



Students' representations of languages in a ten-year time gap: are there any differences?

Representações dos alunos sobre as línguas num intervalo de dez anos: existem diferenças?

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Abstract:

From a didactic perspective of Plurilingualism it is important to develop students' knowledge about languages, reconstruct their representations and promote contacts with other languages, thus contributing to citizens more willing to intercultural encounters and dialogue, especially in today's multicultural world. The present work aimed at identifying the knowledge, representations and practices of 9th grade Portuguese students towards languages through the comparison of two studies, with data collected in 2000/01 and 2010/2011, published in Simões (2006) and Senos (2011). Data was obtained on a ten-year time gap, as we question ourselves how well the Portuguese school system is following the EU agenda, which puts forth that citizens should know at least two more languages, besides their native one.

Thus, we undertook a quantitative methodology (Survey), statistically analysed the results (SPSS), and used content analysis in open answers. Our data revealed that not many changes have occurred: students have little knowledge about the World of Languages, possess crystallized and curricular rooted representations towards languages, and reveal few real and ambitioned contacts with languages beyond those that are part of the school curriculum. These may be strong indicators of the changes that need to occur in terms of Portugal's language policies. The results indicate the need for schools to rethink Language Education, adopting the critical role languages play in the education of more active and participative citizens. We also consider the school must reinvent the way languages are seen, creating enriching encounters with them, thus understanding language education within a holistic framework.

Keywords: languages; plurilingualism; representations; knowledge; didactics

Resumo:

Numa perspetiva de didática do plurilinguismo, é importante desenvolver o conhecimento dos alunos sobre as línguas, (re)construir as suas representações e promover contactos com outras línguas, contribuindo assim para o desenvolvimento de cidadãos mais dispostos a encontros interculturais e ao diálogo, especialmente no mundo multicultural de hoje. O presente trabalho



teve como objetivo identificar os conhecimentos, representações e práticas de estudantes portugueses do 9.º ano acerca das línguas, através da comparação de dois estudos (Simões, 2006 e Senos, 2011), realizados com um intervalo temporal de dez anos (ano letivo 2000/01 e 2010/11), questionando-nos até que ponto o sistema escolar tem conseguido seguir a agenda europeia.

Assim, foi utilizada uma metodologia quantitativa, tendo-se usado como instrumento de recolha de dados o *survey*/levantamento por questionário. Os dados foram analisados estatisticamente com recurso ao SPSS e utilizou-se a análise de conteúdo em respostas abertas. Os resultados revelaram que não ocorreram muitas mudanças: os alunos têm pouco conhecimento sobre o Mundo das Línguas, possuem representações cristalizadas e curriculares sobre as línguas e revelam poucos contactos reais e ambicionados com outros idiomas além daqueles que fazem parte do currículo escolar. Estes podem ser fortes indicadores das mudanças que precisam ocorrer na sociedade e na escola portuguesa. Os resultados indicam a necessidade de as escolas repensarem a Educação em Línguas, assumindo um papel crítico na formação de cidadãos mais ativos e participativos. Há ainda trabalho a realizar para reinventar a maneira como as línguas são vistas, criando encontros enriquecedores com elas, entendendo, assim, a educação em línguas numa perspetiva holística.

Palavras-chave: línguas; plurilinguismo; representações; conhecimentos; didática.

Résumé :

Dans une perspective de plurilinguisme, il est important de développer la connaissance des étudiants sur les langues, de (re)construire leurs représentations et de promouvoir les contacts avec d'autres langues, en contribuant, ainsi, au développement de citoyens plus disponibles à s'engager dans le dialogue et dans des rencontres interculturelles, en particulier dans le monde multiculturel d'aujourd'hui. L'étude présente a eu comme objectif d'identifier les connaissances, les représentations et les pratiques d'élèves portugais de 9e année sur les langues, en comparant deux études (Simões, 2006 et Senos, 2011), réalisées avec un écart de dix ans entre elles (année scolaire 2000/01 et 2010/11), en ayant comme question de recherche : dans quelle mesure le système éducatif a réussi à suivre l'agenda européenne. Ainsi, une méthodologie quantitative a été utilisée et une enquête/questionnaire a été utilisée comme instrument de collecte de données. Les données ont été analysées statistiquement à l'aide du logiciel SPSS et l'analyse du contenu a été utilisée dans les réponses ouvertes. Les résultats ont démontré qu'il n'y a pas eu beaucoup de changements : les étudiants ont peu de connaissances sur le monde des langues, ils possèdent des représentations liées au curriculum et cristallisées sur les langues et montrent peu de contacts réels et désirables avec des idiomes, autres que ceux qui font partie du programme scolaire. Ces résultats peuvent constituer de forts indicateurs des changements nécessaires dans la société et l'école portugaises. Les résultats indiquent le besoin, pour les écoles, de repenser l'éducation des langues et en langues, étant donné qu'elle joue un rôle essentiel dans la formation de citoyens plus actifs et participatifs. Il reste encore du travail à faire pour réinventer la façon dont les langues sont perçues, en créant des rencontres enrichissantes avec ces langues vis à vis des communautés linguistiques, afin de comprendre son éducation spécifique dans une perspective holistique.

