

ENGLISH AS A PAINFUL EXPERIENCE: NARRATIVES OF A YOUNG BRAZILIAN IMMIGRANT IN LONDON

INGLÊS COMO UMA EXPERIÊNCIA DOLOROSA: NARRATIVAS DE UMA JOVEM IMIGRANTE BRASILEIRA EM LONDRES

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with personal experiences of a young female Brazilian immigrant learning English as a second language in London. Data were generated through narrative inquiry procedures, aimed at registering personal stories of the participant's recollection of events. The results showed that learning English as a second language was a painful experience, especially at school, where the participant felt different for being an immigrant and not speaking the language which created a barrier to interact with other students. Also according to her, it appeared to be a reason to be bullied by her classmates. Despite such struggle, she was able to learn, acknowledging the support from her parents and daily interactions with people, rather than learning experiences in formal schooling.

Keywords: Immigrant student; English as a second language; bullying.

RESUMO

Este estudo lida com as experiências pessoais de uma jovem brasileira imigrante aprendendo inglês como segunda língua em Londres. Os dados foram gerados por meio de pesquisa narrativa, objetivando registrar histórias pessoais das lembranças dos eventos da participante. Os resultados revelam que aprender inglês como segunda língua foi uma experiência dolorosa, especialmente na escola, onde a participante se sentia diferente por ser imigrante e não falar a língua, criando uma barreira para interagir com outros alunos. Isso pareceu ser uma das razões, segundo ela, para ter sofrido bullying por parte dos colegas. Apesar de tal desafio, ela foi capaz de aprender, reconhecendo o apoio de seus pais e das interações cotidianas com as pessoas, ao invés das experiências de aprendizagem na escolarização formal.

Palavras-chave: aluna imigrante; inglês como segunda língua; bullying.

INTRODUCTION

In the current global society, people leave their homeland seeking for better life conditions and also fulfill other dreams. A new language and new cultural

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practices are just a few of the main challenges people face in this new journey. Understanding how people experience such transition from the moment they arrive in a foreign country until they realize they are already part of that social community is one of the initial aims of this study.

Representing the meanings of human experience in the narratives people share (CLANDININ, 2006, 2015; CONNELLY; CLANDININ, 2006; WEBSTER; MERTOVA, 2007) is both a theoretical and methodological approach alternative in the educational field. The participant in this study is a Brazilian student sharing her story when she left Brazil as a young girl who immigrated to England to be with her parents. More specifically, we looked at her language learning experiences, that is, how she learned English as a second language (ESL) while attending a regular school in London and in her daily life trying to interact with native speakers.

In order to understand the narrative of this language learner, this study considered two specific questions:

1. What stories does a young immigrant tell regarding her experiences learning ESL?
2. How was the experience of learning a new language away from home?

For this paper, the recollection presents a trajectory filled with negative experiences established by the initial cultural shock (HALL, 2011) and language barrier (GU; PATKIN, 2013; HONG; ESPELAGE, 2012). Besides, this challenge led her to a greater one: feeling bullied at school by her peers for not being able to communicate in English. Even with the impact of bullying in this students' life, the analysis also shows how this language learner found her way into negative experiences to become fluent in English, which set her free from feeling like an outcast, once she could talk to her classmates. In the following sections, we aim at answering these questions following methodological tenets of narrative inquiry and studies in Applied Linguistics.

LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THE CONTEMPORARY CLASSROOM

With changes in the worldwide scenario as a result of the emergent global society, people have to learn a new language for various reasons. According to Kumaravadivelu (2012) these continuous expectations and demands from the global society change the nature of learners' needs, motivation and autonomy. Applied Linguistics, over the years, has considered the different individual,

social and political aspects that surround language classrooms (HALL, 2011; KUMARAVADIVELU, 2012), which in turn play a significant role for inquirers to understand under which specific conditions students are being able or not to learn English. Still, even considering that learners' needs are determined by diverse factors defined as "a combination of individual, institutional, governmental and societal demands" (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2012, p.37), contemporary Applied Linguistics claims that people are becoming aware that they need to learn how to speak English and at the same time preserve their identity and the cultural practices they got to know and be a part of.

The global society¹ also increases the opportunity for people to go abroad looking for better life conditions. They leave their homeland for several reasons and as Vandeyar (2012, p.232) suggests, the journey of immigrating to a new place called home "follows multiple pathways that are motivated by a variety of factors, namely, relief from political, religious or ethnic persecution; economic incentives; as well as the opportunity to be reunited with family members". It is important to add that all of these pathways usually come down to a similar challenge: as part of social life, people are exposed to new cultural practices (i.e., going to school, making friends, getting jobs). Usita (2005), for example, claims that the new place brings different implications for social life, leading immigrants to create new social networks in the neighborhood, workplace or by going to school.

The diversity in global societies is also evident in school, reinforcing the claim that the classroom and what happens in it is inseparable from the actual sociocultural context (HALL, 2011). Hence, in the globalized society "the demographic composition of student populations is becoming more and more hybrid in educational settings throughout the world" (GU; PATKIN, 2013, p.139). On the other hand, while it is acknowledged that immigrant students provide cultural diversity to the classroom environment, much of this diversity is not acknowledged and then students feel left out in a place that should promote dialogue (VANDEYAR, 2012) and teachers often see them as problematic (GU; PATKIN, 2013). In the midst of such conditions, students also have the challenge to learn English as a second language (ESL) which they will need for everything, including keeping up with their peers in classroom.

