From first languages to Portuguese as a "shelter" language: the discourses of two Eastern European students

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Abstract

The linguistic and cultural diversity which currently characterises all European countries (especially for having become, throughout the centuries, shelter countries for immigrants of different origins) brings about important implications to the most diverse society domains, in general, and to School, in particular. The undeniable implications related to the presence of students with different languages, cultures and life stories/personal experiences in the Portuguese Educational System, which are the result of a recent consciousness raising process regarding this phenomenon, are based on two fundamental principles: firstly, the conviction that, in order to truly achieve the "equality of fact" mentioned by Zarate (2003), it is urgent that these students efficiently master the language of the shelter country, since only a good level of proficiency in this language will guarantee the success of their learning process and, above all, their full integration in the shelter communities (both academic and social); and secondly, the consciousness that, when we are in the presence of a second language, we can not forget, nor underestimate, all that already exists in terms of linguistic acquisitions, knowledge of the world, former experiences, given that, in some situations, these may constitute an obstacle to the learning process in the target language (Ançã, 1997).

It is our purpose in this paper to present the way in which, through the subjects' discourses ("Life Narratives") we can develop our knowledge about the learning process of a "shelter" language. By presenting the case study of two Slavic students, we will emphasise the way in which their biographic, linguistic and academic profile, as well as their representations about languages, cultures and people, and the language awareness they possess may interfere in the learning process of a "shelter" language.

Introduction

Nowadays, it almost seems like a "commonplace" – especially in Europe – to talk about linguistic and cultural diversity. In the newspaper, on television, in schools, on the streets…, nobody is indifferent anymore to language, people and cultural diversity which co-exists and interacts. The confrontation with plurality in Europe is not, however, something new at all. If we take into consideration that mobility is one of the main characteristics of humankind's History (Rocha-Trindade, 1995: 139) and carefully analyze the history of the European continent, we can observe that, although unconsciously, co-existence, companionship and/or miscegenation of people of different origins has frequently been the rule[2].

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[2] It is enough, to exemplify, to think of the successive invasions of nations from out of Europe or, in reverse, in the

The way the countries have experienced this phenomenon has been, nevertheless, unequal. While most of the European countries have already become aware of linguistic and cultural diversity for some decades, or even centuries, Portugal, as well as other southern European countries, has maintained, until the early 60's of the past century, a certain homogeneous appearance in both these spheres. At the basis of this apparent homogeneity, which, in fact, never existed, were essentially two factors:

a) the fact that the country presented a negative balance in what concerns the immigration phenomenon. It contrasted, thus, with the majority of the European countries, where the cultural and linguistic diversity was already relevant (cf. Marques & Rosa, 2003);

b) the fact that, until very recently[3], Portugal has held just one official language, the Portuguese Language (PL), and has not recognized any importance (in legal/institutional, social and educational terms) to the presence, on national territory, of other minority languages – spoken either by local minorities or by minorities of immigrants that, meanwhile, have started to become more visible and relevant. For a long time it was considered appropriate to adopt the host country's linguistic and cultural identity: "in Rome, be roman".

In spite of that, since the last quarter of the XX century, a significant change in the migration paradigm has occurred in Portugal, as a result of several factors, some of which we can distinguish: at an external level, the migratory pressure of the immigrants' origin country (PALOP[4], Brazil and Eastern Europe); and at an internal level, the consequences of the progressive lack of internal stock of manpower in a context of economical growth (cf. Pires, 2002; Rocha-Trindade, 1995). This new reality is, therefore, the main reason why Portugal has been so late in approaching these issues considering the current demographic, linguistic and cultural European scenario. According to provisory data from *Serviços de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* (SEF), concerning the year 2004, there were 449.194 foreign citizens legally resident in Portugal[5], which may in fact ascend to half a million.

However, more important than the factual change occurred was, undoubtedly, the consciousness of it and, more specifically, of the implications that the presence of people with different languages, cultures and experiences brings to the most diverse society domains, in general, and to School, in particular.

Focusing exclusively on the educational domain, the most important consequence of this alteration of the Portuguese social mosaic is the presence of a considerable (and growing) number of students for whom the PL assumes the statute of a Non Mother Tongue (NMT)[6]. These students, which are mostly (but not exclusively) not born in Portugal, are distributed according to different nationalities – with special emphasis on the ones from the African countries where Portuguese is the official language (PALOP), Brazil and Eastern Europe (cf. IESE, 2005) –, and are, in general, from the first moment and regardless of their schooling experience or level of knowledge of the PL, "forced" to acquire native competency

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emigration experiences of the European countries that have resulted, among other aspects, in long term contacts with people from the four corners of the world (cf. Rocha-Trindade, 1995: 139).

[3] In 1999, it was recognized the statute of national language to the Mirandese Language, spoken in the Portuguese northeast region – Miranda do Douro (Diário da República nr. 24/99)

[4] PALOP – Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and São Tomé e Príncipe.

[5] cf. SEF (http://www.sef.pt/data/relatorios/2004/relatorio_estatistico_2004.pdf - consulted in 3rd February 2006).

[6] On January, 2003, a study of the Department of Education, regarding the student population attending the Compulsory Education, during 2001/2002, already certified the presence of 17 535 children for whom the PL was not the first language.

in the language of the "shelter" country (cf. Dabène, 1994: 33).

