagogical purpose. It is true that, many times, songs are brought to classrooms, but the didactic strategies do not always please the students, maybe because they break with the material's authenticity: the school turns every and any (written or oral) material into a didactic one (CORACINI, 2011a); it seems to be unavoidable, once, in that specific situation, "authentic" characterizes the school environment and the pedagogical procedures that stems from it.

In R5, Jonas states that he is self-taught, but, right after that, he refers to an online "course." One should observe the use of quotation marks in "course," which are

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[23] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: R4*:* "[...] aprendi a ouvir em inglês, ouvindo músicas e assistindo filmes sem legenda, mas ainda assim não conseguia falar. Só fui aprender a falar quando viajei ao Canadá com um amigo meu, passei 20 dias lá e já foi o suficiente para eu aprender a falar. Bom é assim que eu me lembro que aprendi". (Vitor)

[24] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: R5: "Não obtive ajuda de qualquer tipo de professor, porém por meio do site Livemocha.com, que oferece um "curso" de vários idiomas num nível bem fraco, conheci pessoas de diversas nacionalidades e idiomas, algumas mantenho contato até hoje estas me ajudavam em algumas Duvidas que eu possuía. A estratégia que eu uso para aprender qualquer idioma é sempre a mesma, procuro por músicas, filmes, livros e procuro também conhecer pessoas que são nativas desse idioma. [...]. Sempre fiz muitas traduções, pesquisas sobre regras gramaticais, formas corretas de pronúncia, abreviações e gírias usadas". (Jonas)

a punctuation form that indicates that there is another person's voice and, above all, another meaning: it is not a course like any other, or even better, like the school one. Simply being an online course makes everything different, even when the activities are very similar to those in the traditional textbooks. Another aspect of the online course is that, according to Jonas, there is no teacher, for he states that he has never needed a teacher's support. The learner forgets that someone produced the material and that, therefore, the teacher is there although he is not seen. It is worthy noting that every participant of this research refers to the internet as one of the key ways for learning a language, with the illusion that this way they are learning it by themselves, although they recognize that the material is poor.

Once more, alongside songs, books and translations, the native myth is expressed in the respondent's utterance ("I also try to meet people who are native speakers of that language"), with a similar effect of staying for 20 days in the country of the target language (see R4), although, in this particular situation, the time is too short to greatly develop speaking skills, as Vitor states ("I traveled to Canada along with a friend of mine for 20 days and it was enough for me to learn how to speak English"). One should pay attention to the sentence "it was already enough"; in it, the adverb of time "already" shows an antecipation of what was expected (CORACINI, 1981), and the word "enough" indicates the end of a very short time, which is seen as an advantage: the sooner the better; there is no time to waste in the online world. However, it is important to stress that those accounts are always and inevitable memories, which also carry forgetfullness (CORACINI, 2011b) of what "seems" to have occured ("Well, I recall learning it this way") and give the impression that "to learn (to grasp)" a language involves ackownledged steps set by experts and by others who also successfully followed such steps.

Interestingly, other studies point to the same strategies used by our research participants. Paiva (1998) gathered reports from learners who said that the strategies they used to learn English were: repeating, copying, listening in order to learn how to speak; thinking in the target language, to use dictionaries and grammar books or grammar guides are also quite recurrent in their accounts. In addition to these reports, which are certainly intertwined by the other's voice (especially, by the school's) that constructs representations, images of what it is like to learn a so-called foreign

language, videos, movies and internet tools often rely on this kind of discourse (with statements such as "visit sites in the language you're learning," "download lessons from the Internet and also visited some good language learning websites").

However, it's known that one needs much more than this to step into another person's language-culture (CORACINI, 2014). The excerpts transcripted here point to how a student steps into the other person's language nowadays, which implies that the language-culture of the other has entered the student through the door of desire. One has the desire of and for the other, one desires to become what the other desires and, at the same time, one desires to become the other, who is "thought of" (imagined) as a model by the first. This constitutes one of the most important aspects, if not the most important one, that drives the subject in his/her never-ending search to fill the lack of the other. It is what remains that drives us towards the imaginary other.

