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Investment and imagined communities: A narrative analysis of the identity construction by student-teachers of English

Investimento e comunidades imaginadas: uma análise narrativa da construção da identidade de alunos-professores de inglês

ABSTRACT – The objective of this article is to discuss an exploratory study about the identity construction of eight student-teachers of English as *learners of English* as an additional language in the region of Vale do Açu, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil using some of the concepts developed by Bonny Norton, that is, investigating the types of *investments* made and the *imagined communities* aspired to by those student-teachers. For the exploratory study, a narrative perspective was adopted as identities are socio-cultural narratives constructed in time. The analyses showed that construction of the identities of the student-teachers investigated revolves around two types of investment: those which lead to learn and use the language, and those which lead to learn the English language to teach it. The results have shown that in the analyzed group of student-teachers, the learner-as-user and learner-as-teacher identities seem to conflate and, in most cases, the learner-as-teacher identity seems to override the learner-as-user identity. Also, since many of the studies carried out on learner identity using Bonny Norton's theoretical approach had immigrants in contexts where English is used by the community they are living in, this work is expected to contribute to Norton's approach as the participants of this study are learning English as an additional language in contexts where the community members do not use English and English is mainly learnt in formal environments.

Keywords: learners of English, identity, investments, imagined communities.

RESUMO – O objetivo deste artigo é discutir um estudo exploratório sobre a construção identitária de oito alunos-professores como *aprendizes de Inglês como língua adicional* da região do Vale do Açu, Rio Grande do Norte, utilizando os conceitos desenvolvidos por Bonny Norton, isto é, os tipos de *investimentos* realizados e as *comunidades imaginadas* pelos participantes do estudo. Também, uma abordagem narrativa de pesquisa foi adotada, já que as identidades são narrativas socioculturais progressivamente construídas. A análise mostrou que a construção da identidade dos alunos-professores investigados gira em torno a dois tipos de investimentos: aqueles que os levam a aprender a língua para usá-la e aqueles que os levam a aprender a língua para ensiná-la. Os resultados mostram que no grupo de alunos analisados, a identidade do aprendiz como usuário da língua e a identidade do aprendiz de professor parecem se misturar, e em muitos casos, a segunda se sobrepõe a primeira. Também, como a grande maioria dos estudos realizados acerca da identidade de aprendizes na perspectiva desenvolvida por Norton foram realizadas com imigrantes em contexto de segunda língua, este trabalho pode contribuir com a área, já que seus participantes são alunos, aprendendo inglês como língua adicional no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: aprendizes de inglês, identidade, investimentos, comunidades imaginadas.

Introduction

The objective of this work is to investigate the identity construction of a group of student-teachers[1] of English graduated by the Universidade do Estado de Rio Grande do Norte (UERN). In Brazil, the *Licenciaturas em Letras* are the places where students are prepared to be teachers of both language and literature of Portuguese and other additional languages[2] (such as English, Spanish, French, Italian, German, etc.). The education of the students of the *Licenciaturas em Letras*, and their identities as learners of teaching has been a common topic in Brazilian Applied Linguistics in the last years. These studies have been carried out from different theoretical and methodological perspectives and some examples are Paiva (1997) and Celani (2001), who deal with identity by describing teachers' expected characteristics, and Barcelos *et al.* (2004), who adopt a perspective of teachers' beliefs. Differently, this study, therefore, aims at understanding the identity construction narratives of a group of student-teachers mainly as learners of English and not as learners of teaching, as many of the aforementioned studies have done, although, for some reasons that we will explain later, the learner-as-user and learner-as-teacher identities seem to conflate in many cases.

As mentioned before, in the field of Applied Linguistics in Brazil, and more specifically in the area of teacher education, the identity of the teacher of English as an additional language has been the main focus of several studies. Some studies, such as Ticks (2009) and Falcão (2005), have looked at stories told by teachers to understand the process of becoming an additional language teacher. Others, such as, Rossi (2004) and Fernandes (2006) have found out that one of the main problems in teacher education still lies in the lack of language proficiency of teachers which has triggered insecurity and an inferiority complex in them. Other studies (like, for example, El Kadri, 2010; Mott-Fernandez and Fogaça, 2007) depart from the assumption that the role of English in the world has changed, that is, it has become a lingua franca, and investigate how this change can affect the identity of the teachers of English.

In this paper, first, we will deal with the concept of identity and the notions of investment and imagined communities. After that, we will briefly review some research studies on the process of identity construction of language learners. Then, we will describe the context and the participants, put forward the research question, and explain the procedures for data generation and data analysis. Later, we will analyze the narratives of two participants with the aim of understanding their identity constructions and, then, we will look at the group as a whole attempting to find out some common traits in the construction of the participants' identities. Finally, we will reflect on the problematic findings of the study and offer a possible solution to them.