Mots-clés : langues ; plurilinguisme ; représentations ; connaissances ; didactique.



Introduction

The framework of our study emerges from the belief that we are currently living in a world where contacts with otherness play a crucial role, moreover in a Europe marked by mobility, where the opportunities to deal with diversity are multiplied. In fact, the current social context is marked by intense exchanges and relationships with people around the world and by the need to approach Others, whether for trade, business contacts, training programs or leisure.

Thus, today's citizens should get adequate education and training enabling them to overcome potential barriers when dealing with others. We, therefore, believe that the school must provide students with opportunities to develop communication and intercultural tools and skills, making them more prepared to move and interact in a global world. Language Education acknowledges these changes, as we shall explore next.

In our study we intended to analyse how 9th grade Portuguese students perceived the languages present in the school context, within a ten-year span (school year 2000/2001 and 2010/2011), how they related to them and also how they perceived the speakers of those languages. In this paper we aim at describing Portugal's scenario in terms of the impact the school has on our students' linguistic culture, by comparing the results obtained in 2001 (published in Simões, 2006) and 2010 (published in Senos, 2011), in terms of the students' knowledge and representations of languages and their speakers, inferring how Portugal's language policies have impacted these results.

Many authors concur with the idea that the knowledge people have about languages, as well as the way they perceive them and their speakers have a direct relation to the linguistic projects they create for themselves and, most of all, to the construction of social representations that act as sources of exclusion and inclusion (cf. Schmidt & Araújo e Sá, 2006). European language policies have thus been striving to allow citizens more contacts with other languages and more knowledge about them in the belief that this will provide for citizens more willing to intercultural and plurilingual contacts.

Theoretical framework

Plurilingualism

As today's world is marked by mobility and contact with others, it is fundamental to prepare citizens for moments of intercultural and plurilingual contacts, as differences in languages and cultures may lead to distress and avoidance of such contact. This is a concern of international institutions (cf. Council of Europe, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation), which have called peoples' attention to the role schools play, considering that they:

are also important for the preparation of young people for life as active citizens. They are responsible for guiding and supporting young people in acquiring the tools and developing attitudes necessary for life in society in all its aspects or with strategies for acquiring them, and enable them to understand and acquire the values that underpin democratic life,



introducing respect for human rights as the foundations for managing diversity and stimulating openness to other cultures (Council of Europe, 2008, p.30).

To educate for such understanding implies educating individuals in the respect and recognition of languages. In fact, several studies (cf. Byram et al, 2002; Council of Europe, 2008; Simões, 2006; Simões & Araújo e Sá, 2013) indicate that to know languages is a way to better prepare learners for the contact and understanding of the other and of themselves, since languages imply dealing with a certain vision of the world, social aspects, as well as geographical, historical, religious, cultural and/or identity elements.

We therefore position the work we present here in this context of (re)configuration of the school's mission and role, more specifically the role of Language Education, which is taken as to contribute to the development of plurilingual and intercultural competences. Indeed, European linguistic policies put forth the importance of plurilingual education, aiming at the need to preserve Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity, taking the stance that "While most of the European nations have been built on the platform of their language of identity, the European Union can only build on a platform of linguistic diversity" (Mallouf, 2008, p.5).

Growing concerns with peace and harmony among peoples has led to a serious European reflection, aiming at a harmonic way of living among different cultures. This also concerns Language Education, as it can play a crucial role in the construction of knowledge about others and therefore in the processes of inclusion. Contacting with others also leads to a better knowledge about oneself, overcoming barriers, expanding intercultural contact and fighting against social exclusion (Abdallah-Preteillé, 2006; Beacco et al., 2016; Castellotti & Moore, 2002; Conselho da Europa, 2001; Jodelet, 2008; Moscovici, 2000; Zarate, Gohard-Radenkovic, Lussier, & Penz, 2004).

This assumption of the need to promote and deepen intercultural contact, clearly implies a reconfiguration of practices in terms of Language Education (cf. Alarcão et al, 2009; Pinho et al, 2009). In fact, it has led in the last few years to a change of paradigm concerning the object and the teaching and the learning model of Didactics. The research undertaken in this field has revealed the importance of a plurilingual education within the school context, leaving behind a Language Didactics centred on only one language and moving towards a Didactics of Plurilingualism: 'une discipline qui semble avancer vers une approche globale d'une éducation plurilingue' (Alarcão et al., 2009, p. 5). The object of study is no longer centred on only one language and a native speaker model, but on the development of a plurilingual competence (cf. Coste, 2004; Martins, 2008; Melo, 2006; Zarate, Lévy & Kramersch, 2008).

il ne s'agit plus de prendre comme point de référence la compétence de communication d'un locuteur natif, avec pour finalité la maîtrise parfaite d'une langue, mais de développer un répertoire linguistique-communicatif où l'on donne de l'espace à plusieurs langues, dans une volonté de rencontrer l'autre et de vouloir le comprendre (Alarcão et al., 2009, p.8).