Being aware of the specific needs that the non native students possess and of School's incapacity to respond to the demands of these new audiences, the Ministry of Education has officially recognised the need to develop *"specific curricular activities for the learning of the Portuguese language as a second language"* [our translation] (article nº 8 of DL nº 6/2001, 18th January, changed by the DL nº 209/2002, 17th October). The purpose of this policy was to continue the supporting measures previously determined (DL nº 319/91, of 23rd of August and DL nº 219/97, of 20th of August), and which concerned the development of projects in the areas of literacy and intercultural competencies, as well as to the development of extra supporting activities to learning (cf. IESE, 2005). The presupposition underlying these initiatives is that, in order to pass from an *"equality of principle"* to an *"equality of fact"* (Zarate, 2003), it is necessary that these students effectively master the language of the shelter country. In fact, only a good level of proficiency in this language will guarantee the students' successful learning and, most of all, their full integration in the shelter community (academic and social).

Nevertheless, and in spite of some efforts made to accomplish the guidelines of the Ministry of Education (cf. IESE, 2005), the Portuguese School continues unable to, in a systematic and effective way, promote the equality of educational opportunities to which it has set itself[7], *"prevailing [on the contrary] organizational and management forms which are inadequate to the needs and interests of the ethnical minorities"* [our translation] (Pereira, 2004: 33-34), namely concerning the selection of teaching objectives/contents and the adoption of differentiated strategies suitable for the teaching of the shelter language. On the other hand (and as the main cause of this situation?), we can still verify the existence of a feeling of "discomfort" (cf. Ançã, 2005), by some teaching professionals – mainly teachers –, regarding the challenges that such heterogenic and complex situations place them into.

It was precisely in the sequence of the evidence of these facts – and of the growing immigration flux of the last years –, that, after five years since the settlement of the general principle (article nº 8 of the DL nº 6/2001, 18th January), the Ministry of Education has defined, through the Normative Dispatch nº 7/2006, 6th February, the principles of action and the guiding rules for the implementation, tutoring and evaluation of the curricular and extracurricular activities to be developed by the schools and groupings.

From our point of view, the equation (and resolution) of the non native students' situation in the Portuguese schools is, prior to anything else, the awareness of those realities – given that when we are in the presence of a shelter language, we cannot, in any way, despise or underestimate everything that already exists in terms of linguistic acquisitions, knowledge, and previous experiences (Ançã, 1997) –, we defend, in a first instance: (a) the development, by the Didactics of Non Mother Tongues, of description and analysis methods that allow us to evince the way in which the knowledge of languages is processed by the individuals (comprehension of the factors that interfere in that knowledge) and, (b) afterwards, the development/adoption of a differentiated pedagogy, capable of satisfying the demands of the new audience.

In this paper, and based on the life narratives of two Slavic students, we propose to identify some of the main factors that may interfere in the acquisition/learning of the PL and, thus, produce pedagogic clues that might stimulate the development of specific methodologies/strategies for the teaching of a shelter language.

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[7] Cf. *Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo Português* (point 2 of the art. 2 of Lei nº 46/86)

From First Languages to the Shelter Language…

… the specificity of the learning process of a shelter language and Language Awareness (LA)

It is not our purpose, in this text, to reflect upon the different statuses and functions performed by languages[8]. It is our duty, however, at this moment, to justify the choice of the term "shelter language" (*langue d'accueil*) (Lüdi & Py, 1986; cf. Ançã, 2003b, 2004) to refer to Portuguese as a non native language. The Portuguese official documents always refer to the Second Language (L2) concept. Nevertheless, and in spite of considering that, *grosso modo*, the characteristics enunciated by the literature of the area in relation to this term[9] are the ones which preside to the definition we propose of "shelter language", we have chosen the latter because we consider that it covers, in a more precise way, a plurality of situations that, perhaps, may co-exist under the term L2. We are referring in concrete to the psycholinguistic criterion, according to which it is frequently said that a L2 is a language acquired in second place, after the mother language (Cook, 1991: 5; Ançã, 1999). However, considering the target-audience of our study, we come to the conclusion that, for these individuals, the PL may not be the second language acquired, but instead a third or fourth language. For that reason, we prefer the use of the expression "shelter language". For all these students the PL is, undoubtedly, the language of the country that gives them shelter.

Given this, we would also like to focus on some aspects regarding the specificity of the learning process of a shelter language – in this case, the Portuguese –, as we consider it in our study.

On the one hand, and regardless of our research being eminently related to the *learning* process as perceived by Krashen (1984: 10), that is, the conscious learning process of a language accomplished by the students in an institutional context, we will not restrict the analysis to this domain, but we will equally consider every acquisition accomplished by the individuals out of School, in a natural context. In fact, admitting the existence of a *continuum* between the formal and informal contexts of language *appropriation* – this would be, from our point of view, the most proper designation for the type of phenomenon that occurs (Ançã, 2005) – we will try to analyse the representations the individuals have of the way in which this process occurs and verify in what way their "scholar/formal" and "extra-scholar/informal" experiences (may) interfere in the development of competences in the territorial language and, finally, in the integration of these students in the shelter country. We maintain, however, the designation *learning* according to the aims that sustain our study and which are related to the scholar practices – of learning – within the scope of the teaching of a shelter language.

On the other hand, in the process of learning Portuguese shelter language, we can still emphasize the existence, in the classroom, of a real constellation of situations, either at a collective level – that is, in terms of the increasing number of students that, sharing the same

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[8] Several authors have reflected upon the statuses and functions performed by languages. Cf. among others, Dabène (1994) and Ançã (1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c).