The concept of identity and the notions of investment and imagined community

Even though there are many definitions of identity used in Applied Linguistics, we will be using, in this work, the concept of identity as defined by Norton Peirce (1995) e Norton (2013 [2000]). During the 1990's, mainly in the United States a strong movement within Applied Linguistics appeared which demanded a stronger role to be attributed to the social context in the studies of Second Language Acquisition. Within that movement, led by some scholars such as Firth and Wagner (1997), Lantolf (2000) and Block (2007), Norton's research and theoretical concepts were fundamental to consolidate the integration of the second language learner and his/her socio-cultural context, that is, what he/she does to learn to communicate, how he/she does, with whom, for what reasons, what the power relations embedded, etc. In this way, the second language learner is not considered anymore only a receiver of 'input' or a 'motivated' or 'unmotivated' person. In her attempt to incorporate the social world, Norton Pierce (1995) makes a critique of the studies on motivation that had been carried out up to that time, since, according to her, those studies were based on the assumption that the identity of the learner was fixed and unchangeable. The studies carried out by Norton with immigrant women in Canada clearly show how, throughout a second language process, and highly conditioned by the social context, the learners gradually construct and reconstruct their relationship with that language. Therefore, she suggests that the learners' construction of a second language identity is prone to constant changes. Based on Bourdieu (1992), Weedon (1987) and Anderson (1991), Norton (2013 [2000]) describes identity as 'multiple' and as a 'site of struggle' and defines it as the way in which people un-

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[1] We use, in this paper, the term student-teachers, even though the participants analysed have already finished their university careers, because we believe that the identity construction of a teacher is a never ending learning process, teachers are always student-teachers.

[2] In this paper, we have decided to use the concept of 'additional' instead of 'foreign' language for three main reasons. First of all, the construct of 'foreign language' is ideologically biased and associated with the myth of the native speaker supremacy, which we strongly reject. Second, we agree with Saraceni (2009, p. 184) when he contends that "English should not be presented and taught as a foreign language, and hence as somebody else's language, but as an additional language to be added to one's linguistic repertoire". Also we agree with Schlatter and Garcez (2009) who refer to English and Spanish as 'additional languages' because they are used transnationally and intra-nationally for communication, expression and participation of both learners and teachers in Brazilian society.

Gloria Gil, Cleiton Constantino Oliveira

derstand their relation with the world manifested in their desires of recognition, affiliation and security.

The concept of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2013 [2000]) can be considered a key element to understand the construction of identity in the learning process as it brings a new perspective different from the traditional psychological one. Based on post-structuralist theories, Norton (2013 [2000]) defines investment as the efforts or movements, usually ambivalent, made by learners in order to acquire a second/additional language and also as a way of acquiring cultural capital (material and symbolic) (Bourdieu, 1992). According to Norton Pierce (1995), when investing in a second language the learner can acquire material (such as money) and symbolic (such as status) and thus increase his/her cultural capital, which is at the same time, thus, an investment in his/her own socio-cultural identity. Also, Norton (2001) makes use of another concept, *imagined communities*[3] that complements the concept of investment. According to Norton, the imagined community appears when people that are learning a second or additional language aspire to belong to an ideal community of users of that language. Norton even suggests that the construction of identity in the process of learning a second/additional language is always a process of power negotiation where the identities of gender, social class and race are at stake. According to Norton and Toohey (2011, p. 415), "an imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language can be understood within this context".

In order to illustrate the constructs of investment and imagined communities, we will summarize as follows the learning processes of two of the five immigrant women of Norton (2013 [2000]), Martina and Katarina. In that study, the participants were investigated since the time they were formally studying English as a second language in a classroom where the researcher was also helping to teach, and they were invited by her to write reflexive diaries. Also the researcher and the participants had some talks about their learning processes inside and outside the classroom. In this way, getting to know the social context of the participants became essential to understand the second language identity construction of the immigrant women investigated.

On the one hand, Martina, from Czechoslovakia, arrived in Canada at 37 with her husband and children. Even though she had a university diploma as a surveyor, she had just got a job as a kitchen helper in a restaurant. At the beginning, she could not communicate in English and was completely dependent on her children, but as her linguistic proficiency improved she started to be in charge of the house chores and of her children. According to Norton, Martina's social identity can be defined as a site

of struggle: struggle to learn a language as immigrant, as a learner in a classroom, as a worker in the restaurant, and the researcher in a narrative way knits Martina's process of investment, desire and resistance, and presents different discursive instances/evidences of how she was able to construct a counter-discourse in her workplace.

On the other hand, Katarina, from Poland, also had a high investment in learning English, even though she spent a lot of time at home with her husband and daughter. Katarina's main investment was on the English course she attended in the morning and also she did some voluntary community work with elderly people nine hours per week. Her investment was not triggered by a desire to speak English well but to go back to be a teacher, a profession she had exercised for 17 years in Poland. Katarina did not feel marginalized by the fact of being Polish, but by the fact of being an immigrant and resisted not being a qualified worker. Her main investment was fuelled by the imagined community she aspired to belong to one day, that of qualified professionals which was based on reconstructing what she had left behind and also fuelled the desire of getting a good job and belonging to a network of social relations of qualified people.

