

The issue of the Cape Verdeans in Portugal: some questions linked to linguistics and to the acquisition of a second language

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1. Introduction

In various essays, both mine (Osório, 2008, among others) and of other scholars (i.e. Ançã, 2007), the current migratory movements have been an issue of reflection, and it is now acquired as a matter of course that Portugal has turned from an emigration reality into one of significant immigration. Economic, historical and mainly sociological factors can indeed sustain this reality which has undeniably generated a linguistic as well as a cultural diversity both in the Portuguese society and at school. The profusion of linguistic and cultural varieties existing in today's Portugal has turned a monolingual and monocultural country into a much more heterogeneous one, but, as far as we are concerned, much richer and more diverse.

Once we are dealing with a widely clarified situation, we would just point out that, in our opinion, such diversity is not impoverishing nor does it embody an obstacle in what the linguistic system itself is concerned.

It certainly is much more a stage which, no doubt, will enable the Portuguese language to take its path, and suffer alterations by means of the exogenous influences to its own functioning. Many of the Portuguese schools are thus a real ethnical miscellany which will simply require from the teachers a new approach to the situation. Although the matter may seem complex, it only takes the effort of rethinking the very concept of the language and the methodologies to be implemented.

2. A Brief Note on Fundamental Linguistic Notions

In any situation where the speakers are the key elements, the space of live communication is undeniably a fundamental factor: if one takes the example of the

educational reality, communication is the key element for the understanding of the tools, methods and institutions, allowing the individuals to understand information exchanged among them. The transversal character of the language resides precisely here. According to Sim-Sim (1998:21), communication “is the active process of exchanging information which involves codification (or formulation), transmission and de-codification (or understanding) of a message between two or more interveners”. Thus, communication exists whenever the issuing agent’s message is received as stimulation by the receptor, and the latter, in his/her turn, becomes the issuing agent and vice-versa. Hence, Rebelo’s and Atalaia’s idea is quite clear when referring that communicating linguistically means to transform the speakers’ concepts into signs of a code accepted by the community one is integrated in, and comprehended by the listeners. In educational terms, the success in communicating is the reflection of the teaching –learning process, once the latter already involves an interactive dimension which is established between its interveners - the teacher and his/her pupil. If the pedagogical speech, thought as an educational act, now places the student in a more dynamic and creative position, this is to say, the pupil is no longer a passive receptor, as in the traditional teaching, to become the essential maker of his/her own knowledge. The linguistic difficulties experienced by other students whose mother language is different from the Portuguese language will obviously make this process much more laborious. These pupils, possessing a very particular socio-linguistic profile, can very easily jeopardize what should be their natural attitude: creative and autonomous individuals sensing their own capacities and limitations as well as capable of reflecting over their own learning process. In fact, the language has a dual role: to express and understand the received information, and, according to Rebelo and Atalaia (2000:25), it is the school’s duty to teach the language that allows the child to acquire the various different levels of knowledge: phonological, syntactic and semantic, as well as the different marks of the language used according to the social environment, the place, the circumstances and the relations amongst people. The language being thus “a phenomenon of an institutional and supra-individual nature placing itself between the compulsory, “the rule”, and what is performable, “the variation”, according to Amor (1993:8).

When the issue of the Cape Verdeans residing in Portugal is approached, there are several considerations which should necessarily be made: (i) those students come from a

country where Portuguese is the official language, the State language, the school language; (ii) at home and in the various daily situations those speakers do not communicate in Portuguese but in Creole; (iii) the Portuguese language works rather as a second language (2nd L) than as a first language. This way, many of the oral and written productions of these speakers state a clear interference of the two linguistic systems, making thus the Portuguese language teacher apply a very particular teaching methodology.