Or as defined in the Common European Framework of Reference,

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as



a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures (Council of Europe, 2001, p.168)

The Didactics of Plurilingualism implies that individuals use language, according to their needs, from professional to aesthetical reasons, the school having the duty to develop the linguistic repertoire of students and try to increase their love for languages so they can use the knowledge they have and with that knowledge they are able to better relate to other languages (Alarcão et al., 2009; Gonçalves, 2011). The development of a plurilingual competence gives the individuals the ability to interact in different contexts in an efficient way, linguistically and culturally, allowing people to respond to the demands of today's world, marked by mobility and dialogue. Thus, language learning takes on a more formative nature, under the assumption that the more contacts you have with languages and other cultures, the more able you are to interact with others and to respect them (Castellotti & Moore, 2011).

In fact, languages play a crucial role in the construction of the individual, in terms of language, but also in terms of the personal and social Self, helping in their own construction, contributing towards the construction of values, making them more open to cultural and plurilingual diversity, contributing to the citizen's cultural and educational dimensions.

Based on the assumption that Language Education is developed within the framework of the Didactics of Plurilingualism, centred on the development of an active, more democratic and participative learner, it is relevant to be able to understand how individuals relate to languages, what they know about them and which practices they establish. Such understanding can be achieved by analysing the representations students have about languages and those who speak them, as well as their culture, since representations are taken as structuring elements of the individuals, contributing towards the way they perceive the world, relate to it and move in it (cf. Pinho et al., 2009).

Representations, knowledge and practices of/with languages

The concept of 'representation' has been taking on a major role in the field of Language Education today, namely in research and intervention projects which value and proclaim plurilingualism (Moore, 2001). Representations play an important role in the way individuals relate to languages and develop their practices, their linguistic projects and even how they undertake the learning experience (Marquilló Larruy and Matthey, 2008; Moore & Py, 2011).

There are several studies that approach the concept of representation. Zarate (1993) considers this concept indicates a socially constructed reality, that makes individuals able to generalise social phenomena and transform them into cognitive schemata, thus making the world easier to perceive and understand, and therefore taking the stance of an interpretive and "actional" character. According to Castelloti, Coste & Moore (2001), the construction of representations occurs in dynamic, evolving processes, created by individuals and groups, according to their own stories and life experiences, visible in their discourses, in what the authors refer to as collective social construct.



It is also our belief that representations influence teaching/learning processes, when it comes to the learner's motivation to learn a certain language, to the strategies chosen by the learner, to the linguistic projects they envision for themselves and also to the image they have of their skills in a certain language (cf. Araújo e Sá & Schmidt, 2008; Simões, 2006; Simões, 2013).

The school plays an important role in such (re)formulation, so it is important for teachers and researchers to know and to reflect upon the representations of students, also in order to develop students' awareness of their own representations (cf. Schmidt and Araújo e Sá 2006; Simões 2006). It is also essential to try to understand how these representations are constructed and (re)formulated within Language Education, because only with this knowledge may we favour a plurilingual and intercultural approach inside the school and also within society at large (Castellotti & Moore, 2002).

It is also relevant to be aware of the knowledge students have about the world of languages. Byram (1997) and Byram et al (2002), in the intercultural competence model, consider that individuals always possess some knowledge, whether at a larger or more restricted level, about their social groups and also about the others and their cultures. They also consider a second level of knowledge which is not acquired automatically, but which they refer to as essential for the individual to interact correctly, which is related to the knowledge of how interactional processes occur. This more cognitive dimension refers both to the knowledge students have about languages and their ability to learn them.

Under such plurilingual and intercultural approach it is also important to know students' practices, in terms of their actions related to languages, which also include their linguistic projects and 'interaction management' (Simões, 2006, p.155). In this dimension of practices, we may include:

Reading routines (...); frequency of contacts with languages and language use in different contexts and circumstances; visits to cultural institutions or exhibitions of languages and cultures; language learning inside and outside the school context; reactions to contacts with linguistic and cultural diversity; frequency of talking in and about languages with others (Simões, 2006, p. 156, our translation).

Considering the importance of identifying students' representations, knowledge and practices of (and with) languages, we undertook an empirical study involving students from various schools, which we will describe in the next section.

Methodology

Our starting point was the study by Simões (2006) in 2000, with 9th grade students (the last year of middle school, with students aged 14-15), by means of an inquiry to an intentional non-probabilistic sample of 1926 out of a universe of 7712 students from the District of Aveiro, a coastal centre region of Portugal. We aimed at analysing the knowledge students have of languages, how they perceive the languages present in the school context, how they relate to them and also how they perceive the speakers of those languages. Ten years later we questioned ourselves how far our students had changed their representations, knowledge and



practices about languages. A new data collection of data was undertaken in 2010, creating a 10-year span that would give us some insight about the changes occurred during this period. In 2010 the universe was made up of all the 9th grade students of the 10 schools from the City Council of Aveiro. We collected 651 questionnaires out of a total of 702 students enrolled to attend schools, leading to 7.26% of non-answered questionnaires.