Norton (2013 [2000]) shows Martina's and Katarina's internal contradictions along the processes they went through in order to become proficient English users. Some power relations also spread through their learning narratives due to the fact that being immigrants they were placed or they placed themselves in situations of linguistic disadvantage.

Other studies on identity

When speaking about recent research on the process of identity construction of language learners, we often draw on those studies developed by scholars such as Norton (2013 [2000]), Kanno and Norton (2003), McKay and Wong (1996), which were conducted in second language contexts in which the participants were immigrants. It means that, in these contexts, the level of exposure by the learners is usually – but not necessarily as suggested by Norton (2013 [2000]) – higher than in those contexts which the language is learnt and taught as an additional language. Identity studies related to learning/teaching/ using additional languages, such as Kanno (2003, 2008), Kinginger (2004) and Kramsch (2009) are relatively scarce when compared to those in which the language is learned as a second language, and thus they constitute a new area of research on identity.

Among these studies, and considering the purposes of this article, we will briefly review Longaray (2009), Silva (2013) and Carazzai (2013), all of them carried out

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[3] This term was coined by Anderson (1991).

in the Brazilian context. Longaray's (2009) study tried to explore issues on language and identity through her own experience as learner and teacher of English. The author included in the article both her tensions and difficulties in learning and teaching English and her significant and grateful moments. Drawing on the social perspective to try to understand her data, Longaray (2009) also incorporated in her article the concepts of investment and imagined communities proposed by Norton (2013 [2000]). Thus, the author mentions her study carried out in 2005 and says that the participants often demonstrated ambivalent attitudes in their investments to learn English: they showed positive behaviors and attitudes to learn English during the interview, but revealed a tendency of non-participation in the classroom activities during the video recordings before the interviews.

Also in a Brazilian context, Silva (2013) and Carazzai (2013) investigated students of English as an additional language identity construction at the university. Those two studies heavily draw on the main constructs of Norton's theoretical framework, namely identity, investment, imagined communities, and resistance. On the one hand, Silva's study discusses how the experiences of six English as additional language student-teachers' experiences of learning/using English at college led them to assume different (sometimes contradictory) subject positions and suggests that the identity of the participants as learners/users of an additional language, and at times as learners of teaching were sites of struggle. In spite of the fact that certain contexts and practices seemed to have hindered the participants from identifying with particular subject positions, the student-teachers showed to be invested in the English practices to find opportunities to practice the language. Furthermore, the participants' communities of practice, whether real or imagined, involved both participation and non-participation. On the other hand, Carazzai (2013) investigates the process of identity (re) construction of six Brazilian English language learners at the university. Carazzai's main aim was to try to unveil the participants' identity as learners of English (and not as learners of language teaching like Silva's). The findings from the narrated stories suggest that participants went through a process of identity (re)construction while learning English. The participants invested in learning English since their childhood, hoping to acquire material and/or symbolic resources. At college, the students participated more in class when they felt confident and validated, and resorted to non-participation when they were positioned in undesirable ways. Moreover, the results show that families greatly influence students' learning of English, and that learning happens mostly in informal contexts, thus the educational contexts function as appendices. The participants had different imagined communities related to people with whom the participants wished to connect through English such as virtual (internet) partners, more

powerful and/or knowledgeable people. Finally, although the participants wanted to be in contact with the world using the English language, they often felt there was a barrier separating them from other speakers and users of the language.

Methodological procedures

We have adopted, within a qualitative-interpretative paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), a narrative approach, since we understand, following Block (2007) that identities are socio-cultural narratives progressively constructed. In this approach, identities are considered 'narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals and groups of individuals appeal to self-name, to self-characterize, and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives' (Pavlenko and Blackedge, 2004, p. 19).

In this work, we attempt to answer, using Norton Peirce's (1995) and Norton's (2013 [2000]) concepts, the following research question:

> *What kind of identity positions do the participants hold as learners during their language practices both at school and at college?*

The context of this study is *Vale do Açu* a region located between the middle and the west part of the state of *Rio Grande do Norte* and its regional division includes nine cities: *Açu, Alto do Rodrigues, Carnaubais, Ipanguaçu, Itajá, Jucurutu, Pendencias, Porto do Mangue e São Rafael*. The current population is estimated in 140.534 inhabitants and the region has a territorial size of 4.756.079 km^2. Açu is the major city of the valley and many people usually go there to work and study. The organization of the social structure includes a small upper-class elite, an increasing middle class and a large and diverse popular class. Economically, there still exists a large gap between the formal and informal sectors of the local economy, especially among the rural population. However, the local labor market has envisaged important achievements aiming at developing the region. Furthermore, the region has recently been recognized for its touristic potential based on its natural landscapes and beautiful lakes. The main economic activity is agriculture, especially the cultivation of banana; commerce, with regional manufactured products; and industry, with the oil and gas companies. Besides these economic sectors, there is also a large and increasing service sector which is mainly composed of small land owners, civil servants, teachers and self-employed professionals.