In this regard, it is worth revisiting the story presented in the beginning of Prasse's text (1997). The author (1997, p.63)[25] introduces her text by telling an "almanac story" that, according to her, points to "one's very particular and successful experience with a foreign language." Every child who was contemporary of this author knew this story. It is about a young craftsman who had followed Rhine's course and arrived in Amsterdam. This place amazed him by its beauty, sumptuous palaces and the great amount of flowers that hung outside the windows, and he asked a passerby who the owner of such palace was, but he obviously did it in his mother tongue, once he did not know the other person's language. The passerby, in turn, did not understand what the craftsman had asked and answered in his mother tongue: *Kannitverstan*, which means "I do not understand." The craftsman understood this word as if it were the owner's name. The same answer was given to him whenever he, driven by his admiration for the city's beauty and wealth, asked a question to a local person. His great admiration for this man named Kannitverstan made him, who was a poor and tired hard worker, think that he would be very happy if he had the opportunity, "at least once in his life, to be in the Kannitverstan's place of wealth and happiness" (p.64, our translation[26]). Strong feelings of sadness for not being like this other man and of

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[25] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: "um encontro um tanto particular e absolutamente bem sucedido com uma língua estrangeira".
[26] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: "ao menos uma vez na vida, [...] se encontrar no lugar desse rico e feliz Kannitverstan".

satisfaction for thinking (dreaming?) of one day at least being like this man took over him when he saw a fancy funeral procession. When he asked who was being buried, he got the same answer he had always been given: Kannitverstan. Then, the craftsman realized that death levels all human beings and therefore one should not envy the other.

However, what interests us the most is not the implied moral of the story, but this other sense of happiness, i.e., the other person's happiness that in our imagination is presented as incomparably greater than ours, which causes us envy and admiration. The same happens to us regarding the other person's language-culture that we do not know, but that seems to be infinitely more interesting than ours, because it carries the promise of being like the other (which is more developed, wealthier and with less social problems) that we admire and envy (at least, this is how we picture this native speaker of this unknown and, precisely because of it, desired language-culture). *Kannitverstan*, a sentence (that he listens to without any segmentation) was grasped as a proper noun by the craftsman, constituting a signifier. Prasse (1998, p.64)[27] states that the proper noun "fuctions as a signifier in its pure state, a special trait, a mark of 'subject function in language,' as defined by Lacan (in the seminar 'Identification'), for instance." The signifier *kannitverstan* (I do not understand), grasped by the craftsman as the "other person's name precisely situates him in the position of somebody who desires" (p.65)[28]. By desiring to be like the other, the craftsman ignores the difference between his position and the other's position, which places him as the one who desires. But what does he desire? Kannitverstan. I do not comprehend what "I do not understand" means; I only know that I lack something and for this reason I desire it. According to Prasse,

> [the] condition [of] desire is that one does not understand the other. When one understands the other, this one necessarily faces both his and the other's mortality, in which the diferences between the subjects are trully nullified, and faces indifference, in which one disappears.
> [...] to us, this "kannitverstan" story can be part of a successful analysis, in which "I do not understand" enables a subject to find out his lack of the Other, a happy accident on the wall of language (1988, p.65)[29]).

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[27] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: "função significante em estado puro, o traço especial, a marca de uma "função sujeito na linguagem", como o define Lacan (no Seminário "A Identificação"), por exemplo".

[28] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: "nome suposto do outro designa justamente a si mesmo como sujeito desejante".

[29] Excerpt translated from the original in Portuguese: "[a] condição [do] desejo é que se não o compreenda. Quando se o compreende, ele esbarra necessariamente na mortalidade de cada um, na qual a

Prasse very properly assures the success of this incident (similar to what happens to our respondents) – an experience with a foreign language – that allowed the craftsman to face a signifier that puts the subject before his desire and, above all, before the lack that inescapably constitutes him. The craftsman and we alike try to hide our desire, by attributing a moral, and sometimes a religious, interpretation to a cultural aspect and, thus, leaving us with a unique meaning, the true one.

The error of this small story's character was certainly experienced by everyone who, like our research participants, faces the other person and the other's language-culture, which attracts and betrays him/her. I remember that many times I got surprised when I found out that a word did not mean what I thought it did or that a word was not spelled the way I thought it was. The recollection of some of those erros occurs to me right now: many times, I understood the word *pourtant* (however) as *portanto* (therefore),[30] by trying hard to match the context with the meaning expressed by the word in my so-called mother tongue, whose spelling is similar to the French word. I used to listen to the sentence *Il n'y a que ça* as *yaksa*, because I could not distinguish between words; I only tried to understand their sense effect in its context. Another example: the sentence *J'ai failli tomber*, which can be heard many times at the subway in Paris, made me wonder what it meant: *I fell down, I had to fall down?* Or *I needed to fall*? It took me a while to understand that *faillir*, in this sentence, meant *almost* (fell down): it was when I heard *j'ai failli mourir* that I realized that it could not mean *I had to die*, because the speaker was alive... The same happened to me when I heard the following sentence *jamais tu le vois, dis-lui qu'il me manque*,[31] in which *jamais* could not meant *never*, but, then, what did it mean? The fact is that an error (TODOROV, 1984)[32] is not an isolated fact and it does not point to a certain degree of knowledge, as some experts want to believe in. Those authors (LICERAS, 1991; HOLTZER, 1998; BLANCO PICADO, 2002) advocate that an interlanguage is a saying that merges one's mother tongue and a foreign language, a saying that does not match any of them or that is more related to the first, working as parameter, than to the second. According to

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diferença entre os sujeitos é verdadeiramente anulada, ele esbarra na indiferença, na qual ele se apaga. [...] para nós, essa história de "kannitverstan" pode passar por um fragmento de análise bem sucedida, um "não compreendo" que leva o sujeito à descoberta da falta no Outro um acidente feliz no muro da linguagem" (1988, p.65).

