



# English language diversity in the classroom: what do the official documents tell us?

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## Structure of the presentation

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- ✓ Preliminary findings – discussion
- ✓ Concluding remarks

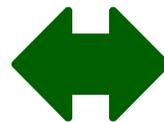


## Background to the analysis

PhD research project “The diversity of English – starting point for the development of plurilingual competence”

### Theoretical framework:

- Linguistic and cultural diversity of today’s societies
- Plurilingual and intercultural education (Cavalli, Coste, Crisan & van de Ven, 2009)
- Plurilingual competence (Andrade et al., 2003; Beacco & Byram, 2003; Council of Europe, 2001) & Intercultural competence (Byram, 2000; Cavalli et al., 2009)



### Linguistic and cultural diversity of English

- English is, in itself, a plural, diverse and heterogeneous language – “...there is not one English language anymore: rather there are many (...). The different English languages (...) represent diverse linguistic, cultural, and ideological voices.” (Bhatt, 2001, p. 527)



**Multiplicity of linguistically and culturally different voices and identities**

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### Other underlying principles:

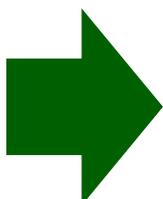
- English is attributed a very “special” status in today’s world;
- English plays a very important role in most areas of social life (Crystal, 2002);
- English occupies a privileged position in the context of foreign language teaching and learning in Europe, as in the rest of the world (Neuner, 2002).

- English is one of the languages that first contribute to the constitution of learners’ linguistic repertoires (at least in Europe) (Melo-Pfeifer, 2010).
- English plays an important role as a common, shared resource (idem) and as a language of communicative mediation (Mendes, 2005)



### **Tension: English language / Linguistic and cultural diversity in general:**

English = cultural and linguistic homogenising agent (*linguistic imperialism* - Phillipson, 1992, 2003)  
= *lingua frankensteinia* (Phillipson, 2008)  
= threatens the existence of other languages and is responsible for acts of linguistic genocide (Phillipson 2003; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000)

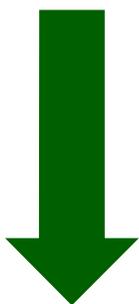




**Contrary to these positions...**

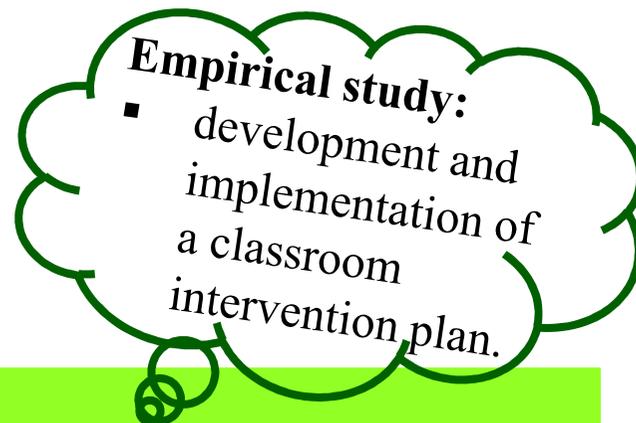
**Our perspective:**

English in educational settings can constitute the starting point for the development of learners' plurilingual and intercultural competences.



**PhD project's main goal:**

- To understand the contribution of a teaching approach based on the linguistic and cultural diversity of the English language to the development of learners' plurilingual and intercultural competences.





## Methodological design

### One of the project's 1st tasks:

- to analyse some of the Portuguese official documents that regulate the teaching and learning of English in the 9th year (the context of our intervention)...

#### The documents:

- ✓ the Portuguese School Curriculum (Ministério da Educação, 2001)
- ✓ the national English syllabi - English as foreign language 1 (EFL1) and English as foreign language 2 (EFL2) (Ministério da Educação, 1997)

#### ...in order to:

- ✓ describe the way plurilingual and intercultural competences are presented and conceptualised in these documents;
- ✓ identify the way the linguistic and cultural diversity of English is portrayed in these documents.

What possibilities are included in these documents for the development of a plurilingual and intercultural education and the promotion of a teaching approach based on the linguistic and cultural diversity of English?