[9] In a very simple explanation, non native language that acquires a particular status, either by being recognised as official in bilingual or plurilingual countries, or by acquiring certain privileges in multilingual communities, being, therefore, one of the spoken languages in those countries (Cook, 1991; Ançã, 1999).

space, have very differentiated socio-cultural, linguistic and learning profiles – or at a personal level – that is, concerning the singularity/specificity of the linguistic and cultural plurality experienced by each individual and of the level of competences developed by him/her in the various domains of the languages which constitute his/her repertoire. According to Trim *et al.*, *"as an individual person's experiences of language and its cultural context expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience) [and] he or she does not keep these language and cultures in strictly separated compartments"* (2001: 4), which is the reason why we give particular significance to each and every pre-knowledge/experiences that non native students "carry" to the shelter language classroom (see also Jessner, 1999: 206). Only a deep understanding of all the factors involved in the learning process of new languages (as well as of the inter-relation that they establish in the process) as well as the way in which individuals manage their own linguistic repertories and their competences (linguistic, communicative…) will we be able to clarify how these students develop proficiency in the target-language, in a short term, and the so desired plurilingual competence[10], in an intermediate and long term.

It is exactly in this sense that Jessner, taking into consideration Ushioda's findings (1996) and regardless of focusing on the cognitive domain of the learning of languages, considers fundamental, within the scope of the development of the multilingual proficiency, to pay attention, among other aspects, to *"the complex interdependencies between social, biological and personal factors in language learning and the changing nature of some of them"* (1999: 203)[11].

It is, therefore, in this context – of knowledge/discovery of the factors that may eventually influence/determine the learning process of a language – that we attribute a leading role to the LA.

In general, LA may be defined as *"a very wide phenomenon, characteristic of speakers and learners of a language, [which] consists in the capacity they have to think about language (Mother Tongue (MT) or Foreign Language (FL)) and to verbalize those considerations"* [our translation] (Ançã & Alegre, 2003). It is our understanding that, underlying this definition, there are two complementary meanings.

In a more restricted sense, we can consider LA as *"a metacognitive attribute of knowers and competent (though not necessarily native) speakers, to the extent that they have developed metacognitions that they had hitherto exercised 'unawares'"* (James, 1996: 140). The delimitation of this phenomenon is not, however, easy to specify. In fact, depending on factors such as age and level of (formal) education of the speaker, we can, for example, consider the existence of a *continuum* of explanation levels of LA: *"the knowledge may vary between the implicit –when the leaner uses, but does not think about the rule –, the more or less implicit – when the learner is capable of recognizing that a enunciation is or is not according to the rule –, the more or less explicit – when the learner can describe the rule using his/her own words – and the explicit – when he/she is capable of explaining it in metalinguistic terms"* [our translation] (Faerch, Haastrup e Phillipson *apud* Alegre, 2000: 122). The question is not exactly (or exclusively) the domain of the metalanguage or of the grammatical rules, but the individual's ability to refine and enlarge his/her ability to use language and explore, in a more complete way, all the potentials of the

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[10] The plurilingual competence may be defined as «*the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a social agent has proficiency, on varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures*» (Council of Europe, 1998).

[11] For a more detailed analysis of the factors to take into consideration in the learning process of a L2 – or a shelter language – consult, among others, Nunan (1999), Towell & Hawkins (1994), Cook (1991), Spolsky (1989), Krashen (1984, 1981), Krashen & Terrell (1983) and Wilkins (1975).

languages he/she masters (cf. James, 1996: 140). In other words, LA, in this more restricted sense, consists in the *"ability the learner has to reflect on the FL [or other], of using it or acting upon that same language, taking into consideration his/her knowledge about the grammar rules. Thus, we characterize it as a process (the capacity to reflect), but also as the result of that process, that is, the capacity to use linguistic knowledge"* [our translation] (Alegre, 2000: 104).

In a broader sense, LA can be understood as a phenomenon that involves, besides the explanation and the conscientiousness of the knowledge and competences acquired by the students, and its use in the course of linguistic experiences, an ability to observe and analyze the language, either in the surrounding environment, or in the world in general (cf. Donmall, 1991). That is, just as language embodies in itself aspects that belong to various domains, the LA of a speaker may (should) also be considered as a multifaceted phenomenon, made up of several aspects. At this level, we would highlight the proposal of delimitation of the LA concept made by James & Garrett (1991: 12-20), in which we can find five domains: the *affective* (construction of attitudes towards languages), the *social* (the conviction that LA can be an instrument at the service of social harmony by making the individuals aware of the origins and characteristics of their own language, as well as of the dialect varieties, and of the place it occupies in the linguistic world map), the *power* (language notion as a manipulation instrument); the *cognitive* (stimulation of the capacity to make an analytic reflection about different language aspects) and the *performance* (relation between the analytical capacity and the communicative competence of the individual).

Therefore, we consider that, in this second meaning of LA, the *representation* concept is also included. This notion, in Language Didactics, is essentially related to the images the individuals have of the language itself and to the way in which parents, students, teachers and other intervenients in the educational process foresee the teaching/learning process, among other aspects (cf. Cuq, 2003: 215-216). Focusing just on the student's point of view, it is currently recognized that the learning process of a language is determined by the representations that the individuals construct about the languages, namely concerning the statuses and functions they perform, their usefulness, their formal characteristics, their speakers, their histories and the cultures they convey. It is believed, therefore, that these representations influence the processes and the strategies that the students place at the service of the learning and usage of a L2/FL (cf. Dabène, 1994), which is why we consider them as a fundamental component of this wider notion of LA.