1. This term reflects the changes brought up by the development of globalization in media, technology, economy and other sociopolitical aspects of human life. The English language has a privileged position as an international language and in emerging economies like Brazil, it is part of the official curriculum as a foreign language (EFL).

Harel-Fisch *et al* (2011) suggest that the contemporary society needs educational settings that provide safety and promote students' belonging. However, schools should also promote openness to cultural differences. What immigrant students initially encounter besides the culture shock is a language barrier. According to Hall (2011, p.167) culture shock is "the feeling of social uncertainty or dissatisfaction when caught between two cultural groups". Moreover, culture shock also entails the attempt to balance and understand the differences between both cultures and how to navigate through them. As a result of initial culture shock and language barrier, Gu and Patkin (2013) add that students often struggle to find their right place in the school community especially when they are not proficient in their peers' native language. In cases when they are unable to negotiate and interact, immigrant students may become victims of bullying for being or feeling different, as evidence showed in studies by Hong and Spelage (2012).

Bullying has been defined in different ways, but most definitions maintain the idea of intimidation and psychological or physical violence. As defined by Olweus (1993), being bullied implies to be repeatedly a victim of negative actions by other people. These actions may be verbal (i.e, threatening, calling names) or physical (i.e, hitting, stealing money). In addition, other actions include: promoting social exclusion and isolation, sexual harassment, online stalking and humiliation (cyber-bullying). In terms of exposure, it can occur in public – in front of other people – or in private (RAYNOR, WYLIE, 2012).

Tolsma *et al* (2013, p.53) explain bullying as "the existence of a power imbalance between bullies and victims". Hong and Espelage (2012) define it in terms of direct (i.e, pushing) or indirect actions (i.e., spreading gossip) that harm and intimidate other people. Though some scholars suggest that students may be bullied in class because of language barrier (HONG; ESPELAGE, 2012), studies on bullying, language barrier, ethnically diverse classrooms and minority students have not come to a consensus regarding a direct relationship between bullying and language barrier (see SHIN *et al*, 2011; TIPPET *et al*, 2013; TOLSMAN *et al*, 2013 for examples of different opinions).

For Tolsma *et al* (2013) the chance of being bullied does not rely on the students' ethnic background, as it can occur among groups with the same or different ethnic background. Shin *et al* (2011), however, reported different results. In a study with 295 participants, 86 of them (29,2%) claimed to be bullied while 74.6% acted as bystanders (220), in other words, people who witness other people being bullied without offering help. The analysis also considered two perspectives: the bullies' and the victims'. When eliciting the reasons, Shin *et al* (2011) found

out a few reasons why students think they become the bullies' target from which we highlight two. The most recurrent reason students felt bullied was due to their country of origin (29.1%) followed by the feeling that they were different (29.1%). Regarding results why bullies pick on their victims, the results differ. From their point of view, harassing a student for being different is the fifth reason (19.4%) and being from another country was the eleventh and last reason (10.8%). In general, bullies reported in Shin *et al* (2011, p.876) pick on victims mainly for physical characteristics.

At the same time, considering bullying as a worldwide social problem (HAREL-FISCH, 2011; HONG; ESPELAGE, 2012; SHIN *et al*, 2011) with effects on students welfare and mental health, countries have tried to deal with it by elaborating anti-bullying policies. Raynor and Wylie (2012, p.783) for instance, mention that educational institutions in the United Kingdom are required by law to develop an anti-bullying policy in schools, however, "there is no requirement for schools to record incidences of bullying, although there is a consultation document that will mean, at some stage in the future, it will be a legal requirement for schools to document incidences". Given that students nowadays are growing up in a society where bullying is becoming a common practice, schools will need effective alternatives to deal with it in order to avoid complications, such as suicide or bullycide (Suicide and/or homicide as a result to peer victimization) in rarer cases, but equally preoccupying².

Considering that classes are becoming more hybrid and ethnically diverse (GU; PATKIN, 2013; HALL, 2011; KUMARAVADIVELU, 2012; RAYNOR; WYLIE, 2012), there is an essential necessity to acknowledge the diversity and the challenges it brings to the classroom as an effort to provide educational settings that are less threatening and more socially inclusive, enhancing students' success and sense of belonging. In the next section, we turn to narrative inquiry, thinking of it as an alternative to study such a private and sensitive aspect of human experience.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Living and telling stories are cultural traditions which have endured for centuries in different societies (CLANDININ, 2006, 2015; LIMA, 2017;

2. Cases include examples of school shootings such as the Columbine High School massacre (U.S.A) in 1999 and the Realengo School shooting (Brazil) in 2011. Both of them highlighted the debate concerning bullying, suicide and school violence in general, though reasons for such violent crimes were rooted in very complex reasons and motives.