[30] TN. The spelling of the French word *pourtant* is similar to the Portuguese word *portanto.*

[31] In English: "If, by any chance, you meet him, tell him that I miss him".

[32] See footnote 12.

them, an interlanguage is a step that needs to be overcome. The language itself is also constituted by error, for it is open to multiple meanings, thus, leaving spaces that allow subjectivity to step into each one of them and, this way, creating the illusion that they have been occupied (filled). However, if we follow Derridas's (1981)[33] understanding of an ultimate meaning, which delays space filling, and of the place of meaning in between the signifiers that make it shift, slip and continously change in time and space, then, the speaker (phallus and a lacking person, "parlêtre," according to Lacan, 2007)[34], who speaks any language and, especially, a so-called foreign language, lives – and, therefore, sees himself/herself – in a tense place, without precise boundries, of being in *between*: between him/her and the other person, between a language and the other(s),between a meaning and another, between this and that. This explains merging languages, a fact which is very common in any speaker's daily routine.

In between him/me and the other, because, as Vološinov (1986)[35], Foucault (2001)[36], Derrida (1998)[37] and Lacan (2001)[38] state, each in his own way, I see myself through the other person's eyes[39], I constitute myself in and through the other ("je est un autre[40]," a Rimbaud' s quote). Indeed, one can only talk about identity thanks to the other who tells one who and how this one is, even though, little by little, the subject can and should break up with alterity, which makes him alienated, in order to be able to fulfill one's desire and assume oneself as a subject. To inhabit a language, whatever it may be, implies being in between languages (CORACINI, 2011c), which means being

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[33] See footnote 14.

[34] TN. For this book, I opted to keep the same reference used by the author's paper. However, Lacan's seminar "Joyce and the Sinthome", book XXIII, in English is avalaible online at: http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-23-Joyce-and-the-Sinthome-Part-1.pdf; http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-23-Joyce-and-the-Sinthome-Part-2.pdf. It was translated by Cormac Gallagher and is only for private use.

[35] See footnote 10.

[36] See footnote 7.

[37] TN. Here, differently from the paper in Portuguese, I opted to refer to the English translation. Therefore, the full reference is: DERRIDA, J. *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin.* Translated by Patrick Mensah. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

[38] TN. Here, differently from the paper in Portuguese, I opted to refer to the English translation. Therefore, the full reference is: LACAN, J. The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience. In.: LEITCH, Vincent B; et al. (Eds.). *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001, p.1285-1290.

[39] As in the mirror stage, I see myself through the other's eyes, which means that the representations or images of myself as a whole being that constitute my identity, always in an illusionary way, come from the other (LACAN, 2001; see footnote 37).

[40] In English: "I am another."

between cultures. There is no united language-culture that is intertwined by others; it suffices to ackwoledge it, paying close attention to each language-culture's hitstory.

Some Tighten Ups...

The excerpts transcripted here allow us to say that one can step into the other person's language-culture through a formal learning (educational institution) or through informal learning, also called as natural (through the internet, by downloading videos, movies, songs, etc.), as the research participants did. However, as we already pointed out, without desire, nothing happens! It is clear that the desire - which is expressed as the love of and for a language (MILNER, 1978) - may (and should!) be caused by a teacher, by a father (in the case of Jonas, whose father knew German), by a mother (in other cases) (CORACINI, 2011d), by a boyfriend (this is the case of Regina who became interested in Catalan because she thought listening to her boyfriend speaking it was beautiful, as she herself explains: "I came across Catalan because of my ex-boyfriend. I used to listen to him speaking it. I read some things and found it a wonderful language. I fell in love with it and decided to study it on my own"): passion that unfolds in boyfriend and language, in reading and listening, in the de-cision [scission], which is an impossible and necessary break up (scission) at the same time. These cases indicate that desire is always the desire of the other person, which can be read at least in two ways: a desire driven towards the other person and a desire coming from the other. It is also the desire of the other which explains, according to Revuz (1998), the desire of languages, which can be endless, because it is driven towards a great amount of languages, as is the case with Jonas, who, besides English and German, tried to learn Latin, Greek, French, Italian, with other participants from other studies (CORACINI, 2011c), who have done so in an obsessive way.