Hence, it is the combination of the definitions presented previously, that we see LA as a process and/or ability developed by the individual to reflect on a language (MT, L2 and/or FL) allowing him/her to overcome the merely linguistic domain (reflection about the functional rules of language(s)). This also embodies an analysis of the type of relation that the individual establishes with the languages, of the usage he/she gives to them, of the way the learning process occurs, of the factors that intervene in it, among other aspects.

… the Life Narratives: a pathway to knowledge

The methodology adopted in this study consists of the construction of Life Narratives, just as they were defined by Bertaux (2001). According to this author, we are in the presence of a Life Narrative whenever an individual narrates to another, researcher or not, some kind of episode of his/her (life) experience (2001: 32).

Thus, consisting in the recovery of *"narrated memories from the point of view of who narrates them"* [our translation] (Pais, 2001: 107), Life Narratives do not have the purpose, as

one may expect, to deeply understand an individual; on the contrary, its objective is to extract, from their experiences, pieces of information that may help us to understand the functioning and the internal dynamics of a certain phenomenon (cf. Deprez, 1997). Life Narratives are, very often, built on the sequence of a semi-conducted interview in which the subject is invited by the investigator to – preferentially (but not exclusively) using the form of a narrative – consider (and express) past experiences through a filter – a series of topics that guide the interviews. By explaining, describing and commenting on his/her descriptions and the occurrences he/she refers to (cf. Bertaux, 2001: 20), the individual is then making visible a certain amount of aspects about the phenomena put under analysis which are not always empirically noticeable.

… the target-audience

The inherent reasons for the choice of the target-audience of this study, subjects from Eastern Europe – from Ukraine to be more precise –, have to do with two factors:

a) on the one hand, the numeric prominence of this group of students in the Portuguese education system. According to data presented in the Final Report of the IESE (2005), the Ukrainian students appeared in the third place of the ranking of the most represented nationalities of Compulsory and Secondary Education in Public Schools, in the school year of 2004/2005. This situation is, of course, in accordance with the statistics related to the presence of Eastern Europe immigrants in Portugal, which reveals that, notwithstanding it being a recent migratory flux (they have probably started to arrive in 1999/2000), this constitutes, nowadays, one of the most numerous foreign communities of our country. In fact, in the general Portuguese immigration panorama, the Ukrainian community already sums 66.227 citizens in Portuguese territory (SEF, 2004; cf. Sousa, 2002, Pires, 2002, 2003);

b) on the other hand, the fact that this Eastern Europe immigrants' generation presents very specific characteristics, both in social and scholar integration, and in relation to the learning process of a shelter language. In fact, they not only develop a *"harmonious adaptation towards society and towards school"*, but also reveal a surprising ability to learn Portuguese (cf. Ançã, 2003c, 2004). See, for example, the *lead* of news on the front page of a weekly Magazine. *Grande Reportagem*, of one of the most prestigious Portuguese periodics, *Jornal de Notícias*: *"Newly arrived Eastern Europe and Russian youngsters prepare to dispute the top Portuguese Universities' places. They have arrived in Portugal less than three years ago, but already have already learnt the language, conquered the best marks at Mathematics and occupy the first places on the honour boards in Portuguese schools. They speak of hard work, discipline, determination to learn, but also to travel around the world. As if they were already grown up people. What explains the success of the students who came from the cold?"* [our translation] (Serra, 2005: 31).

…the discourses of two Eastern European students

The data that we present in this text consists of data resulting from a case study and which has been obtained through three data collecting instruments:

1) a Sociolinguistic Sheet filled-out previously by the students, with the purpose of identifying their biographic, socio-cultural, linguistic and sociolinguistic profiles. Later analysis allows for the selection of the subjects according to pre-defined parameters for

this effect;

2) the Life Narratives. These were created from the performance of semi-directed individual interviews, with the duration of approximately an hour. In the first student's case, only two interviews were carried out, while in the second one, in order to accomplish the established purposes, three sessions were carried out. The sessions were organized in the following way:

   a) Student profile – in this section the themes were essentially concerned with the linguistic and sociolinguistic profile of the students and were related, among others, with the following aspects: linguistic repertoire, learning contexts and usage of the languages, immigration experiences, linguistic experiences, and affective relations with the languages;

   b) LA – this section was divided, by turn, into two subsections:

- representations of the students about: the country of origin and the country of shelter; the MT and the shelter language; the learning of the PL; the learning systems of the country of origin and the country of shelter.
- conscientiousness of the PL learning process. The following domains were considered: linguistic and sociolinguistic competences; learning competences; and role of the ML (or other languages of their linguistic repertoire) in the knowledge of a shelter language.

3) Documents produced by one of the students[12], which were analysed, *in loco,* by her.

The analysis of the data collected through these instruments and the building of the Life Narratives of these students, has allowed us to propose the three major categories that we will now present.

I – Students' biographic profile

The students of this study are MK and NL and they are both from Ukraine.

MK is 15 years old, has been in Portugal for 5 years, attends the 9th grade and lives with her parents. Her father, who in Ukraine was a teacher of Physical Education, is presently a driver. He arrived in Portugal in 1999. MK's mother, who was a saleswoman in the origin country, is now a cleaning-woman. She arrived in Portugal, with her daughter, in 2001.

NL is 13 years old and has been in Portugal for nearly a year. She attends the 7th grade and lives with her parents too. Her father works in the civil construction area as he did back home. Her mother, who in Ukraine worked as a bartender, is now also a cleaning-woman. They both arrived in Portugal in 2000[13].