WEBSTER; MERTOVA, 2007). It is also a way to teach future generations the cultural-historical knowledge elaborated by society (VYGOTSKY; LURIA, 1992). Scientifically, narrative has become an important alternative for studying human experience, especially for qualitative research that differs from a positivist paradigm. People live through stories, recollect experiences and make sense of the world they live in and the people they interact with. According to Shacklock and Thorp (2005, p.156) the idea of life story entails "a personal account in the teller's own words". This recollection, in turn, follows specific structures (BELL, 2002) in which different experiences are reunited and shared with others. From its rise in Social Studies and Anthropology, narrative also was welcomed in other fields such as Education and Applied Linguistics for its qualitative potential in registering peoples' beliefs and experiences (CLANDININ, 2015; LIMA, 2017).

One of the most important aspects in narrative inquiry is looking at human experience. As Connely and Clandinin (2006) claim, the phenomenon of experience is the way to understand how people interpret their own stories and the lives they live. Therefore, Clandinin (2006, p.47) explains that narrative inquiry is understood as a metaphoric space built on three dimensions, "the personal and social (interaction) along one dimension; past, present and future (continuity) along a second dimension; place (situation) along a third dimension". Thus, these dimensions help narrative inquirers to understand peoples' experiences that are embedded in social places, where people interact under particular conditions and during a specific historical moment.

As a research methodology in Education and Applied Linguistics, for instance, it provides an insight of the participants' stories that sometimes even they are unaware of, and even if they are not precise, in terms of memory, they still represent the participants' view of the phenomenon (BELL, 2002), in other words, how they view themselves in the world they live and the experiences they have throughout their journey. That means that narrative inquirers do not look for a single version of a story as the ultimate truth. The concern is to faithfully represent the participants' view on the events he or she lived and the meanings that these people create by narrating their stories, which also can affect how they live and see life.

In language teaching, for example, with the emergence of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), learners became the center of the curriculum (HALL, 2011; KUMARAVADIVELU, 2012), a shift that required attention to what students and teachers were thinking and doing in the language classroom. One of the contributions of narrative inquiry was that it provided personal accounts

on the diversity of language classrooms, in other words, the many ways students conceptualized learning and teaching.

In a methodological view, narratives are generated from the moment stories are shared and told. This process may entail the constant composition of field texts or conducting interviews (CLANDININ, 2006, 2015), asking students to write them or promoting a dialogue with other instruments, such as questionnaires. People live lives and as narrative inquirers, our goal is to “describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (CLANDININ; CONNELLY, 1996, p.29). In this way, we provide in the next section an overview of the study, and then the stories of our participant.

THE STUDY

This session presents a brief outline on the participant and the methodological procedures to generate and analyze the stories that were shared. Originally, the study aimed at studying the narratives of Brazilian people who had lived abroad and then later returned to their homeland. Three people were present in the beginning of the study case, however, only one of the participants continued to collaborate to this project. The participant is presented in the following section as Carolina, a fictitious name, for ethical reasons.

PARTICIPANT AND CONTEXT

Carolina is an adolescent who was born in Brazil. When she was a kid her parents moved to London, England looking for job opportunities. A few years after working in construction and cleaning jobs, they spent their savings to bring their daughter to the U.K. The following five years comprised their life together in London to raise money to go back to Brazil, while Carolina attended school to learn English. Nowadays, Carolina studies English in a private language institute to practice her skills. She was invited by one of her teachers to share her narratives to be part of a research project. She signed a consent form that assured her anonymity and allowed us to reproduce excerpts of her interview.

DATA ANALYSIS

Following some methodological principles of narrative inquiry in the study of experience (BELL, 2002; CLANDININ, 2006, 2015; CLANDININ; CONNELLY,

1996; CONNELLY; CLANDININ, 1990, 2006; WEBSTER; MERTOVA, 2007), as discussed earlier, data was generated through an open ended interview, which was audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The interview had an open script which allowed the participant to share stories that were not necessarily expected but still contributed for analysis. Questions were elaborated according to five aspects:

- The reasons which motivated the immigration and the experiences with Carolina's family.
- The beginning of the journey in London and the adaptation.
- The process of engaging in cultural practices of the new context (family, friends, school, among others).
- Details on the learning experiences as an immigrant learning ESL.
- A retrospective view on this learning trajectory in the current days as an English speaker.

The full transcript was analyzed according to four major aspects in common narratives as suggested by Connely and Clandinin (1990). These aspects entail: script (time structure, i.e., present or past), scene (the environment where the story take place), characters and events (the people and the actions that compose the experience). Stories are then organized in the form of episodes. Therefore, the narrative is analyzed and reported in a manuscript and later sent to the participant before being shared in public.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This session is divided into three parts. First, Carolina's narratives about leaving Brazil and reuniting with her family in England are analyzed. Second, her initial experiences at school are addressed, mainly her challenges to interact in English and the relationship with her peers. Third, Carolina's recollections about learning English are discussed and the section is closed with her looking back at those years while being back in Brazil.