The main aims of the questionnaire used in both studies were: a) Practices: to identify linguistic and communicative practices in terms of contacts established with languages and students' willingness to learn and contact with other languages (linguistic projects); b) Knowledge: to verify students' knowledge of the languages of the world; c) Representations: to identify students' representations about the languages present in the school curriculum and their speakers.

Data collection instrument

The final questionnaire was composed of 29 questions and was divided into five parts: general characterization, linguistic profile, linguistic projects, representations about languages and their speakers, and verification of the students' knowledge of the languages of the world.

Different types of questions were used, according to our objectives and target group: open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, multiple-choice questions (Likert scale questions) and semantic differentials.

Students' characterization

Our sample is composed of students between the age of 13 and 19, and most of them are 14. Considering gender, 54,1% of our respondents are female, whereas 45% are male. As far as their experiences abroad are concerned, most of our students have never lived outside Portugal and only 9,2% of them have already lived abroad.

Only 18,6% of our students have parents from a nationality other than Portuguese. From these, 37,2% are mothers and 33,9% are fathers. We also registered 35 students with both parents from a foreign nationality. The most mentioned nationalities are Angolan, French, Venezuelan, and Brazilian. From the data collected, the majority of our students speak the language of their parents (43,8%), against 32% of students who do not, while 24% mentioned they can speak 'only a few words'.

In summary, students seem to have few experiences abroad and are mainly of Portuguese nationality, just like their parents. We also realize that most of the students' parents have studied up to Higher Education, followed by a group that studied up to secondary school level and the last group that only studied up to the end of middle school. If we compare our data to Simões's (2006), we realize that our students' parents have higher qualifications. Still, both studies are alike in terms of experiences living abroad and to Portuguese nationality being more represented.

We also tried to analyse the linguistic profile of our students and the majority refers the Portuguese language (93,4%) as their Mother Tongue. Only 2,3% of respondents do not indicate any Mother



Tongue, which can indicate that either the students are not aware of the concept or, as they have continuously contacted with other languages in their family, they cannot choose one of them as their Mother Tongue. The second Mother Tongue mentioned is Creole (0,8%), followed by Spanish (0,6%), and Brazilian Portuguese and French which appear both in fifth place (0,5%). Once again, we realize our students do not have a wide variety of languages they contact with, besides Portuguese.

In order to analyse the contacts students establish with foreign languages (FLs), we asked them to identify the languages that had been part of their school curriculum so far. Most of the students (93,5%) have chosen English as their first foreign language to be studied, usually at the age of 9-10 years old. The second foreign language of their choice is either French or Spanish, usually at the beginning of middle school, aged 11-12 years old. French was chosen by the majority of students, 64,5%, while 29,5% chose Spanish.

These data reveal a substantial difference from the study undertaken 10 years before. Back in 2000 English was already the language chosen by the majority of the students as their Foreign Language 1 (FL1), but there was still a small percentage of students that chose French (11,4%). We can clearly see a rise in the study of the Spanish Language in terms of second foreign language. This tendency started in the 2008/2009 school year, which registered 49,873 students studying Spanish, a number four times higher than in 2005, especially in middle school (Maneta, 2009).

Students' representations

When analysing students' representations about languages we considered important to know their motivations for choosing a FL (table 1). We applied content analysis on these answers following the categories adapted from Pinto (2005), Simões (2006) and Andrade et al. (2007), dividing the answers into five categories: Language as learning object, Affective object, Empowerment tool, Interpersonal relationships instrument and External influences (parents, friends, relatives).

Table 1: Reasons for the choice of FL1 and FL2

Reasons of choice	FL1 English	%	FL2 French	%	FL2 Spanish	%	Total
Language as learning object	403	58,5%	240	55,6%	52	29,0%	53,5%
Language as affective object	52	7,5%	72	16,7	50	27,9%	13,4%
Language as empowerment tool	79	11,5%	30	6,8%	40	22,3%	11,5%
Language as interpersonal relationships instrument	132	19,2%	20	4,6%	16	8,9%	12,9%
External influences (parents, friends, relatives)	14	2,0%	59	13,7%	8	4,5%	6,2%
Other	3	0,4%	9	2,1%	12	6,7%	1,8%
I don't know	6	0,9%	2	0,5%	1	0,6%	0,7%
Total	689	100%	432	100%	179	100%	100%



Bearing table 1 in mind there is a greater balance on the reasons of choice of the Spanish Language as FL2, but when it comes to the French and English Languages the reasons of choice are mainly the school offer that students have available. Only French and Spanish present affective reasons in the first three reasons of choice, whereas the reasons of choice of FL1 and FL2 present a more pragmatic vision, whether for the global use of the language or for the fact that it is seen as a language of greater utility or easier to learn.