II – Linguistic and sociolinguistic profile

We will analyse three components within this category: the students' linguistic repertoire, their day-to-day linguistic practices and their representations regarding the

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[12] The ethno-sociologic research techniques do not limit themselves to the construction of Life Narratives, but also allow their articulation with other forms of observation and documental resources (Bertaux, 2001: 18). In this case, we used texts produced by students, although just one of them allowed us to use the materials.

[13] Both students live in Aveiro, the place where the interviews also took place. Aveiro is city of the centre region, on the seashore, with about 60 000 inhabitants. It is situated about 70 km south of Porto and 55 km north of Coimbra.

proficiency they think they have in each of the languages of their repertoire.

1. Students' linguistic repertoire

The students' linguistic repertoire differs greatly. While MK regards it as being composed of 5 languages (Russian, Ukrainian, English, Portuguese and French), NL only considers the existence of 3 languages (Ukrainian, Russian and Portuguese). For MK, Russian is her MT, while for NL this status belongs to the Ukrainian language. At the base of this choice, in both cases, are explicitly criteria of a psycholinguistic (the acquisition order) and functional (the frequency of use of each language) nature. We believe that, at the basis of these choices, there are also historical factors – which the students seem not to be aware of – that consist in the evidence of a greater influence of Russia in East Ukraine than in the West (more nationalist). This seems to be the reason why MK has always been more in contact with the Russian language and NL with Ukrainian.

The learning contexts of the different languages that build up the students' linguistic repertoires vary between the formal and informal.

In the case of MK, the learning of the languages took place as follows: Russian was learnt especially in a family context, but also at School (courses created, meanwhile, in Ukraine schools, for those who wanted to develop competences in that language); Ukrainian was learnt essentially at School, although the student also had some contact with this language through television and some people she interacted with; English she learned at School, either in Ukraine or in Portugal – it is, therefore, a FL to her; regarding Portuguese, it was learnt both at a formal– at School and due to her attendance of extra-curricular courses in Portugal – and informal level – through the several interactions that she has been establishing in her day-to-day life, since she arrived to Portugal; French on the other hand was learnt exclusively in an academic context, in Portugal, which is therefore why it is also a FL to MK.

For NL, Ukrainian was learnt not only in a family context, but also at School; Russian was acquired only in informal contexts, with some friends; Portuguese is being learnt both in formal (at School) and in informal (different types of interactions made) contexts.

2. Day-to-day linguistic practices

In an attempt to assess the place that the students' linguistic repertoires occupy in their lives, we tried to identify the situations and contexts in which they were used. We were able to evidence the following:

In MK's case, the language used more frequently in Ukraine was undoubtedly Russian (both at a informal and formal level), while Ukrainian and English were almost totally restricted to academic use, in spite of the latter already being a privileged language for leisure activities, such as listening to music. In Portugal, the student's communicative habits and practices distribute themselves, almost equally, between the PL and Russian. While the first is used in almost every circumstance, the second is used with some degree of regularity at home, in social interactions with people from Ukraine and when reading, which the student insists on doing in her MT. English is especially confined to School and leisure activities (listening to music) the student guarantees. However, the language which is less used nowadays is Ukrainian.

NL's linguistic practices are simpler to synthesize. In Ukraine, the student used her MT

almost exclusively, while in Portugal we can see a balanced use of the two main languages of her repertoire: Ukrainian and Portuguese. The fist language is used within the family and in social relationships established with people from Ukraine, while Portuguese has the status of a functional language, used therefore in every single domain of the student's life: at School, in her day-to-day interactions…

3. Students' representations of the proficiency they have in the different languages

With the purpose of analysing the representations students have of their proficiency level in the different languages of their repertoires, we asked them, in the Sociolinguistic Sheet, to evaluate, in general terms and for each language, their competences in the main language domains (listening, oral production, reading and writing). The results obtained at this level seem to be consistent with the information given by the students concerning the status the different languages have in their lives, as well as the use they make of them.

Thus, we see that, for MK, the languages in which she has a better level of proficiency are Russian and Portuguese, since, according to the student's discourse, she has not got any problems in the different linguistic domains. Then, there are the English and Ukrainian languages. Regarding English, the student states that she has a good writing proficiency, but some difficulties in the production of oral texts. In Ukrainian, she reveals to have some difficulties with oral and written texts, although she has a good proficiency at the comprehension level (both oral and written). Finally, the student states that she has a reasonable performance in every domain of the French language.

As for NL, she states that she has a good level of proficiency in all the domains of her MT, Ukrainian. However, as far as the Portuguese and Russian languages are concerned, the only domain in which the student feels at ease is, in fact, the listening one.

The inter-change of the information obtained in these three first sub-categories is an essential element in the analysis of the LA shown by the students in relation to the learning of Portuguese. In fact, *"the development of proficiency in two or even more languages can result in higher levels of metalinguistic awareness facilitating the acquisition of language"* (cf. Jessner, 1999: 201). We, therefore, verified that MK's linguistic repertoire, associated to the uses the student makes of the different languages in her day-to-day life, alongside the LA proficiency she seems to have in those languages, are a positive aspect in the shelter language learning process. Unlike NL – whose linguistic repertoire is more restrict, who makes a more limited use of the languages and seems to be, in a certain way, unable to reflect upon the different types of relations which occur between linguistic systems –, MK is able, not only to consciously analyse the inter-relations that may occur between different languages, but also, and especially, to reactivate the necessary knowledge, in each linguistic system, for the development of competences in the shelter language and, at another level, of her plurilingual competence.