LEAVING THE NEST: CAROLINA REUNITES WITH HER PARENTS

As a young girl in Brazil, Carolina never realized the importance of learning a new language. In her daily life, she mentioned her appreciation for listening to music in English and trying to understand the lyrics, however, she never felt interested to

study it. At the same time, with economic changes in the country due to inflation, immigration rose in popularity and people started considering going to the United States or England to make a living.

Carolina's parents were no different. Living in South America as small farmers, they felt that going abroad could offer them the economic conditions for a better life, thus, going to England became a possibility. However, they could not take Carolina with them because they did not know what would happen and she was still a kid. As their parents left Brazil for better opportunities, Carolina was being raised by her grandmother. Today, she recalls this experience with more empathy of her parents' choice, as she narrates:

Because my mother and my father were in England to make money, you know? [laughs]. They were there, and I was left in Brazil. I stayed in Brazil for three years, and they told my cousin [who was also living in England at the time] to pick me up over here. So I went to England to live with them. And I lived there... I think... four years and a half or five.

The family network was once fragmented due to financial reasons, but the parents always had in mind the goal to bring their daughter along. Three years after living in London, her parents saved enough money to bring their child close to them. Carolina's cousin came back to Brazil to visit her family after three years abroad, and brought Carolina along when she returned to England a few months later. A different country, a different culture and a new language paved a new way in this young immigrant's life and would be crucial in her identity and sense of belonging. In such conditions, the possible culture shock (HALL, 2011) and language barrier, as shown in different studies (GU; PATKIN, 2013; HONG; ESPELAGE, 2012; USITA, 2005) often intimidate immigrants. However, that was not Carolina's case in the beginning, once her main priority was to finally be reunited with her parents, restoring the original family network. Notice how she talks about going abroad:

No, I didn't care so much, because I wanted to see my parents so much, so I didn't really imagine I had to learn another language, and I thought it was going to be easy.

One of her first expectations, as shown in this excerpt, was that learning English would not be a problem, considering she was young and unlike her parents, she would have the opportunity to go to school. But Carolina did not go straight to school, she still had a few months off before classes started, and she stayed home getting ready for this new experience. According to her, there was no initial cultural shock because the family network was finally restored and that was the most important goal. Being around them was also a way to keep the Brazilian memories alive, even miles away. The desire to be with them was so strong, that

learning a new language was a secondary concern. She expected that learning this new language would be simple. Meanwhile, her English vocabulary was still very limited as explained in the next excerpt about her preparation for school.

I stayed... I think... one or two months home, because it wasn't time to go to school yet. Then, I think two months later I went to school. I was in fifth grade, I think. And I didn't really like it. Because it was kinda scary, because I didn't know how to speak anything in English, only basic things like, "Good Morning" and "Hi", things I learned at school over here [in Brazil]. And when I went there, it was really scary. When I got there, my father called a girl and said: "This girl is Brazilian too". And I said to him: "How do you know?". And when he called her, she approached and I stayed next to her, she was in my class. That was better, but she couldn't help me so much. She wasn't patient enough.

Going to school without knowing anything in English – her own words – was described as a scary experience for young Carolina. She recalled that the only basic expressions she knew (i.e., greeting people), she learned during English classes in Brazil. Bearing in mind how her daughter would struggle in this new context, her father reached out to another Brazilian student who attended the same school, in order to soften the impact of not being able to communicate with anyone. Luckily, but not for long, Carolina had the support of another Brazilian girl. However, this new friend was not built to mentor someone who was struggling with the language barrier.

This moment in her narrative is when the cultural shock becomes clearer, especially because she was in a new environment where her parents were not around. Some reasons exemplify this shock such as realizing how elementary her linguistic skills were and how intimidating that was. Once the problem was evident, a solution was suddenly found: another Brazilian girl to mediate Carolina's new experiences as an outsider. The problem was that the new girl was not prepared to offer the necessary support, even though it is possible to assume that as an immigrant as well, she was once in a similar situation that Carolina was experiencing.

Carolina did not remember receiving specific support from school staff or from her teachers and peers in terms of adaptation, reinforcing her view of the initial experiences in the new school as negative. Regardless of that, the feeling that she needed to learn English fast became more evident, as she sat in school doing different activities³ (i.e., puzzles, crosswords, vocabulary sheets, among others), due to the fact that she could not keep up with the other students and felt unable to speak to them. In the next passage she gives more details about it.

3. These exercises were presented in separate sheets and introduced basic language skills, vocabulary and classroom etiquette. The complexity of texts would increase from one exercise to another.

Yeah. I had to learn. Had to! So, most of the times, for half year I stayed in class doing activities, like... my teacher was teaching [the regular contents] and I was doing activities to learn English. Because I couldn't speak anything.

The student became part of a class, but she was not doing the same things as her peers. For a whole semester she kept doing these activities, hoping it would foster her ability to finally learn and keep up with the rest of the class. As Gu and Patkin (2013, p.113) point out, when young immigrants go to school, the language barrier they encounter not only hampers their chance to engage in socialization with other pupils, but it also support the decision to place them in classrooms that are not suitable for their age, in an attempt to enable the opportunity to learn the new language in the first place. Carolina felt different for doing different things such as being unable to interact and for doing the kind of exercises her peers were not. Still, she made it clear that in order to change this initial impression it was necessary to learn the language, which is why she engaged in those special activities. The socialization was limited, but she expected that would not last for long.