We also wanted to perceive their opinion on the importance of learning new languages. So, we questioned them about the number of languages they thought that school should offer. Most of them (54,4%) believe the offer should be more varied, the second largest group of students has no opinion on the subject (26,7%), and 18,9% think the school should not offer more languages in their curriculum.

We asked students to name the languages they would like to see in the school curriculum. Although we have 354 students answering this question, we obtained a higher number of languages (574) which reveals that many students chose more than one language.

Table 2: Other languages school could offer

Languages	No. of answers	%	Languages	No. of answers	%
German	174	30,3%	French	2	0,3%
Spanish	131	22,8%	English	2	0,3%
Italian	121	21,1%	Swiss* ¹	1	0,2
Chinese	52	9,1%	Israeli*	1	0,2
Japanese	27	4,7%	Malawi*	1	0,2
Russian	23	4,0%	Indian*	1	0,2
Latin	10	1,7%	Luxembourgish*	1	0,2
Dutch	9	1,6%	Norwich	1	0,2
Greek	7	1,2%	Moldavian*	1	0,2
Creole	4	0,7%	Danish	1	0,2
Ukrainian*	2	0,3%	Total	574	100%
Arabic	2	0,3%			

The first five languages mentioned by the students had already been referred to when they were questioned about their linguistic projects. The results once again show students would like to have the possibility of contacting and deepening their knowledge on a high number of languages and study them in a formal context. We also realize the two most referred languages are or can be

1 * refers to the name attributed by the students to some languages, thus showing a clear relationship for the student between the name of the country and that of the languages, leading to the reference to several "inexistent" languages.



a part of the schools' curricular offer. However, this possibility is most often frustrated by several factors: first, it can be related to regulations from the Ministry of Education regarding the minimum number of students to compose a class, and second, the possibility of choosing 3 foreign languages presents constraints difficult to overcome by schools, for it implicates the separation of classes in shifts, leading to the need of more human and material resources. When it comes to the students' representations about languages and their speakers we considered it important to analyse how they perceive the importance of studying languages. A high number of students (93,1%) considers it is important. This apparently contradicts previous data, namely when the students indicate they wanted to stop studying languages. However, we consider this may be related to the schooling relationship students establish with languages, which is determined by various factors (Cain and De Pietro, 1997). Therefore, their answers can depend on the degree of language learning success or the affective relationship they have established with languages. This recognition is a tendency that was already registered in previous studies, namely by Simões (2006).

Table 3: Students' opinion about the importance of studying Foreign Languages

Importance	No. of occurrences	%
It's important	606	93,1%
It's not important	12	1,8%
I don't know	28	4,3%
No answer	5	0,8%
Total	651	100%

Students were also questioned about the reasons why they believe studying languages is important. They were presented with an open question, these answers being then the object of content analysis according to the categories defined by Simões (2006): practical objectives (e.g. 'to communicate'), cultural objectives (e.g. 'to meet other cultures and peoples'), educational objectives (e.g. 'to develop capacities'), political objectives (e.g. 'for international relationships between countries') and others. Only the 606 students who had answered affirmatively to the previous question answered this one. However, many of them pointed out more than one reason, which explains the higher number of occurrences.

Table 4: Reasons for the importance of learning FLs

Reasons	No. of occurrences	%
Practical objectives	523	84,1%
Cultural objectives	16	2,6%
Educational objectives	75	12,1%
Political objectives	4	0,6%
I don't know	4	0,6%
Total	622	100%



As we can see in table 4, when asked to mention the reasons why they think it is important to learn languages students do not reveal a broad vision of what languages are and the role they play in the education of individuals, focusing only on the role of languages as communication tools (84.1%). One may think this is an obvious answer, however, as we analyse them more deeply, we realize their vision has much to do with practical reasons such as finding a job or being able to travel, much more than envisaging the ability to communicate with others as an opportunity for encounter, for bridging over cultural differences, which are aspects that should not be forgotten when analysing the purpose of learning a new language. Therefore, we consider this to be a poor vision of languages that is also present in previous studies developed in the Portuguese context (Simões, 2006; Pinto, 2005 or Andrade et al, 2007).

We also wanted to know which languages of the school curriculum were considered more important by the students. Students were asked to number the languages on a scale from one to five, according to their representations about degree of importance. The languages considered more important were Portuguese (n=360) and English (n=307). The least important language among the five listed was German, with 427 occurrences. Once again, the negative image of this language among our students is confirmed, as shown in previous studies (Andrade et al, 2007; Schmidt, 2006 or Simões, 2006).

Taking into account the essential roles representations about languages and their speakers play in the way students relate to languages (Melo, 2006; Pinto, 2005; Simões, 2006), we also questioned our students about their representations on languages. They were presented with a group of five pairs of opposite adjectives/expressions: ugly/pretty; useless/useful; culturally rich/culturally poor and with political importance/without political importance, as in Simões (2006). The students had to fill in the data related to the languages that are part of the school curriculum (Portuguese, English, French, Spanish and German), as presented in table 5.