Misunderstandings between the concept of 2nd L and Foreign Language (FL) can very often arise. It is thus our task, although very briefly, to clarify certain concepts. So, 2nd L is defined as a language whose nature is that of a non-maternal one, but possessing a particular statute, e.g., it is either the recognized official language in bilingual or multilingual countries in which the maternal languages have not yet been sufficiently described (PALOP), or it is still allowed certain privileges in multilingual communities, that language being one of the official languages of the country. The delimitation of the 2ndL and FL fields starts to make sense when one thinks of the decolonization of the African countries, of the coming home of the Portuguese people and their descendants of the European Community or of America, or still of the several ethnic and cultural groups which, for various reasons, are settled in Portugal. This way, two definitions seem to be pertinent, one being chronological and the other institutional: the former lies on psycho-linguistic criteria and has to do with the order according to which the language is acquired, e.g. the 2ndL is acquired in second place in relation to the maternal one. The latter, based on socio-linguistic criteria, deals with an international language which covers the social functions considered as being official, in a certain country. It is precisely within the scope of these two definitions that the realms of the 2ndL and FL split.

Thus, the process of learning a 2ndL is simple and natural, for the speaker moves in linguistic immersion while, in what learning a foreign language is concerned, and because we are here dealing with a language different from the one spoken in the speaker's country of origin, a formal instruction as well as the use of materials which are able to make for the absence of contextual support are required. Obviously, the FL is the non-native language, the non-maternal one. Under the designation of non-maternal

language, it is still possible to find the 2ndL, whose interpretation has been slightly changed according to epochs and authors, considering in the 2nd L the order of acquisition for communication purposes, the context of linguistic immersion, and the schooling language (that one being concomitantly the official language). In spite of all the existing differences in a society marked by multi-linguistic and multilingual speakers, it is extremely difficult to establish very defined frontiers between maternal and non-maternal languages.

The links established between maternal and non-maternal languages are the result of a hybrid reality which can hardly be labeled (as an example, in a multilingual context, the speaker who experiences two processes of socialization, the primary socialization language, within the private scope throughout childhood, and the secondary socialization language which runs through all fields of communication).

It is precisely the pedagogical reflection on how to teach communication skills that has brought about the debate over the articulation between maternal and non-maternal languages. This debate has gradually been gaining importance due to the emergence of multilingual and multicultural skills which the speakers get hold of in order to communicate.

3. Cape Verdeans in Portugal: From the Linguistic Facts to the Didactic Attitude to be Implemented

Let us take some texts written by Cape Verdean pupils attending 6th grade classes of elementary school in Portugal.

A Sida

A Sida é uma doença sexualmente transmissível, dá a penetração do sêmen no útero feminino.

A Sida é causada por:

- influência dos amigos
- utilização de seringas infectadas
- relações sexuais
- não utiliza preservativos, etc...

As consequências:

- gravidez precoce
- trabalho cedo
- problemas familiares, etc

A Sida tem causado muitos problemas para os jovens e também nos adultos.

As pessoas já não se preocupam muito com isso.

No estrangeiro os cientistas têm procurado o cura mas nunca o conseguem.

Aí agora a única cura é a prevenção.

Produção escrita

o tema é a Escola

É gosto um bocadinho da escola mas muito mais gosto os jogos tem coisas que fazem e não gosto e quando os professores mandam os alunos no rua e marcam falta e também quando nos dá um teste surpresa.