Even with this initial language barrier and different activities she had to do, she started feeling she was actually learning something, as if speaking English was day by day becoming a reality for her, but unfortunately, this feeling was yet not related to school. The language barrier played a major role in that moment, as she offers more details in the next passage.

It [the English language] was coming naturally. But it was difficult because I had to keep doing those activities that I couldn't understand. I was really embarrassed. I was annoyed because no one liked to talk to me. Actually, some tried to talk to me, but I couldn't answer. What would I say? I didn't understand what they said and I didn't know what to answer.

Negative emotional experiences emerged as a result of this struggle that the classroom represented for her. First, she did not understand completely all these activities she constantly had to do in class, and in turn, she felt embarrassed (i.e., asking for help from other peers or teachers all the time, not being able to accomplish these tasks in the language she wanted, needed and had to learn). At the same time, she was missing opportunities to interact with her peers. A contradiction is then revealed in her narrative. Even though she felt she was actually learning, the pace was not fast enough and her interactions were still limited as she could not reciprocate. The activities became more difficult and Carolina also struggled to communicate that to her teachers.

As she reflects on it, while narrating her stories, a few of the pupils tried reaching out to her, but again the language barrier constrained the chance to understand and be understood. Although her classroom seemed ethnically diverse,

as most classrooms in global cities are (see, for example, GU; PATKIN, 2013; HALL, 2011; HAREL-FISCH *et al* 2011; KUMARAVADIVELU, 2012; RAYNOR; WYLIE, 2012; TIPPET, WOLKE; PLATT, 2013), she felt she was the one struggling more, since she came to England with a first language that she could not use.

Well, some people tried to talk to me [laughs]. I think two, three, something like that. But most of the people didn't like that. And there were a lot of nationalities [in the classroom].

Carolina could not provide specific information regarding the fluency levels in her ethnically diverse classroom. However, according to her, most of her immigrant peers, moved to England while they were still very young, which nurtured possible bilingual education, while Carolina spoke only Portuguese and interacted mainly with Brazilian peers (neighbors and family friends). In this sense, her first year was constantly described as a difficult situation.

Her bumpy start kept providing constrained interactions with her peers, since most of them did not try to talk to her, and the ones who did, she struggled to understand them. As Gu and Patkin (2013) claim, besides hindering the immigrants' interpersonal relationships, the language barrier also affects young students' sense of belonging and the legit positions they may assume in the new community they live. The perception of being different increased and she did not relate to the other immigrant students who did not seem to struggle like her. Furthermore, this was just the beginning of a predicament. She increased her efforts to learn English, but also had to deal with another problem: feeling bullied for not speaking the language everybody else used in the classroom.

THE STRUGGLE TO LEARN AT SCHOOL: CAROLINA EXPERIENCES BULLYING

Overall, Carolina believes that most of the problems she had were contingent to the fact of her not knowing how to speak English. Unfortunately, isolation was not the only problem; she also felt she was bullied by her peers. This is a central aspect in the meaning she elaborates about her experiences abroad.

At school, as I told you once, I decided I had to learn English, so I could stand up for myself. I was bullied at school so much, because I was a Brazilian. So, as I didn't know how to speak [English], everything they did wrong was my fault. For example, like I told you once, if they broke something at school, they said it was my fault. And I couldn't speak for myself. Then, the teachers didn't allow me to at least try [to explain], because they didn't want to hear. I couldn't bring a friend to tell the teachers and explain what actually happened. They said they didn't have time for that. It didn't matter to them.

At first, she suggested the reason why she felt bullied was because she was from a different country (an outsider). Evidence on bullying and ethnic diversity in classrooms is still inconsistent (HONG; ESPELAGE, 2012; SHIN *et al*, 2011; TIPPET *et al*, 2013; TOLSMA *et al*, 2013). In the study conducted by Shin *et al* (2011) with 295 students, for example, evidence on bullying victims support Carolina's perspective about being bullied for being an immigrant. According to their study, the group of bullied students reported several reasons why that happened and the two main ones were because of their country of origin and for being different. Conversely, when bullies pointed out the main reason for doing that to their peers, being from other country was the last in a list of reasons. In this way, we could consider that even though Carolina was not feeling bullied because of her specific origin, her difficulty to interact did not help to alter this situation.

However, later she provides more information on how she was treated in class which was more related to her lack of proficiency rather than her nationality itself. Even so, we do not discard the possibility that students may be bullied for reasons related to specific nationalities, as other studies with minority groups argue (GU; PATKIN, 2013; SHIN *et al*, 2011). Also, as we see in the excerpt above, she was constantly vulnerable among her peers due to the fact she could not use English to "fight back", standing up for herself. Therefore, whenever students did something wrong in class, to avoid being punished or scolded by teachers, they tended to attribute the responsibility to Carolina, making her a scapegoat. She became an easy target who felt unprepared to express herself in that language she was still attempting to learn, which is why she constantly felt the need to learn English to be able to stand up for herself. This trace of resilience is evident throughout her entire narrative.