Table 5: Students' representations on languages

Representations	ugly / pretty		difficult / easy		useless / useful		culturally rich/poor		with/without political importance	
	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001	2000	2001
Language										
Portuguese	5,47	6	4,55	4	5,45	6	2,66	2	3,66	4
German	3,40	3	2,14	2	4,06	4	3,39	3	3,54	4
Spanish	4,64	5	5	5	4,79	5	3,41	4	3,49	4
French	4,20	4	3,40	3	4,49	5	3,272	3	3,43	4
English	5,7	6	4,49	5	6,37	7	2,43	2	2,29	1

Results reveal that students have a very positive representation of their Mother Tongue (MT), taking it as pretty, easy, useful and culturally rich. A more neutral position is displayed when it comes to its political importance. Spanish and French are also seen as pretty and useful languages, both



presenting neutral levels when it comes to cultural richness and political importance. Spanish is seen as an easier language than French, which is coherent with previous data. Besides Portuguese, English is the language which has the most positive representation of all, it being considered the most useful. This corroborates previous data related to the choices of MT, the choices of FL and the degree of importance of languages, where English is linked to a vision of a language that has a higher social and economic capital and is of higher utility, as well as being considered a language that allows an easier contact with others. It is still seen as a pretty, easy and culturally rich language, presenting the highest political importance. German is the language that presents the least positive representation, it being considered difficult, but useful. The students' opinions are neutral when it comes to its beauty, cultural richness and political importance. These results are consistent with previous studies where Portuguese has a positive representation, English is associated to practical reasons and German has a more negative representation (cf. Andrade et al, 2007; Araújo e Sá et al, 2006; Pinto, 2005; Schmidt, 2006; Simões, 2006).

Students' practices with languages

Concerning students' practices with languages, we asked them about the languages they had contact with outside school and how these contacts were established (table 6). The languages with the highest number of occurrences are the ones present in the school curriculum, revealing that the students aren't aware of the informal contacts they establish with languages, or that they do not value these contacts.

Table 6: Types of contacts for each language²

Types of contacts	PT	EN	FR	DE	ES	BR*	JA	EL	IT	UC	RU	AR	NL	MAN	Total
1) People I live with	619	423	414	396	419	6	0	1	4	3	4	2	0	3	2302
2) Language Schools	453	476	422	393	396	0	0	0	3	1	2	0	0	1	2150
3) Internet	593	578	453	418	485	9	7	0	8	2	7	0	3	4	2573
4) Music	587	610	482	410	471	11	10	0	12	2	5	0	0	3	2607
5) Television & Cinema	604	607	459	411	457	9	8	0	15	2	6	1	0	3	2586
6) Books/ Magazines	615	499	412	401	429	2	0	0	6	1	2	0	0	1	2369
7) Travel	557	479	451	406	478	5	1	3	12	1	2	2	1	3	2411

² Language's abbreviations according to the international norm: PT = Portuguese; EN= English; FR= French; DE= German; ES= Spanish; BR= Brazilian; JA= Japanese; EL= Greek; IT= Italian; UC= Ukrainian; RU= Russian; AR= Arabic; NL= Dutch; MAN=Chinese.



8) Family Friends	610	489	468	414	457	11	3	2	11	3	8	2	3	3	2497
9) Product Labels	605	541	438	415	459	3	1	1	8	2	3	3	2	8	2492
Other	13	17	6	1	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	52
Total	5256	4719	4005	3665	4065	56	30	7	79	17	39	10	10	29	22040

When it comes to the students' linguistic projects, most of the students name more than one language. First comes Spanish, followed by German, and in third place Italian. The fourth most mentioned language is Chinese and in fifth place comes Japanese.

When comparing the results with Simões's (2006), the three most mentioned languages are the same, although in a different order. Back in 2000, German and Spanish were the first two choices. Another difference we can observe is the fact that Chinese and Japanese were now mentioned by more students than before, which may be justified by the higher proximity that these two cultures have in our society. When questioned about the possibility of abandoning the study of a language, 45,8% said they would and 30,9% answered negatively.

In summary, in terms of the students' actual and wished/desired contacts with languages we realize that their linguistic projects are difficult to achieve, due to the constraints of the Portuguese public school curriculum. When comparing our data with that of Simões (2006), students now mention a larger variety of languages and Italian continues being one of the most referred languages. The students' linguistic projects do not seem to be very ambitious, for even though more languages were mentioned now in comparison with 2000, the number is still not very high and many of the languages are those with which they already establish formal contacts. This limited ambition is confirmed by the number of students that would like to stop studying a language.

Students' knowledge

We wanted to know more about the students' knowledge about the world of languages. When questioned about the number of languages of the world, using as reference the existence of 6000 to 7000 languages (cf. Skutnabb-Kangas 2002, or <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue>), students reveal a profound lack of knowledge, including not even being able to estimate a number. The diverse answers reveal their lack of knowledge about languages, which may point to the lack of access to these facts, although this is a transversal issue which can and must be dealt with in different school curricular areas.