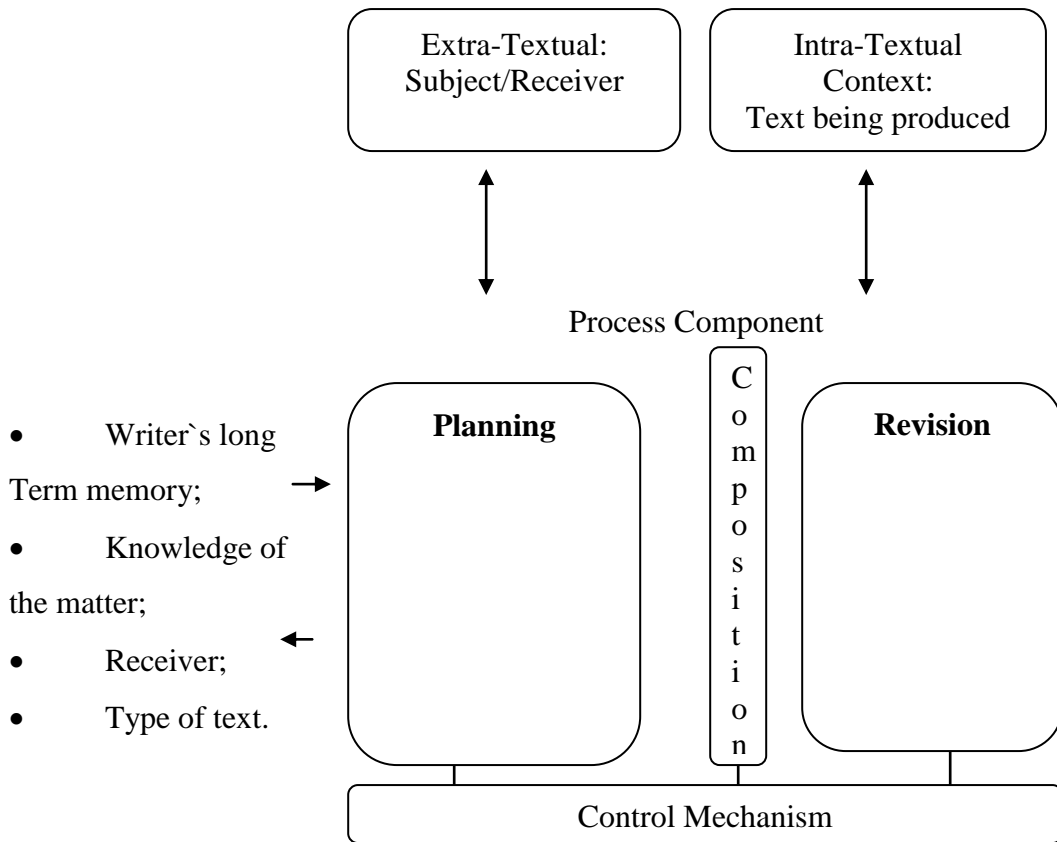
Os alunos são muito divertidos porque fazem alguns coisas que eu gosto muito e falar com eles enquanto os aulas eu também estudo. Uma das coisas que eu gosto mais é no escola e fazer sempre posso de amor.

The analysis of the texts written by these speakers of Portuguese as a 2ndL will allow us to demonstrate that the linguistic contact between Portuguese and Creole (maternal language of those pupils) is favourable to (i) a lack of grammatical hold; (ii) a lack of structural control as far as the Portuguese language is concerned. Thus, very often what these pupils use is not so much Portuguese or Creole, but rather an inter-language. In fact, the speakers tend to simplify the target-language structures, producing minimized structures of very simple phonological patterns, minimized morphology and an undefined word order. Therefore, the use of an inter-language is thus marked by a super-generalization of the target-language structures, whenever the language transference phenomenon occurs, it may well be that the inadequate control of the Creole, in this particular case, can lead to a poor proficiency of the Portuguese language.

The texts shown here demonstrate, among other aspects, the frequent tendency to spelling mistakes. The making of mistakes can be linked to two causes: (i) reflection of unsuccessful teaching-learning methods; (ii) lack of adequate cognitive strategies; (iii) defective environment for cultural and identity representation; (iv) inadequate meta-linguistic capacities.

The acknowledged failures also attain other realms of the language: lexical, morphological, syntactic and semantic. However, the teacher will be able to adopt the Error Pedagogy whenever the existence of mistakes is the cause of perplexities. Producing written work is a possibility of training linguistic structures which have not so far been polished by the learners. This way, the Flower and Hayes (1981) writing model should be implemented and worked upon.

Production Context



So, a teacher, who in his/her classes teaches Portuguese as a second language, must in no way reduce 'Portuguese' as a subject to (i) the study of grammar; (ii) a technique of text analysis and (iii) not turn the study of the language into the projection and analysis of something external.

Thus, the teacher should take into consideration the development of linguistic, socio-linguistic and pragmatic abilities, and be prepared to adopt an original and consistent didactic attitude where the student becomes more important than the subject that is being taught: here lies the core of the whole pedagogical relation. Rather than questioning himself/herself about "how to teach" the teacher should ask "to whom to teach". This way, a monolithic and uniform methodology seems not to make sense., and disjointed and congregated didactics, lying on a language teaching directed to a reflection upon the verbal behaviours adequate to each particular situation, enables the re-

appreciation and understanding of the links between the linguistic and extra-linguistic dimensions of communication as well as between the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the individual.

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