Learning English is no longer represented as necessary for communication, but for survival instead. The struggle to interact made her vulnerable among her peers and in the recollection she opens up about a specific event to illustrate how she was feeling: becoming a scapegoat. Her vulnerability reaches a higher level not only due to her peers, but also for not getting the attention she expected from her teachers. The most intense part of the struggle is represented in these memories.

Her peers were not the only ones who made her feel left out though; some teachers also avoided giving her a chance to explain her side of the story. Once Carolina did not know how to express herself properly, she could not call her Brazilian friend who was helping her in the beginning⁴. Also, as an attempt not to

4. The Brazilian friend was no longer mentioned in her stories. Apparently, they parted ways as Carolina realized how impatient she was.

waste time, her teachers tried to solve the problem by dealing with the majority in class. In brief, Carolina realized she could not rely on her teachers and she had to make things work on her own.

In other moments, she remembers feeling bullied also by her teachers, and once again because she did not know how to communicate with them.

My teachers were really not interested [in me]. When I started saying something in English they didn't listen. And most of the time we had to read a book and stuff, and I couldn't say some words, they bullied me, the teachers! The one I had... I think the only one, actually. My English teacher, she was the one who did that to me. Once, I got really embarrassed because I read a book and I said something then she understood something else, and she started laughing at me, so it was really sad.

Carolina not only felt the pupils made fun of her, but the teacher as well. In fact, she mentioned one specific event with her English teacher. During a class when students were reading aloud passages from a book, the teacher asked Carolina to read a passage and when she misread a few words, the English teacher started laughing and Carolina felt even more embarrassed and exposed in front of her class. She illustrated with another passage to emphasize how her vulnerability increased as a foreign young learner by understanding the teacher's laugh as bullying. Somehow, both vulnerabilities overlapped in a way that her isolation status was validated by everybody in that group. At least this is how she interpreted things.

As mentioned earlier, students' academic success also rely on school environments that provide them healthy socialization and safety. The lack of these two factors brings drastic consequences, considering that the quality of the relationship that teachers nurture with their classrooms may influence the relationship among peers and how they make sense of the school environment. Carolina felt more and more intimidated to go to school, and apparently she did not receive any help and did not reach out, possibly for thinking she would be ignored once more. The motivation to go on and invest in her language learning process came from her supportive family, who kept telling her to stay in school and try to overcome this predicament. In the next passage she talks about what motivated her.

The willingness to learn was important, because I had to. I think the person needs to say: "I want to learn this language" and they will learn. (...) Sometimes I didn't want to go to school, during the first year. Because... I was so embarrassed of those people laughing at me. But my mom was like: "You have to go". So I did.

This girl believes that her resilience to learn was her strongest characteristic, because even when facing these intimidating learning events in the classroom, she never gave up, mainly because at home her parents stood by her side. These

negative experiences made her more resilient, and even when she felt like giving up, her parents intervened, emphasizing she needed to go to school. A change of attitude is formed through the willingness to learn as part of her instinct. The pressure of the struggle oriented her goals, even though they took an emotional toll on her. The struggle of internal (herself) and external forces (others) converged in the desire to learn as a necessary force. This is the moment when she changes the flow of her narrative. The need to learn English to *stand up for herself*, as Carolina recollects, was a harsh experience which she finally was able to overcome, as she looks ahead, narratively, to one year later in life.

One year later, I could speak better. I was able to speak up for myself and I could talk to people. It was better.

Things seemed to improve for Carolina as she describes herself no longer as the non-proficient left out student. She finally could socialize with her peers and eliminate the language barrier, which is usually a greater challenge for immigrant language learners. Her memories have a different meaning now because they move from the impacts of a struggle to the success of finally being able to speak English. The narratives on how she overcame her predicament are presented in the next section.

FACING THE WORLD: CAROLINA LEARNS ENGLISH

Even with a story surrounded by negative experiences at school, Carolina was able to learn English while living for almost five years in London. In a recollection of her moments there, she does not acknowledge school in her language learning success, but her real world experience instead. For the first year, her parents spoke Portuguese at home with her, but then started switching more to the English language to help Carolina learn. This was the first strategy as part of what she saw as a real life experience.

I think about... I think one year later, I started speaking English with my parents at home. But before... not really, we spoke Portuguese.

Her parents offered the support she needed and apparently did not get from school. As difficult as things were, the family was there to bridge the gap. Even though her parents did not have an advanced level of language proficiency, they provided her with situations that required interacting with people in English. She felt she was using the language for meaningful reasons, learning it and rediscovering

herself as a young immigrant who was beginning to speak a new language. The memories she kept from that period show how important her parents were. More insights are provided below:

It's like... they are fluent in English, until now. But it was good for me sometimes, when they spoke in English to me, because I didn't know anything. And for me they knew everything, because they could speak with people.

The parents were the example to be followed. They represented the rock she could stand on and motivating her to speak was acknowledged as a pivotal moment in her narrative. The recognition that Carolina's parents could talk to English speakers made her feel safe at first, especially considering that in her years abroad, she still interacted more with Brazilians. When she arrived in England, her parents had been saving up money, which allowed them to bring their daughter, but also afford to live in a place by themselves, so the family could finally be reunited. At first, that was not the case, as Carolina tells a little bit about her parents' story when they arrived in the U.K.