Due to the reality of globalization, especially for the frequent contact with "foreigners" from the big companies in the region and the presence of some exchange students who spend about a year studying in Açu, more

and more people are becoming aware of the social and economic importance associated with English today. In this way, people know that a certain level of command in English can provide them with much better opportunities of succeeding in getting a good employment.

The participants of this study were eight student-teachers of a Specialization Course in the Teaching of English. All the participants had graduated in the teaching of English in the State University (Universidade do Estado do Rio Grande do Norte – UERN). The participants' ages ranged from 23 to 48 years old and, out of the eight participants, three were female and five were male. The following table illustrates some of the details of the participants' profile. Pseudonyms will be used in order to protect the participants' privacy (Table 1).

The program where data were collected is *Curso de Letras/Inglês*, in Açu, Rio Grande do Norte. As already mentioned, Açu is the main city of the region and students come from different nearby cities to undertake their academic studies in the only campus of UERN in the region of *Vale do Açu*. In the *Curso de Letras/Inglês*, as it is called, which is a *Licenciatura em Letras* (see the Introduction), the curriculum is designed mainly with pedagogical disciplines and the main objective of the program is to form intercultural competent professionals. The program has two cycles, in the first one, from the first semester up to the fourth, students have to attend disciplines of oral and written practice of English language, that is, Basic English Language[4], English Language I, English Language II and English Language III. From the fifth semester on, they start the second cycle, which has methodological disciplines, the teaching practicum as well as English Language and

American and British literatures. Since proficiency in English is not a prerequisite to be admitted in the EFL program, many students enter *Curso de Letras/Inglês* with vary basic knowledge of the English language; and that can be the reason why students need to attend disciplines of oral and written English to develop their communicative competence in this language.

The narratives[5] analysed for this study were generated by means of semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 1979). Firstly, based on the transcribed[6] interviews, the narratives were reconstructed. Secondly, the narratives were thematically analyzed trying to identify and characterize both the investments and the imagined communities of the student-teachers. As follows, we will show the findings of the analyses carried out.

Analysis of Claudio's and Angelina's narrated identities: investments and imagined communities

By analysing Claudio's and Angelina's narratives, we specifically searched for some examples of investments and imagined communities. The stories below are samples of 'narrated stories' (Pavlenko and Blackedge, 2004) of Claudio and Angelina as learners of English as an additional language.

Claudio

Claudio is the oldest (48 years old) in the group and he grew up in Açu (RN) and his trajectory as a learner began early in childhood, even before he entered primary

Table 1. Participants' characteristics.

Name	City	Age	Occupation	Year of graduation
Angelina	Açu	36	Teacher of English	2001
Carlos	Açu	27	Executive Secretary	2009
Claudio	Açu	48	Teacher of English	2008
Edson	Açu	26	Teacher of English	2008
Fátima	Açu	25	Teacher of English	2009
James	Açu	23	Teacher of English	2010
Joel	Açu	29	Teacher of English	2007
Raele	Açu	26	Teacher of English	2009

[4] *Fundamentos de Língua Inglesa.*
[5] Data generation was carried out in 2010 for another study about the ways of learning of the student-teachers of the research here reported (Oliveira, 2011).
[6] It is important to explain that the data of this research was transcribed using as transcription convention the symbol "+" for pauses but also using some ordinary written English conventions, such as interrogation marks for questions.

school. At the time, he used to listen to songs in English from an old radio his father had at home. His favourite song, a landmark in his story, according to him, was *Ben*, by Michael Jackson, which he used to sing for relatives and friends.

Throughout Secondary School, he was a student engaged with his own learning, who was not only interested in attending English classes but in becoming proficient in the language, desire that fuelled his investment in learning the language and thus becoming a language user. That investment, as learner/user also appears from his story as a language learner from the time he started interacting with *gringos* at weekends when he moved to Rio de Janeiro:

> when I left the north-east and went to Rio de Janeiro + every weekend I used to go to the beaches to meet gringos and listen to them talk + that means that there was an awakening in relation to my learning in that sense + about liking + wanting + there I built the space of my learning (Claudio, interview, March 2011).

> quando eu fui embora do Nordeste pra o Rio de Janeiro + o meu programa de final de semana era ir para as praias pra encontrar gringos e ficar ouvindo eles falarem + quer dizer tem um + há um despertamento meu com relação a aprendizagem nesse sentido + muito do gostar + do querer + aí construí espaço dessa aprendizagem mesmo.[7]

Claudio's investments to learn the language evidence the discursive construction of his imagined community: groups of people, both foreigners and Brazilians using and interacting in English. On the other hand, while Claudio evidenced his development by listening to *gringos*, it is important to mention that he also influenced other students to engage in learning English. Moved by his desire to use and learn the English language, Claudio usually assumed leading roles in his classes at college which also contributed significantly to his learning as in this way he was also able to use the English language. Claudio comments how he encouraged his classmates to participate in English conversations and highlights the importance of the university for his learning process:

> and the university was the door to that + allowed me to open discussion spaces + conversation spaces + to really use the language + because that way + I always tried to talk to the colleagues and putting the language into use + there were no external spaces + but at least the university was very important (Claudio, interview, March 2011).