We then focused on the reality of the Portuguese Language, trying to understand if the students could name Portugal's official languages (Portuguese, 'Mirandês' and Portuguese Sign Language, cf. Portuguese Republic Constitution, Law 7/99, 29th January). Only two out of 585 respondents (0,3%) answered this question correctly. The majority of the students only mentions the Portuguese language (80,9%) and 62 students (10,6%) answered Portuguese and 'Mirandês'.



Once again there are languages listed that are not correctly named by the students. They mention 'Brazilian', 'Mozambiquean', and 'Azorean' as languages, which reveals the lack of knowledge they have of Portuguese and its variants, as well as varieties, for example when they mention 'Azorean' (similar results in Simões and Ramos, 2003; Dias, 2007). This also shows some myths about languages, namely that a language equals a country (Bagno, 2000; Boyer, 1997; Feytor Pinto, 1998; Possenti, 2001; Rajagopalan, 1998; Simões, 2006). These myths can lead to crystallized discourses about languages and influence the way students see them and relate to them. We therefore question ourselves if these myths are also shared by the teachers, for it is in the school context that students get most of their knowledge about languages and, also, the ability to restructure that knowledge. Thus, it is essential that one finds room for the discussion of these issues in schools (cf. Andrade et al, 2007; Pinho, 2008).

Another aspect we wanted to obtain answers from our students had to do with the number of speakers of each language. 47,3% of the respondents mention the English language first and Mandarin second, probably because the English language is considered as a lingua franca.

Summary of the results

Several changes have occurred in society and in the school over the last ten years, namely the immigration waves, or the curricula designs that today foresee the mandatory learning of at least two foreign languages during middle school. Considering the broadening of citizens' knowledge about languages, Language Didactics has been developing new guidelines on the work to be done with students, promoting more openness towards languages.

In 2006 the results obtained by Simões were as follows: (i) students revealed few contacts with languages, both in and outside the school context, they showed willingness to learn and contact with other languages and its speakers and some negative representations about languages; (ii) the results obtained after the implementation of a didactic intervention project acknowledge relevant changes in the students' representations, knowledge and practices about languages.

When analysing the results obtained by Senos (2011), 10 years later, regarding students' practices with languages, we realize students only contacted formally with two foreign languages, when concluding the 3rd cycle of schooling – English and French or Spanish. Moreover, contact with these languages is pre-determined by the curricular choices made by schools. In terms of informal contacts, the first languages mentioned are the languages present in school. When they mention languages that are not part of the school curriculum, the number of contacts is reduced. Thus, it seems that students are not aware of their contacts with languages or that they do not value them. This may indicate the schooled relationship they establish with languages, that makes them not value other kinds of contacts or the knowledge they have about other languages.

Concerning students' linguistic projects, we realize they are varied, but difficult to achieve due to the school options available. Students are willing to learn languages, mainly because of practical reasons, mentioning communicative and utilitarian aspects of languages. This means that other dimensions of languages are not valued. Similar results also emerge in other contexts besides school (Andrade et al, 2007).



When it comes to their representations of languages, students reveal a very positive image of their mother tongue, as well as of the English language, which is in line with other studies (Andrade et al, 2007; Pinto, 2005; Simões, 2006). This reveals crystallized representations/images that prevail throughout the years.

In terms of the students' knowledge, they have poor knowledge about the world of languages, both in terms of the number of languages in the world, of how they are distributed, of the official languages of Portugal or even about language families. Myths such as 'one Country, one Language' still prevail.

In sum, students: (i) establish few contacts with languages beyond those present in the school curriculum; (ii) have very crystallized images of the languages and of those who speak them; (iii) have a limited vision of languages and of their role in the life of individuals; (iv) have a poor knowledge about languages.

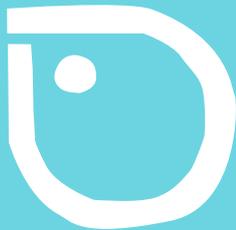
Final considerations

Taking the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education in the development of a democratic and active citizenship, it is crucial to study and act upon the knowledge, the representations and the practices of individuals towards others and their languages. Educational projects centred on the study of these three components may contribute to the deconstruction of stereotypes, to a better understanding of self-identity and also to a better understanding of others and their identity.

In our study we wanted to identify the practices about languages that students undertake (or are willing to undertake), both in formal and informal contexts. In terms of formal contacts, we concluded that students continue to maintain very few contacts with languages, confirming the results obtained 10 years before (Simões, 2006). This situation reveals a static curriculum over time, with apparently little diversity regarding language provision.

Students' linguistic projects (despite the increase in the number of languages mentioned when compared to the previous study in 2000) present serious constraints in order to be undertaken, mainly due to the curricular offer of languages in schools. This stresses the need for a deeper reflection by educational stakeholders on the role of languages on individuals' lives inside and outside school walls, and about the transversal role of Language Education in the curriculum, since instrumental and pragmatic reasons to choose languages have increased and, consequently, students' perspectives about languages need to be enriched with more formative, social and political roles, to name just a few.