At home, it was only my mother and father. First, they lived in a flat, and it was like, with a lot of people, there was only one room and stuff like that. So, there were a lot of nationalities around [in the flat]. And then, after I went there [to London], they moved to another place. It was only us. Actually, it was a flat but a big flat, only to my mom, my dad and me. It was better, and I had my cousin there as well, and my parents' friends as well. These were the Brazilians I kept in touch.

Another event was mentioned and this time she wanted to illustrate her awareness of the struggles of her family, even before they were back together. Carolina's parents were able to overcome even more serious life conditions and she wanted to follow their example. Three years later, they could afford a new home to live with their daughter. And in this period, most of their friends were also Brazilian, which offered Carolina a chance to keep using her first language (Portuguese), as most people she interacted with were her parents' friends and her cousin, the compatriots who were facing the similar experience of living in a foreign country. Therefore, her parents felt she needed to practice English more and not only at school. Then, everyday life turned out to be a better context for her learning trajectory as the next excerpt shows.

My daily life was better, I think so. Because as I told you, there [at school] I only had to do activities and I didn't speak and I couldn't understand anything. My mother also helped me with school and my father helped when I was going somewhere. They were like: "Ask them this and then that". And I asked them how to do it and they told me, so it started like that, I guess. I think school didn't help me so much because I was bullied.

She mentioned again the activities she repeatedly had to do in class, which were different from her peers', once she was not yet able to keep up with them. Due to the fact that she did not understand most activities and did not receive support from teachers either, in turn, she did not see those tasks as motivational and meaningful tools to learn. Conversely, in her daily life, her parents gave her chores which engaged her in language use situations in which she felt she was learning at the same time she received support from them – they even told her which sentences she could use in specific situations, for instance.

Once again the family is highlighted in its support as opposed to school where she felt isolated. It was her family who helped her overcome the cultural shock and mediate her experiences as a young immigrant living in London. A lot of improvement was perceived in her story and they were ascribed to the conditions created by her family. Carolina also felt intimidated while trying to communicate in English with strangers, but she did not feel bullied for the eventual mistakes. See the next example:

I was really embarrassed [laughs], but I tried to learn. One day, I was with my grandma, she went to England to visit us, she went to a store and I laughed so much, because it reminded me of myself years before. She went to a store and said: "me dá isso aqui!" [gimme that!]. And I was like: "Vó [Grandma], nobody understands you! Portuguese is not spoken here".

The everyday interactions felt less intimidating and more carefree. Years later, when her grandmother came from Brazil for a visit, she went out with Carolina to run some errands and when they entered a convenience store to buy some food, her grandmother approached the clerk and started asking about the products she wanted, but speaking Portuguese instead. This story reminded Carolina of the time when she felt she was not confident enough to engage in a conversation with native speakers. Another event comes up in her narrative as a way to show how she was able to put herself in her grandmother's place looking back at a time when speaking English was daunting and difficult. That was an intense memory, but the present was more successful. Now she was able to offer the same support she received from her parents, by talking to the clerk in English and buying her grandma what she wanted. Among the several implications in a person's life when immigrants move to a new country, Carolina started feeling the benefits of speaking English to live more comfortably. These memories were more pleasant than the others in her early years there.

Approximately five years later, Carolina's parent felt it was time to come back. The initial objective to leave their homeland seeking for better financial opportunities, with a desire to return one day was at discussion. At home, they

went back to speaking Portuguese, to make her daughter practice again her first language, while outside she would speak English. A few months later they finally came back to Brazil. These days, Carolina takes private classes once a week in a language school to keep practicing her conversation skills, and wishes to go back to England to see the friends she left there, before going off to college to become a veterinarian.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Language learners have come a long way with different stories that characterize their personal experiences and efforts they have to make in order to be able to speak a new language. In this paper, we outlined the story of a young Brazilian immigrant who went to England to stay with her family and tried to learn English as fast as she could. Through narrative inquiry, we were able to perceive how her storyline is built on both positive and negative experiences with different implications in her life.

The stories that were shared here shed a light on the nuances and the movements that represent the complexity in a young immigrant's journey in a completely new scenario. The plot then changes from the restoration of a family that was separated to the secondary concern that learning English would be simple and inevitable. This affective experience is then changed by what was defined here as a struggle: learning English would be more complex than expected. Complexity here is not understood only as an individual difficulty to grasp the new language, it is also a social phenomenon as Carolina felt vulnerable and unable to engage with others. Vulnerability for her means the isolation and difficulty to belong which were materialized, in her perspective, as being targeted. Also, being bullied was represented as becoming the scapegoat among her peers as well as the way her teachers dealt with her.

The struggle generates resistance which is then oriented by a concrete necessity. Despite the emotional cost, the family establishes the alternatives for overcoming the problems in the life of a young learner. This is the painful experience that is described in this paper. Something that was expected to be simple turned out to be even more complex than the ability to learn ways to communicate meanings in a new language. It involved social relationships in Carolina's understanding of herself in relation to others, which in turn explained how she became an English speaker. Behind her individuality lies a story of struggle, of family support and a happy ending.