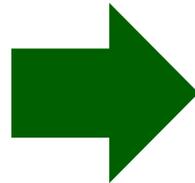


**Content analysis** (Bardin, 2000) – descriptive and interpretative dimensions (Guerra, 2010)

**Categories:**

**Category I:** Plurilingual and intercultural competences

**Category II:** Linguistic and cultural diversity of the English language



**Subcategories:**

- **the socio-affective dimension** (willingness, motivation and attitudes);
- **the linguistic and communicative dimension** (management of a person's linguistic and communicative repertoires);
- **the learning dimension** (management of the learning process, strategies and experiences);
- **the interactive dimension** (management of the interactive and communicative processes + *intercultural dimension* – knowledge of other social groups, their cultures and the processes of interaction; skills for managing interaction)

(cf. Andrade et al., 2003; Byram, 1997)



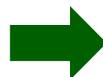
## Preliminary findings - discussion

### I. *Plurilingual and intercultural competences*

#### i) **the Portuguese School Curriculum**

- **Introductory section:**

guiding principles and values



essential conditions for the development of plurilingual and intercultural competences...

e.g. **“Respect for and valuing of the diversity of individuals and groups as far as their origins and choices are concerned”** (2001, p. 15 – our translation\*).

- ***Foreign Languages section*** – direct and explicit reference to plurilingual (and pluricultural) competence → definition of the Council of Europe

**ability “to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural action, 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 cited in Beacco & Byram, 2003, p. 8)

\* **Note:** all the references/citations of the elements identified in the documents are the result of our translation and adaptation into English)



Other elements were also identified...

### Interactive dimension – e.g.

- “To interact, orally or in writing, in foreign languages, to broaden and reinforce relationships with foreign interlocutors” (p. 20);
- “To organise cooperative learning activities in situations of interaction among different languages and cultures” (idem)

➤ It is acknowledged **the importance of interaction and exchange** among linguistically and culturally different individuals, as well as of **contacting with different languages and cultures** and **acquiring knowledge** about them.

### Socio-affective dimension – e.g.

- learners should “...participate, in a conscious way, in the construction of plurilingual and pluricultural competence by adopting an attitude of openness and tolerance towards foreign languages and cultures and by establishing relationships of similarity/difference between the mother tongue and the foreign languages” (p. 53)

➤ It is recognised **the importance of adopting positive attitudes towards Otherness and deconstructing prejudices and stereotypes** for the development of plurilingual and intercultural competences.



### Learning dimension – e.g.

- “...being able to use the linguistic resources available in situations of communication strategically and effectively, as well as to reflect on the use and functioning of the language in order to develop metacognitive strategies that guarantee a continuous learning process –the *know-how (savoir faire)*” (p. 40);
  - learners should “use in an integrated way mother tongue and foreign language competences...” (p. 43) in the construction of plurilingual (and pluricultural) competence.
- It is stressed the importance of **using the knowledge, experiences and skills acquired in previous learning situations and in situations of informal contact with other languages** whenever learning or contacting with a “new” language.
- It is also acknowledged the importance of **reflecting on the use and functioning of the language**, associated with the ability to manage one’s own linguistic and communicative repertoires (the *linguistic and communicative dimension*).



## ii) the national English syllabi (EFL1 / EFL2)

**Note:** these documents were written in 1997. The notion of plurilingualism was not widely disseminated at that time.



Therefore, we were interested in understanding if they include opportunities, ‘openings’, for the development of a plurilingual and intercultural education...



- **Introductory section** – it is made clear that learning a language “develops the individual’s understanding and respect towards different socio-cultural environments” (p. 5 EFL1/ 91 EFL2)

**Intercultural competence in the teaching and learning of foreign languages** (main focus of interest since the 1980’s – Araújo, 2010)



**Indeed**, it is evident the concern, in these documents, with the integration of the intercultural competence “...in the specific competences that interact in the acquisition of a communicative competence” (Moreira & Chaves, 2007, p. 184) (our translation).



We have identified some elements that illustrate this concern...

...mostly at the level of attitudes and values (the *socio-affective dimension*)...



### **Socio-affective dimension – e.g.**

- “To promote the education for communication, as a phenomenon of social interaction, in order to increase respect towards the Other, sense of mutual help, cooperation, solidarity and citizenship” (p. 7 EFL1/ 93 EFL2) (one of the goals of the teaching and learning of English in the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle);
- “To express positive attitudes towards different socio-cultural environments – fellow learners, teacher, target culture(s) – by sharing information, ideas and opinions” (p. 10 EFL1 / 96 EFL2) (one of the aims);
- “...the contrastive analysis that the learner makes of his/her own reality and the reality of the English speaking communities gives him/her a better understanding of both situations, which, in its turn, leads to the adoption of attitudes of tolerance and respect towards differences and to the capacity to relativise his/her own culture’s meanings and values” (1997, p. 62 EFL1/ 142 EFL2);
- “...demonstrating empathy towards other ways of being and living” (p. 50 EFL1 / 131 EFL2) (section of *Contents and Teaching Processes*)...