> e a universidade me permitiu isso + me permitiu também a abertura de espaços de discussão + espaços de conversação + de usar realmente a língua + porque assim + eu procurava sempre tá conversando com os colegas e botando em uso a língua + se não havia espaços exteriores + mas pelo menos na universidade foi muito importante.

He also mentions that, when he was still at college, he was always ready to interact with exchange students that frequently go to Açu. He states that:

> and a second point was my contact + with exchange students + through an agency + called American Field Service + AFS + and the possibility of day-by-day interaction with the language + that is + the need to use English everyday (Claudio, interview, March 2011).

> e um segundo ponto também foi o meu contato com + com estudantes de intercambio + através de uma agência + chamada *American Field Service* + a AFS + e a possibilidade da interação cotidiana com a língua + ou seja + a necessidade de usar o Inglês cotidianamente.

Therefore, the two kinds of investment: his efforts to use the language to talk to foreigners in English and his efforts to use English with his college classmates, were the more important ones for the construction of his identity as language learner. In his narrative, then, the identity of the learner as 'user' is very strong, and his imagined community is clearly that of users of English of any kind, both natives and non-natives.

Angelina

Angelina's English learning story is different from Claudio's. She is 36 and her learning experience does not seem to be satisfactory for her as she does not show any instances of actually using the English language. Nevertheless, Angelina seems to invest in her career as an English language teacher and her narrative shows that there were no investments to really learn to use the language.

In her narrative, there is a recurrent theme: the lack of adequate professional education of most of the English teachers she had mainly along her school years. Thus, she started to realize that well prepared and good teachers make substantial difference in one's learning trajectory. According to her, the teaching of English at that time was very traditional, i.e., code-centered, and the teachers were very much concerned with language as code without providing the students with interaction in English. Her learning narrative makes a constant comparison between prepared and unprepared teachers which seems to hinder her actual engagement with her own learning as user of the language, leading, thus, to a form of resistance:

> the teachers I had had not been educated to be teachers + other teachers were + so + what made me aware of this was to observe the difference between a teacher educated to teach languages and one who was no prepared to teach + an educated teacher + an undergraduate teacher makes all the difference (Angelina, interview, March 2011).

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[7] All the interviews were carried out in Portuguese. In this article, we offer, first, a translation of the participants' words into English, and then their actual words in Portuguese.

os professores que eu tive alguns não tinham formação + outros tinham + então + o que me despertou foi observar a diferença entre ter um professor que realmente tivesse tido a formação pra ensinar línguas e um que realmente estivesse só tapando buraco + um professor formado + um professor com a graduação faz total diferença.

The way Angelina sees her teachers implies that, in an indirect way, she blames them for her language proficiency underachievement, and this, in turn, signals the dependency that she has on them due to the restraints imposed on her in that specific context. When asked to recollect her former teachers she says:

> I remember the teachers in the classroom that made us copy + and we did not know what we were copying + but that teacher did not have skills to make us participate in the classroom + to engage us and to make us develop the necessary skills to really speak English (Angelina, interview, March 2011).

> eu lembro de professores que estavam na sala e faziam muito copiar + e nós não sabíamos o que estávamos copiando + mas aquele professor ele não tinha dinâmica em sala de aula pra nos fazer participar + para nos envolver na aula e nos fazer desenvolver as habilidades necessárias pra realmente poder falar Inglês.

Therefore, we can suggest that Angelina was not the agent of her own learning along primary and secondary school, consigning to her teachers an activity that should have been hers: managing her own English learning process. In that way, Angelina seemed to resist, for a long time in her school years, the path towards a real engagement with that process as learner/user. Nevertheless, her college experiences seem to have helped her to change, up to a certain extent, her own image as language learner, and, thus, she starts investing in her own English learning, mainly owing to the fact that she starts seeing (imagining) herself as an English teacher, that is, she positions herself within an imagined community she wishes to belong to one day. And that community seems to be composed not only of English teachers, but, English teachers qualified to teach English well. Her changed position can be seen in the description she gives of a 'good' teacher she had at college that used ludic activities in the classroom and encouraged learners to actually use the language:

> I feel that + at the undergraduate program I had a teacher that taught in a playful way and in that way the students got quite engaged + got them enthusiastic + got them stimulated to talk + to get over the natural blocks + because where you enter a classroom where everybody is talking in another language + you sometimes even know that you should talk + but your mind is blocked + so + the objective is more than teaching how to say things + but to let the student free so that he/she can voice his/her opinions + in the second language + so + I consider it important to work with the ludic aspects of the language + so important that I myself + I am dealing with play in my project + because today I wok the ludic aspects in the classroom and I perceive even with this ludic approach the student blocks him/herself when he/she has to ask a question + so imagined what

would happen when working in a systematic of mechanical answers and questions (Angelina, March, 2011).