In fact, representations about languages are influenced not only by the contacts students establish with them, but also by the way schools present and deal with them, leading students to regard the languages offered by the school curriculum as the most important, for example, as this study reveals. Studies also show that the less contact individuals have with languages, the less they are able to position themselves towards them, taking on neutral opinions about them. Moore and Py (2001) question whether it is desirable to directly act on the representations



about languages of both students and teachers, or to let each person be responsible for the (re)construction of such representations. Bearing in mind the comparative results of the present study, which reveals no considerable variation between the findings of Simões (2006) and Senos (2011) within a ten-year time span, we believe that a more active and conscious action needs to take place in educational contexts as far as a plurilingual and intercultural curriculum implementation is concerned.

So, the school curriculum is responsible for proximity and non-proximity processes between individuals and languages, which reveals the crucial role it has on the lives not only of students, but also of other members of school communities. The enlargement of students' linguistic repertoire will give them a better critical vision of the world, allowing them to take on a more active citizenship role in the construction of democratic and plural societies (Byram, 2009).

However, Beacco et al (2016) conclude that schools have not yet been approached as a place of investment in the promotion of diversity. Thus, the role of the school and of curriculum design has to be reinforced, according to its responsibility for the inclusion and development of students' repertoires: "The purpose of schooling is to contribute to inclusion and cohesion by developing mastery of languages of schooling and also by taking into account what has already been acquired" (Cavalli et al, 2009, p.6). Indeed, many possible curriculum scenarios within plurilingual and intercultural education (Beacco et al, 2016) may be adopted and there are plenty of resources available (Beacco et al, 2009). Consequently, it is essential that they are adapted and adopted according to each educational context.

In order to enlarge the students' repertoire, it is necessary that language teachers see themselves as curriculum constructors, considering that they are the ones who can guide the teaching of languages, reflecting on how and what to teach. According to Paraskeva (2006) it is urgent to rethink the curriculum in the light of the new social realities since one of the big challenges of our times is the multicultural world we live in.

In our study, when analysing students' knowledge of languages, we concluded that they have poor declarative knowledge about languages and also revealed the perpetuation of some myths, also found in other research studies (cf. Feytor Pinto, 1998; Simões, 2006). These results highlight the importance of involving other courses in an interdisciplinary work on the world of languages (for instance History, Philosophy, Geography) and also the need to rethink language teachers training. As the main managers of the teaching and learning process, they can be very influential in the way students acquire most of their knowledge, reinforce or change their representations about languages. Schools are spaces that must answer the students' needs, which emphasizes the need to reinvent themselves, not only in terms of their curricular offers, but especially in the way it envisions languages and their teaching. In this context, students should be given more opportunities to contact with languages and new approaches to language teaching should be considered (Candelier et al, 2007), in order to contribute to the enlargement of the students' knowledge and the reconstruction of their representations of languages.

In other words, to construct a plurilingual and intercultural education in the school context and more diversity-oriented repertoires would not only imply to amplify the students' perspectives



and worldviews, but also to foster their critical reflection upon their trajectories with languages and awareness of their own devaluing of their linguistic and cultural practices (cf. Castellotti and Moore, 2011). Such opportunities can be foreseen inside and outside the classroom, for example by means of linguistic workshops (Simões and Araújo e Sá, 2012), online contacts with other languages/speakers or by means of other pluralistic approaches (Beacco et al, 2016). This implies that teachers should have a wider vision of the curriculum, where they do not take on a central role. Instead, they can act as guides and also co-learners. In fact, when looking at the recent legislative changes that took place in Portugal, we consider there is growing room to create new and creative ways to approach language learning (cf. Dec. Lei 55/2018).

As far as students' representations are concerned, we concluded that the representations they have now are not considerably different from those they had 10 years before. If we understand the role of representations about languages in students' choices and in their motivation towards learning and contacting with the other (cf. Mariko, 2005), we clearly understand the importance of working on this theme. To do so, it is crucial to develop work in language teacher education on plurilingualism (Gonçalves, 2011; Martins, 2008 and Pinho, 2008), since it is important for teachers to be aware of the ultimate research findings in plurilingual and intercultural education and to reflect upon how their teaching practice may serve a more humanistic dimension of language teaching (PNUD, 2004).

Considering the results of our study, we may conclude that there is a need to rethink the way different educational institutions (e.g., schools, universities, teacher training centres) work together to develop languages knowledge, representations and practices of students and other educational agents, in order to promote a Language Education that favours a plurilingual approach, towards a more holistic education of the individuals, taking Language Education as perceived by European Language policies. This seems to be crucial for a quality education (OECD, 2012) in which plurilingual and intercultural competences have a role to play (Goullier, 2011), in terms of educational achievement and students full development, as well as fostering other pedagogical attitudes and curriculum management practices and the creation of a school climate more supportive of linguistic and cultural diversity. These results are important for the continuation of the study, since a new data collection stance is going to take place in 2020, in order to tackle another ten-year span.

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