II – Language Awareness

1. Representations…

In this study about the representations built by the students in relation to several aspects of the origin and shelter countries, we will consider three domains of analysis: (1.1.) Socio-cultural representations (Ukraine vs Portugal); (1.2.) Linguistic representations (MT vs

PL); (1.3) Representations about learning contexts (School in Ukraine vs a School in Portugal).

1.1. … socio-cultural representations (Ukraine vs Portugal)

An analysis of the students' discourses regarding the origin and shelter countries/people/cultures allow us to perceive a small difference of positioning in what concerns the relation which they seem to maintain with both "worlds". In effect, and notwithstanding the fact that we find, in their discourses, references to both positive and negative aspects of each country, MK's narrative reveals a more affective and positive connection to Portugal than NL's.

MK possesses a positive representation of her country, but she seems to have already moved away from her roots. When asked to talk about her homeland, she only refers to abstract things, such as the privilege of being in contact with nature or some Ukraine's "calling cards" such as theatres and exhibitions. The sole aspects about which she seems to talk about with a true nostalgia and pride are the investment made in Ukraine in the fields of culture and sports (MK is a gymnastic athlete who has not had, in Portugal, the same opportunities to "shine" that she would have had in her country or any other Eastern European country) and the type of relationship that, in her homeland, people establish among themselves.

> *MK – [as pessoas] são mais fechadas ao princípio / mas depois, quando se conhecem melhor e isso (…) é mais fácil / acho que é mais fácil fazer amizades a sério lá [MK – [people] are more "closed" at the beginning / but then, when they get to know each other better (…) is it easier / I think it is easier to make true friendships there]*

In relation to Portugal, MK's discourse is highly positive, as we have mentioned before. Only regretting the fact that the country does not invest in the promotion of other sports besides football, MK seems to be totally integrated in the shelter country, towards which she states to already feel a great affinity. For this, it seems to have contributed to the following factors:

a) the shelter city: *"Ahm Por acaso, gosto muito / porque é assim / não é tão confusa como Porto e Lisboa mas também tem um pouco de tudo (…) pronto é também calminha apesar de ter muitas coisas"* [*"Ahm Actually / I love it / because it is like this / it is not as agitated as Oporto and Lisbon but it has also a bit of everything (…) it is also quiet in spite of having many things"*]

b) the weather: *"Também é mais pelo clima também que é diferente / é mais…// Eu acho que isso até tem uma influência nas pessoas // Porque aqui está sempre mais sol, mais / as pessoas se calhar / ficam mais contentes"* [*"It is especially because of the weather which is different too / it is more… // I think that it even has an influence on people // Because here there is always more sun / people maybe become more happy"*]

c) especially, people: *"São muito simpáticos / ahm fáceis de falar / são assim acessíveis"* [*"They are really nice / ahm easy to talk to / they are like accessible"*]

d) the process of integration up to the present: *"Sim, porque em todas as turmas que fui / arranjei logo amigos / e então nunca tive de ficar assim sozinha"* [*"Yes, because in every class I went to / I immediately made friends / and then I never had to stay all by myself"*]

The degree of MK's affinity towards Portugal and the Portuguese people is shown in

two ways: on the one hand, in the fact that, notwithstanding the difficulties inherent to the practice of her favourite sport, she did not accept her father's proposal of moving of city or even country in order to accomplish that dream; on the other, her affective predisposition in what concerns the relationships with the Portuguese. In the following-up of a conversation about the possibility of marrying a Portuguese, the student mentions:

MK – Eu acho que é mais ao contrário agora [prefere os portugueses aos ucranianos] // Não sei / como estou aqui e convivo assim mais com os portugueses / não não sou daqueles que quer ir pra Rússia só pra casar lá depois, não [MK – I think that now it is more the other way around [she prefers the Portuguese to the Ukrainians] // I don't know / as I am here and interact more with the Portuguese / I am not one of those who wants to go to Russia just to marry there, no]

NL, in contrast, still seems to have a very strong connection to her origins (which is understandable, if we consider that she has only been in Portugal for a year). Her discourse is eminently nostalgic. The descriptions of specific experiences of her life in Ukraine, as well as the references to the *ex-libris* of her country – namely the sumptuousness of the churches and the theatres – are constantly present. She also highlights the relationships that people establish among themselves as being something very valuable, referring specifically to the respect they have (she is, thus, indirectly criticising the Portuguese and, in particular, the way the young people treat the elders). There is also a clear preference for her homeland when she evaluates the traditions of both countries. According to the student, Ukraine is *"uma terra mais alegre / muito muito mais alegre do que aqui"* [*"a more cheerful land / much more cheerful than here"*]. It remains, however, unexplainable, in this study, if it is the traditions which are more "cheerful" or if it is the affective relationships which are interfering in the student's representations about those[14]. As the sole negative aspect about her country, the student mentions the lack of living conditions, opposing, therefore, her homeland to Portugal, which, according to her, *"já entrou na Europa [ao passo que] a Ucrânia ainda não é ca aqui"* [*"has already entered Europe [while] Ukraine is not like here yet"*].

The discourse of the student about Portugal starts in a positive tone. Excited about the cosmopolitan life which the shelter city offers her, the student enumerates the aspects which she enjoys the most: the stores, the beach, the palm trees… However, she also ends up referring to what she considers to be the main reason for not being (yet) able to feel integrated in Portugal: the lack of friends.