Eu sinto que + na graduação eu tive um professor que ele trabalhava muito com lúdico e isso fazia com que o aluno se envolvesse bastante + o aluno se empolgasse + se sentisse estimulado pra falar + pra vencer o bloqueio que é natural de cada um + porque quando você entra numa sala que todo mundo está falando em outra língua + você às vezes até sabe o que deveria falar + mas a sua mente bloqueia + então + isso é um trabalho que não é mais a questão de ensinar o que dizer + mas de deixar o aluno à vontade pra que ele possa transmitir suas opiniões na outra língua + na segunda língua + então + eu considero importante o trabalho com o lúdico + é tanto que eu + no meu projeto eu estou abordando o lúdico + porque hoje trabalhando em sala de aula eu trabalho o lúdico e mesmo com o lúdico eu percebo que o aluno bloqueia na hora que você faz uma pergunta + imagine se você trabalhar uma coisa sistemática só de perguntas e respostas mecanizadas.

Therefore, a resistance to learning with "unprepared" teachers who just focused on the linguistic code and dependence on "good" teachers that encouraged her to use the language seems to be the most salient features in Angelina's identity construction as English language learner.

The findings from the analyses of both Claudio's and Angelina's identity constructions as learners seem to point to the fact that within the same education context different identities can be constructed and/or reinforced. While Claudio along the path has his learning identity as language user reinforced, Angelina struggles to be more a teacher than a learner. In the following section, we will describe the findings from the analysis of the school stories, of the other participants, also focusing on investments and imagined communities.

Analysis of the other participants: teacher and learner identity investments

In this study, we found out, as suggested in the previous section, that the construction of the identities of the student-teachers investigated revolves around two types of investment: those which lead to learn and use the language, as in Claudio's case, and those which lead to learn the language to teach it, as in Angelina's case. We discuss below the most salient features of the two types of investment and how they are related in the learning identity construction of the other participants.

First, Edson, like Claudio, invests in his identity construction as a learner who wants to use the language, in his case, specifically to play video-games, understand their stories, and to communicate with other people. He comments on how this type of investment to learn to use the target language started:

> well + my first contact with English was in a videogame store + because + I have always liked electronic games + and that kind of thing + and I still deal with them today +

but then myu first contact was in that store + I went there to paly + I was a boy + I should be eleven years old and I wanted to know what happened in the plot of the game + I realized that there was a plot and a story was being told + so I wanted to know what was happening + and so as all those games were told in English + so I imagined that if I took a dictionary to the store I would be able to understand a bit more of the whole thing + so as I have always played games since childhood and my whole adolescence + + so I believe that this is how I started learning English (Edson, interview, March 2011).

bem + meu primeiro contato com Inglês foi numa locadora de vídeo game + porque assim + eu sempre gostei de jogos eletrônicos + aquela coisa toda + inclusive convivo com eles até hoje + mas aí o meu primeiro contato exatamente foi nessa locadora + eu fui jogar + eu era garoto + devia ter uns dez anos e eu queria saber o que acontecia na história do jogo + eu percebi que tinha um enredo e uma história estava sendo contada + então eu queria saber o que se passava + e aí como todos esses jogos eram contados em Inglês + então eu imaginei que se eu levasse um dicionário pra locadora eu podia entender um pouco mais da coisa + aí como esse hábito me acompanhou + o hábito de jogar esses jogos me acompanhou durante a minha infância e pré-adolescência inteira + então eu acho que eu comecei a aprender Inglês daí.

It is important to highlight that Edson's investments as learner/user, like Claudio's, do not take place inside but out of the classroom. Edson, on the other hand, is like Angelina, as he also clearly invests is his identity as teacher, as he explains:

The second movement took place when I was called to work as a teacher at xxx (language school) + and there + in the professional experience + as teacher + I could not even be there teaching + but I was there + I had my first experiences + I learnt more teaching than as a student + because I needed to understand those contents not only for me and still had the understanding to pass it to my students + so that was a crucial moment (Edson, interview, March 2011).

E o segundo salto foi quando eu fui chamado pra trabalhar como professor no xxx (escola de línguas) + e lá + na experiência como profissional + como professor + eu nem podia tá ensinado + mas já tava + fui ter as minhas primeiras experiências + eu aprendi dando aula muito mais de que como estudante + porque eu precisava entender aquele conteúdo não só pra mim + mas eu precisava entender aquele conteúdo pra mim e ainda ter discernimento e entendimento suficiente pra passar para meus alunos + então isso ai foi um ponto crucial.

Edson, thus, is the only participant that shows to have both an investment as a learner/user of English and an investment as a learner to teach the language. Differently from Edson, Carlos in his narrative shows how he did not invest in his learning to use the language process and thus, like Angelina, at college he invested mainly in learning to become a teacher:

at college + at college the learning of the English language was… the progress was very little + because + we studied to be teachers + we learned to teach + we didn't learn the target language (Carlos, interview, March, 2011).

na faculdade + na faculdade o aprendizado na língua Inglesa foi... o progresso foi muito pouco também + porque... porque assim + na universidade nós estudávamos para ser professor + aprendemos a ensinar + não aprendemos a língua-alvo.