In brief, school brings to her mind harsh memories of feeling different in class for not speaking English, for not being able to keep up with the students and for being bullied by them, without even a chance to stand up for herself (i.e., trying to talk to other students). In the large spectrum of bullying behaviors people may experience (OLWEUS, 1993; RAYNOR; WYLIE, 2012), the narratives portrayed specifically episodes of someone experiencing social exclusion and isolation. That is evident in the episode where the other students used her as a scapegoat for disruptive behavior by telling the teacher she was the one to blame. Also, another episode includes public exposure (RAYNOR; WYLIE, 2012) which increases her level of discomfort, when she becomes the center of attention due to her mistakes while reading aloud. In this case, the laughs had a similar impact of derogatory remarks (verbal bullying), as they both intimidated and exposed the student publicly. Though she did not understand literally what they said in English, she interpreted the signs of that situation, in other words, that they were making fun of her.

This rough moment almost made her give up, but Carolina's resilience to learn and her parents' support kept her going until she finally came to realize she was already speaking English. This plot twist in her life, according to Carolina, happened as a result of her experiences with language use in daily life activities which her parents provided. She believes she eventually learned to speak ESL mostly because of daily interactions, in which she did not feel bullied as she once felt in school. Narrative inquiry help us understand how people make sense of different stories people live by, and for educational and language learning studies they also allow us to understand what students have been through in the process of learning a new language. This is a complex process that goes beyond simply attending classes and doing what was assigned.

One may point out the fact that our analysis did not bring perspectives from the other people involved in Carolina's narratives to make a comparison in relation to events that occurred. However, it is important to consider, as pointed out by Webster and Mertova (2007) that in narrative inquiry the focus lies on the subject's interpretation of events. In other words, how people create meaning to process those events related to the memories they have. Rather than assessing to what extent her experiences were or were not in fact bullying, our analysis focused on the reconstruction of her language learning trajectory, through a recollection of memories from the past. Also, these events where she faced social exclusion and isolation for not speaking English resemble to her as bullying experiences, which is why our analysis tried to voice Carolina's understanding of the phenomena. From

a narrative inquiry perspective the point here was not to vilify her peers or her teachers, but to focus on the meaning people elaborate to make sense of their own experiences. By doing so, we understand human development at the intersection of individuality and social life, as biological and cultural life (cf. VYGOTSKY; LURIA, 1992).

More recently, parents and school staff have become more sensitive to the impact of bullying as the number of tragic events increase each year. From the worldwide stories of the Columbine massacre⁵ to the recent stories emerged in Brazil with students engaging in similar violent acts (2011 in Realengo, Rio de Janeiro⁶, 2017 in Goiânia, Goiás⁷). The issue here is that every time such tragedies take place the debates regarding bullying resurface as connecting evidence to motives for heinous crimes. Even though not all bullied people fight back with violence (HONG; ESPELAGE, 2012. RAYNOR; WYLIE, 2012), it is paramount to consider the impact of these events in people's lives.

Though studies on bullying have been documented for decades, different countries have yet to promote efficient anti-bullying policies in schools. Unlike in the years when Carolina was a student abroad, it is important to emphasize that nowadays all schools in the UK are required by law to promote an anti-bullying policy – even though keeping records on bullying incidence among students is yet not mandatory for the school staff. Nevertheless, the impact of such policy in schools has not been investigated in depth (RAYNOR; WYLIE, 2012, p. 783). In their study, Raynor and Wylie (2012) show that schools have had little impact on students' attitudes towards bullying, due to the fact that students reported in their research suggest violence as the only way to fight back. In places where students do not feel supported, they tend to think they are the only people they can count on. In serious cases, some may fight back with violence, but in Carolina's case she found the support she needed in her family and she succeeded.

Further studies could investigate the impact on effective support from school staff to promote healthier environments for students. Carolina did not reach out for help, as she mentioned earlier, because she felt her teacher did not care about what was happening to her. We understand people may interpret these events differently,

5. In April 20th, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold murdered twelve students and one teacher at Columbine High School (U.S.A). Though mental health (suicidal and homicidal tendencies) is often mentioned as a driving force, bullying was constantly discussed as part of the aftermath.

6. In April 07th, 2011, Wellington de Menezes murdered twelve students at Tasso da Silveira School in Realengo, Rio. Later, the Police found a video in which he mentioned that his motivation was related to humiliations he experienced as a former student in the very same school.

7. In October 10th, 2017, a 14 year-old student murdered two classmates in a private school in Goiânia. Students who knew the minor suggested he was allegedly bullied at school.

one may say these events do not seem harmful to them. Nonetheless, they were significant in Carolina's life. Her language learning trajectory could have been less intimidating and more welcoming, considering she was already dealing with major shifts in her social life (leaving home, getting familiar with a new culture, among others). Language learning itself can be a challenging endeavor for every person. The task for schools and educators would be to promote learning environments that are supportive and non-intimidating, in ways that future narratives may depart from struggles to learn a language and not struggles to learn a language while being bullied.

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