### Interactive dimension – e.g.

- “To promote contact with other languages and cultures, ensuring the mastery of basic linguistic uses and acquisitions” (p. 7 EFL1/93 EFL2) (another goal of the teaching and learning of English)

### Recognition of the importance of:

- ✓ developing learners’ linguistic and intercultural\* competences (essential components of the desired communicative competence, among others);
- ✓ adopting positive attitudes towards the Other;
- ✓ contacting with other languages and cultures while learning a specific language
- ...

- English can be a **gateway**, and not necessarily a **“gatekeeper”** (Pennycook, 1994 cited in Araújo, 2010, p. 36), to other languages and cultures.
- “...it is an opportunity to enter the “**linguaging of others**” (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004, cited in Araújo, 2010, p. 36).

\* Described, in the syllabi, as “the ability to interact with different cultural and social environments, visible in behaviours and attitudes of empathy” (p. 67 EFL1 / 147 EFL2).



## II. *Linguistic and cultural diversity of the English language*

- The elements included in this category were solely identified in **the national English syllabi**.
- The presentation of these elements follows the structure of the documents, organised in different sections:

### **Goals/Aims:**

- “To relate to the Anglo-American culture by questioning different behaviour patterns...” (p. 9 EFL1);
- “To identify signs of the Anglo-American culture (Great Britain and USA) by distinguishing and questioning different behaviour patterns...” (p. 95 EFL2)

**Recognition of the cultural diversity of English** (of the existence of more than one culture associated to the English language) – although these goals/aims are more directed towards the culture(s) of Great Britain and USA.



### Competences – e.g.

- “Distinguishes differences between British English and American English in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, orthography” (p. 28 EFL1/p. 111 EFL2);
- “Identifies contributions of other languages for the evolution of American English – Indian words, Spanish words, French words and Dutch words” (p. 29 EFL1) ;
- “Recognises and distinguishes variations in the pronunciation of the same phoneme (BrE/AmE)” (p. 35 EFL1/p. 116 EFL2);
- “Distinguishes regularities in the English language: functioning of the language system; linguistic variations” (p. 40 EFL1/ p. 121 EFL2)

**Acknowledgement of the existence of varieties of English** – more exactly the varieties of British English and American English.

**Study of the etymology of American English** (only in the syllabus of EFL1).



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### Strategies – e.g.

- Comparing/Contrasting varieties of English: distinguishing and recognising differences and regularities.
- Contacting with native speakers and/or people that have been in contact with English speaking countries.
- Participating in exchange programmes

### Contents – e.g.

The English language: *Nouns, Pronouns, Articles, Adjectives, Adverbs, Prepositions, Sentence connectors, Verbs, The sentence, Orthography, Punctuation, Pronunciation, Varieties of English, Etymology of words...*



These examples of contents represent, almost exclusively, the linguistic knowledge about the English language system and its functioning.

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## Concluding remarks

- ✓ The *Portuguese School Curriculum* includes **possibilities for the development of a plurilingual and intercultural education** – even if, sometimes, it seems to apply more to a certain *biculturalism (the society / the culture)* (Moreira & Chaves, 2007).
- ✓ The *national English syllabi* incorporate elements that illustrate the concern with the integration of the **intercultural competence in English language teaching and learning**, by acknowledging the importance of **the contact with other realities in an intercultural perspective** – even if, sometimes, the contact with diversity is mainly oriented towards the target cultures, particularly the Anglo-American realities (Moreira & Chaves, 2007).



Furthermore, there are ‘openings’ in these documents for considering the **teaching and learning of English as a gateway not only for contacting other languages and cultures**, but also for engaging with other languages and cultures, interacting with others and learning about “ourselves” (learners).

- ✓ The linguistic and cultural diversity of English is conceived exclusively in terms of the Anglo-American cultures – the traditional division/dichotomy British English (BrE) vs. American English (AmE).



Knowledge has evolved and **English has been progressively seen as a repertoire of linguistic and cultural pluralism** (Moreira, 2006, pp. 196/197).



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