Also other participants, such as Fátima and Joel, talk about their investments to become language teachers at college. Fátima, for instance, comments on how the choice of that college career was a conscious investment to acquire the symbolic capital associated with being a language teacher:

and what happened after high school? + I took the university entrance exam + and as in our region people really want to be teachers + teachers + the market of teachers is good in Açu + so+ so with that in mind I decided to take the test to study English at college (Fátima, interview, March 2011).

e depois do ensino médio veio o quê? + eu fui fazer vestibular + como na nossa região só... a gente visa muito a questão de + de professor + o mercado de trabalho que se tem em Açu é + ser professor + então + visando isso aí eu resolvi fazer o vestibular pra Letras com habilitação em língua Inglesa.

It is important to highlight that most of the participants criticize the teaching practices at college, complaining about the large classes and the heterogeneous linguistic proficiency levels of the students. For some of them, these two factors were the most salient causes of their non-participation in the classrooms which can be considered a type of resistance to those formal teaching situations. For Joel, for example, those heterogeneous levels of proficiency in the classes prevented him from investing in his role as learner/user of the English language at college:

see + at college was... it was a little + at the beginning it was a bit complicated + why? + because as I said to you before + when I started college I knew a bit of English + so I believed I knew English + I could have done much better at college if I had entered college without any knowledge of English + because in that way I would have made an effort + to learn that + so + what really happened at college? + as I already had basic notions and the other colleagues did not have them + so + the teacher had to teach to everybody + and had to start from the very beginning + good morning + hello + hi + how to greet + and things of that kind + I had already seen those thing in a course I had attended before + so the classes were boring for me + why? + because I knew that and did not do anything + I even asked permission to the teachers not to need to be present in the classes, it was boring + but that for me was bad in a way+ why? + it was later that I realized + that the English language + because it is a language different from ours + a foreign language requires practice and the more you practice + the more fluent you get + so + eu I didn't see it that way + I didn't see it that way the first and second years in college + thus I lost a little + in those years I lost + I could have taken more advantage at that time (Joel, interview, March 2011).

olha + na faculdade é... foi um pouco + no início foi um pouco complicado + por quê? + porque como eu já disse aqui a você antes + é + eu já cheguei na faculdade já sabendo um pouquinho de Inglês + então eu achava que sabia Inglês + eu poderia ter produzido bem mais na faculdade se por acaso eu

tivesse ingressado na faculdade sem nenhuma noção de Inglês + porque eu iria ter mais vontade de procurar + de aprender aquilo + então + o que era que acontecia na faculdade? + eu como já tinha noções básicas e os outros colegas eles não tinham + ora + o professor ele tinha que lecionar pra todos + então ele ia pegar desde o início + *good morning* + *hello* + *hi* + usar as saudações + tal + que eu já tinha visto no cursinho + então isso se tornava chato pra mim + por quê? + porque eu já sabia disso aí e acontecia de eu gazear + pedia até permissão aos professores pra não assistir aquela aula porque eu achava chato + mas isso de certa forma foi ruim pra mim + por quê? + depois foi que eu fui vê + que a língua Inglesa + por ser uma língua diferente da nossa + uma língua estrangeira ela requer prática e quanto mais você pratica + mais fluente você fica + então + eu não tinha essa noção + eu não tinha essa visão ainda logo no primeiro e segundo período de faculdade + daí eu perdi um pouco + nesses dois períodos eu perdi um pouco assim + poderia ter aproveitado mais.

Apparently, the main issue that emerges from Joel's narrative reveals that as he felt that he already had some cultural capital in relation to the English language, therefore, he aspired to have in college a community where English would be used in class and when he did not find his imagined community he started resisting the college context[8].

Also, some participants, like Angelina (as shown in the previous section), show that the investment to learn to use the language was not enough and they feel frustrated for not having achieved language proficiency. This is also the case of James, who, as can be seen in the following comment puts all the blame of his underachievement on college:

> To tell you the truth at college it was horrible + there was no specific learning in the English language and I did not grow at all (James, interview, March 2011).

> Na verdade a faculdade foi horrível + não houve um aprendizado específico em língua Inglesa + eu acredito que não me engrandeceu quase nada.

On the other hand, the findings of the analysis show that for most participants (with the exception of Fátima, Joel and James), the classrooms at college were much more satisfactory than the primary and secondary ones, and that in the identity constructions of the student-teachers analysed, some of the teachers the participants had at college became important models due to their engagement. Carlos comments about this importance:

> I saw + because for people to go ahead + to study what you ...for you to get something really you need to mirror yourself in someone + to mirror in a good person that you really consider + consider good + because you will do something without + with no objective if you get inspired by something or someone+ the teacher I got inspired by was from college + nobody from primary or secondary school + from college (Carlos, interview, March 2011).