Therefore, what is there to say about the binomial learning/acquiring one or more language(s)? The excerpts, which are the result of the conducted analysis, indicate that one learns (grasps) a language in the temporal spacing or in the spatial temporality of *differänce* (DERRIDA, 1972), i.e., in between (or in a hyphen, or in an and), which joins and, at the same time, splits the opposites, by removing, not the opposites themselves, but the polarity of these opposites, which is consistent with Western

epistemology whose thought is dichotomous and logocentric. One learns (grasps) a language in between teaching-learning, which is related to methods, approaches or formal/school strategies, and in between acquiring, which is related to spontaneous resources, like what happens to the mother tongue, whose grammar will only be learned much later, when one already speaks and understands the language that has previously constituted us as subjects very well.

These spontaneous moments are hardly remembered or not recalled at all. In general, the respondents seem to ignore or do not realize (perhaps because it is unconscious) what occurs in the gaps between the words when one reads a book, the sounds of a music, the musical nature of a language, the images of a movie or video: Though we may state or think that we do not understand anything (like in the story of the craftsman), though we create a meaning in order to fill what we lack, there is something that captures us and we are hooked.[41] In fact, as Holtzer has stated (1998, p.141)[42], "we still ignore many things about acquisition. To know what learners actually do with the material offered in language courses [in formal or informal contexts] remains a mystery." To that I would like to add this: It remains a mystery and it will always be, once it is impossible to understand what, unconsciously, affects the subject and what is at stake in the passion for language one studies.

Thus, it is precisely what is (un)said in a book, a video, a song, which "speaks" without "speaking," because in the beginning we can only hear noise, meaningless sounds, which leaves marks in the silence of the unconsciousness. We are captured by the musical nature of a language - just like the mother tongue (which brings one warmth, comfort, and joy) - by the echoes, e-vocations and in-vocations, by what is most specific to a certain language, which many in Brazil call idioma [idiom][43]. A language is body and symbolism; an idiom means to be particular to oneself, an *idio*m makes us *idio*ts – like in the personal experiences we have gathered here - and it captures us by the difference, the strangeness, and makes us unique in a heterogeneous

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[41] This word was employed by Patrick Anderson during a course on Foreign Language Learning, which he taught in the Departamento de Linguística Aplicada [Departament of Applied Linguistics] of the Instituto de Estudos de Linguagem [Institute of Language Studies] at Unicamp [University of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil] in May 2010.

[42] In the original in French: "Nous ignorons encore beaucoup de choses sur l'acquisition. Savoir ce que font réellement les apprenants du matériel offert en cours de langue reste un mystère".

[43] TN. Although in English, the idiom is not used as a synonym for language, as it happens in Portuguese (in Brazil), I wrote the word in between square bracktes, because the author presents the ethymology of the word *idioma*, which is the same of the English word *idiom*.

horizon. This singularity certainly affects not only our imagination (our identity, our representations), but also the reality of unconsciousness, where there is no place for the meaningless, the impossible, the inexplicable.

Following this line of thought, how could one regard a mother tongue (which is related to the mother, to the comfort, to the pleasure that is castrated by the symbolic father, by the law, by the (self)censorship), in opposition to a foreign language (which is a language-culture of strangeness, of the different, of the stranger, who is hardly understood, accepted and lived)? If the so-called foreign language is the language of desire, like the so-called mother tongue,[44] it is the pleasure, it is what is lacking, it is what speaks, it is phallus and, as such, it constitutes the subjectivity of everyone who sees himself/herself as captured, learned (grasped), tightened to it and by it.

We believe that we understand what we hear and see, similar to the small story's craftsman. However, when do we really understand what we say and what we are told? According to Tyszler (2010, p.162)[45], it only happens

> when we are part of what we are told. It is what Lacan calls the event of saying: a saying, your saying, makes an event. [...] we only see this light when we accept to step into the storm[46], which means here to really follow the psychotic without trying to understand, to psychologize or to interpret him/her.

It is not hard to interpret: This is what we do every day, every moment, by rationalizing what we see, read and hear, but to step into the other person language-culture's discursivities implies letting ourselves be constituted by it, embarking on an endless adventure with no turning back. This is an adventure of the (im)possible, of the (in)explicable and of (trans)formation.

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[44] Regarding the reflection on the mother tongue and foreign language see Coracini (2011c).

[45] In the original in French: "Ce n'est pas l'ordinaire de nos vies. Nous entendons à l'occasion quand nous faisons partie de ce qui nous est dit. C'est ce que Lacan appelle un événement du dire: un dire, le sien, fait événement. […] nous ne voyons nous-mêmes cet éclair que si nous acceptons d'entrer dans l'orage, c'est-à-dire ici, suivre le psychotique à la lettre, sans chercher à comprendre, à psychologiser ou à interpréter".

[46] "Éclair" can also be translated as "lightining."

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