Eu via + porque se + pra que a gente possa seguir em frente + de estudar o que você... pra você conseguir alguma coisa realmente você tem que se espelhar em alguém + e se espelhar em alguém bom que você realmente considere + considere bom + porque você vai fazer alguma coisa sem + sem objetivo nenhum se você num se inspirar em alguém ou em alguma coisa + o professor que eu me inspirei ele é da faculdade + nenhum da educação básica nem médio não + da faculdade mesmo.

Differently, when narrating about their primary and secondary school English learning experiences, in spite of some positive perceptions of their learning processes at that time, most of the narratives did not refer to how the participants lived those experiences but to what they did not live or have at that time. Those narratives can thus be called *narratives of lack* since the student-teachers reconstruct their past on a criticism of their school experiences. In that sense, the participants did not seem to have been invested in those experiences and have described the classes as 'boring practices' and emphasized the lack of university-educated teachers. Carlos, for example, states that:

> from primary school I remember ₊ the verb to *be* (laughs) everybody remembers the verb *to be* + and finished high school and does not know how to conjugate + the verb *to have* + the verb *can* + but I never learned + at school I never learned + the teacher wrote the verb on the board for us to conjugate + we conjugated by repeating + writing the conjugation of the verbs and + it was basically that (Carlos, interview, March, 2011).

> no fundamental o que eu me recordo é que + do verbo *to be* (risos) todo mundo recorda do verbo *to be* + que termina o ensino médio sem saber conjugá-lo + o verbo *to have* +o verbo *to can* + mas nunca aprendi + na escola nunca aprendi + o professor passava no quadro o verbo pra gente conjugar + a gente conjugava repetindo + escrevendo a conjugação dos verbos e + era basicamente isso.

And in relation to the lack of university-educated-teachers in primary school, Joel comments:

> My primary school teacher did not even have a diploma in English teaching + that is + the best she could have done was to have attended a six-month course in an language school to have some basic notions so and no to go the classroom to + talk about things and teach in a wrong way + because + as she did not have a diploma in + in the area certainly she would make some mistakes (Joel, interview, March 2011).

> A minha professora do ensino fundamental ela não era nem formada na língua Inglesa + em Letras/especialização em língua Inglesa + ou seja + ela já no máximo tinha feito um cursinho de seis meses pra ter noções e não ir pra uma sala de aula apenas pra é falar coisas ou lecionar de forma é... errada + porque + até porque se ela não se formou na + na área com certeza ela ia cometer alguns deslizes.

Therefore, from the narratives of some of the participants, such as Angelina and Joel, emerges the imagined

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[8] We thank João Fábio Sanches Silva's contribution to develop this idea.

community they aspire to belong to: that of qualified university-educated teachers.

To conclude, the findings from the analysis of the participants' narratives show that most students were more invested in their professional identity as learners of teaching than in their identities as learners to use the language.

Final remarks

As suggested in the beginning of this article, today the identity of language learners can be described as multiple, a site of struggle prone to changes, and the narratives here analysed unveil some of these participants' struggles and changes. According to Norton (2013 [2000]), the identity of a language learner can be understood through the way(s) in which she/he constructs his/her relationship with the social world, through how this relationship changes throughout time and through how he/she envisages future possibilities. The findings of this study seem to show how, being to a large extent influenced by the socio-cultural contexts, the investments realized or not by the learners, either as users or future teachers also play a fundamental role in this identity construction.

In spite the original aim of this study was to understand the identity construction of eight student-teachers as learners/users of English, most of the narratives show that for the participants there are many instances in which the learner-as-teacher identity overrides the learner-as-user identity. This finding, thus, stresses that identity can be understood, following Norton (2013 [2000]), as 'a site of struggle'[9]. Similarly to the group of public school learners of English as an additional language investigated by Longaray (2009), the great majority of the participants show contradictory investments. Also, along most of the narratives, the learner-of-English-as-teacher identity becomes stronger and the learner-as-user-of-English identity becomes more and more blurred. As a possible reason for this, we raise the hypothesis that the university curriculum and practices of the "Licenciatura em Letras" are not contributing for the students to become invested as language learners and the institution seems to be centering its efforts in the construction of the identity of the students as a teaching professional and not language users. In that sense, as pointed out in the beginning of this paper, one of the biggest challenges is to provide student-teachers at college with meaningful situated practices where they can really become users of the language. Thus, we believe that research on teacher-learners' resistance in different contexts in Brazil could be a path to understand the lack of investment in their identity-as-language users such as the one shown in the participants of this study. As Norton and Toohey (2011, p. 434) suggest, it is necessary to carry out research that "ex-amines how structural constraints and customary classroom practices might position learners in undesirable ways, but [...] [which also shows] that such constraints and practices are sometimes resisted by learners so as to create innovative and unexpected identity relationships".

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[9] We thank João Fábio Sanches Silva's contribution to develop this idea.

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