NL – É que aqui é um… ahm não sei eu não tenho tantas amigas / eu não consigo falar com elas / aqui é muito diferente [NL – Here I don't have so many friends / I cannot talk to them / here it is too different]

In spite of liking the teachers she works with very much, NL says that she has not got one single friend in the shelter country (either in school or outside school). Stating that in Portugal there are good and bad people (*"algumas pessoas não eram muito boas / algumas é muito chatas (…) outra parte é… boas pessoas / simpáticos / ahm gostam de ajudar / que falar contigo"* [*"some people are not very good / some are very boring (…) another part is… good people / nice / ahm they like to help / and talk to you"*]), the student refers to a series of episodes, most of them having occurred at School, that show her difficulty of integration in the shelter communities (both academic and social) and which end up leading her to say that she does not feel well in the shelter country. This feeling of inadaptation is, therefore, the consequence of her integration process, which, according to her, has been *"Ai, tão muito difíceis / tão muito difícil"* [*"Oh, so difficult / so much difficult"*]. However, the data does not allow us to state that

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[14] As we will see ahead, NL is having great difficulties in developing friendships in Portugal.

this is a problem of discrimination on behalf of schoolmates or society in general. There may eventually be at stake here other factors such as the student's interpersonal skills. Nonetheless, NL's difficulties of integration are evident: *"Quase não tenho [amigos] / só aqui na escola falam comigo / às vezes eles muito chatos / às vezes não gosto nada delas"* [*"I almost do not have [friends] / only here at school people talk to me / sometimes they are really irritating / sometimes I don't like them"*].

1.2. … linguistic representations (MT vs PL)

The students' representations towards both languages are clearly positive, as we can see by the adjectives selected to characterise each one of them and which are presented in the table below.

	MT	PL
MK	Interesting Pleasant (a bit) Difficult Pretty	Important Cheerful Difficult Interesting
NL	Important Pretty Difficult (for other people) Easy (for her)	Important Pretty Easy Interesting Cheerful

It is interesting to analyse the relevance the languages acquire for these students.

Both MTs are characterized by the students as being the languages towards which they feel a special affinity, almost unexplainably: *"MK – porque me habituei a falar Russo desde sempre / e não sei / é uma língua que eu gosto"* [*"ML – because I got used to always speaking Russian since ever / and I don't know / it is a language I like"*]. They are, however, aware of the relativity of their opinions, *"NL – a língua ucraniana vai ser difícil para portugueses como língua portuguesa para mim"* [*"NL – Ukrainian language is going to be hard for Portuguese people just as the PL is for me"*], and their discourses reveal the changing nature of the type of relations (affective or instrumental) they may establish with these languages – according to the competences they develop and the stadium of integration in which they are in. These two students are the living proof of this situation. While NL still dreams in Ukrainian (*"mas eu sempre sonho com língua ucraniana (…) as minhas amigas ou amigos / ou meus avós ou meus tios / sempre ucraniana"* [*"but I always dream in Ukrainian (…) with my friends / or my grandparents or my uncles / always Ukrainian"*]), MK already mixes the two languages (*"às vezes é confuso / porque às vezes acordo e parece que é as duas línguas ao mesmo tempo / ou que estou a falar com uma pessoa assim em Português e em Russo ao mesmo tempo"* [*"sometimes it is confusing / because sometimes I wake up and it seems that it is the two languages at the same time / or that I am talking to a person in Portuguese and in Russian at the same time"*]).

In what specifically concerns the PL, and despite MK's love for her MT, she nowadays ascribes a greater importance to the shelter language, since, according to her words, *"estou a estudar em Português e se calhar depois vou continuar a estudar em Português"* [*"I am studying in Portuguese and maybe I will afterwards continue to study in Portuguese"*]. On the other hand, NL, who is not able to reach a consensus about the language which, at the moment, is more important to her (*"é que pode ser dois / ucraniana e portuguesa / é que não sei se vou ficar aqui para sempre / Se vou ficar aqui, vai ser portuguesa / porque preciso aqui andar n… universidade, casar / é*

que se vou no Ucrânia, preciso falar mesmo Ucraniano" [*"it may be two / Ukrainian and Portuguese / because I don't know if I'm going to stay here forever / If I stay, it is going to be the Portuguese / because here I need to go to the university, to get marry / if I go to Ukraine, I will need to talk Ukrainian"*]), ends up by giving the PL (that is, the proficiency that she may develop in it) the responsibility for her future: *"Se eu vou saber Língua Portuguesa como uma portuguesa (…) Se eu vou ser como professora / saber tudo / todas as palavras, os frases / tudo, tudo / eu podia estar aqui"* [*"If I am going to know Portuguese like a Portuguese person (…) If I am going to be like the teacher / to now everything / all the words, the sentences / everything, everything / I could stay here"*]. The instrumental importance that the PL acquires in the students' life courses therefore becomes quite clear.

1.3 … representations about learning contexts (School in Ukraine vs School in Portugal)

The analysis of the representations towards the school systems of both origin and shelter countries has been imposing itself due to the critical awareness shown by the students at this level. With regard to Ukraine's Educational System, the students' perspective is highly positive. The following testimony illustrates the opinion of both students on the subject:

MK – Então, a escola é mais / eu acho que está assim um bocadinho melhor organizada porque temos menos aulas e são sempre mais aproveitadas / também por causa da disciplina que é diferente lá / e, por exemplo, somos capazes de ter só uma hora de uma disciplina por semana, mas mas isso / aprendemos muitas coisas nessa hora / e… depois, por exemplo, uma coisa / que eu nunca estudava lá / em casa eu nunca estudava porque eu saía e já sabia a matéria e não precisava de rever em casa / depois, por exemplo, aqui os testes são sempre assim marcados, a hora / lá nunca diziam quando é que tínhamos teste / porque tínhamos que ir estudando a matéria / e, por exemplo, nos testes depois saía podia sair matéria que já demos há muitos anos atrás / e, pronto, tínhamos que saber / nunca / e lá ensina-se de uma maneira que nós não nos esquecemos mais [*MK – So, School is more / I think that it is a little better organized because we have fewer classes and we learn more / also due to the subjects which are different there / and, for instance, we can have just one hour of a subject per week, but that / we learn lots of things in that hour / and then, for example, one thing / that I never studied there / I never studied at home because I left [classes] and I already knew the contents and didn't need to revise them at home / then, for example, here the tests are always scheduled / and, for example, there the testes could be on any day and about all the contents that we had studied many years ago / and, well, we had to know / never / and there people teach in a way that we never forget*]

The students then highlight, throughout the narratives, the following positive aspects:

a) the curricular organization;
b) the usefulness and the amount of knowledge acquired in the classes they attend;
c) the discipline/respect between students and teachers;
d) the work and cultural engagement which is encouraged, not only by the Educational System, but also by the children's parents;
e) the efficiency of the teaching methods used by the teachers (which nevertheless they are not able to describe);
f) the teaching standards / teachers expectations ;
g) and, consequently, the inexistence of the conception of "school failure", that is, in Ukraine the degree of success is of 100%. In the words of MK, *"E lá, por exemplo (…) nunca vi ninguém reprovar lá / que é uma coisa que, cheguei aqui, era nova pra mim"*

["There, for instance, (…) I never saw anyone fail / which is something that, when I arrived, was new for me"].

Only after some reflection and, showing little conviction, was MK able to enounce a less positive aspect about the Ukrainian Educational System: the fact that a School like "this" – especially having so many demanding teachers – imposes upon students a great effort. We believe, however, that this statement corresponds to an attempt on MK's behalf to put herself in the shoes of a Portuguese student, trying to find a less positive aspect to mention and, in this way, avoid a radical position in her assessment of both educational systems. On the other hand, NL refers – absolutely assured – that the main problem of School in Ukraine is related to logistic issues, considering that there it is at an inferior level when compared to the Portuguese Schools.

In relation to the Portuguese Educational System, the students' opinion is eminently negative, in spite of also recognizing the existence of some positive aspects in it, such as:

   a) the curricular organization of Secondary School into scientific areas;
   b) logistic aspects (informatics' systems, libraries and other equipment/material).

The students' criticism of the Portuguese School covers different domains:

a) the students' lack of respect towards teachers, something which, in MK's opinion, is due to the education (not?) provided by parents to children, as well as teachers actions in classes;

MK – Eu acho que são logo os pais (…) começa tudo em casa / que desde pequeninos não não têm assim limites / e depois chegam à escola e depois não é só uma pessoa / são trinta pessoas assim / e, pronto, depois é mais complicado [MK – I think that are the parents (…) it all starts at home / they [children] are not imposed any limits since they are smaller / and then when they arrive at school it is not only one person / it's 30 like this / and well afterwards it is more complicated]

MK – (…) há professores que, muitas vezes, perdem completamente o controlo e depois querem voltar atrás mas os alunos já já não tão habituados e é mais complicado [MK – (…) there are teachers who, frequently, lose control and then they want to go back but the students are no longer used to it and it is more complicated]

b) the curricular organization: the excessive number of classes per week and the lack of applicability of the non disciplinary curricular areas[15]

NL – É que aqui é muito muito tempo / às vezes, às vezes é uma seca [NL – Here it is a long time / sometimes it is boring]

MK – Por exemplo, as aulas de Área de Projecto / são sempre aulas que, pronto, fazem-se grupos / depois, durante o ano todo, não se faz nada / e depois no fim faz-se um trabalho / que até é capaz de ser feito em casa (…) e depois os professores que vão pra lá também são professores que não estão assim muito preparados / por isso, acho que não [MK – For instance, the Área de Projecto classes / they are always classes in which, we are put into groups / then, throughout the year we do nothing / and then in the end we do a project / which we may as well have done at home (…) / and then the teachers who go there are teachers who are also not well prepared / so, I don't think so]

c) the teachers competences and the methodologies used by them in classes. NL complains about the lack of general knowledge that she can perceive in Portuguese teachers.

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[15] *Área de Projecto, Estudo Acompanhado, Formação Cívica* e *Área-Escola*. These subjects constitute the three non disciplinary curricular areas instituted by the DL nº 6/2001, 18th January, whose measures had the purpose of *"reorganizing the curriculum of compulsory education, in order to reinforce the articulation between the three cycles which it is organized into, at the curricular level or the organization of assistance and induction processes that assure, without the loss of the correspondent identities and objectives, a greater quality of the learnings".*

NL – (…) eu acho que professores têm de saber / ahm não era de só de disciplina / podem eles podem saber / por exemplo, a professora de Matemática / acho que ela ainda tem de saber / alguns têm de saber de Geografia ou… de Matemática / ou de Francês [NL – (…) I think that teacher must know / ahm not only of the subject / they may know / for instance, the Maths teacher / I think that she must know / some must know about Geography or Maths / or French]

MK, on the other hand, considers that the teachers have good knowledge but that they do not master the necessary techniques to teach (she indirectly criticizes the teacher training system in Portugal):

MK – Ah, e uma coisa que eu acho que até nota-se, por exemplo, que uma professora tem muitos conhecimentos e que, pronto, o professor até pode perceber muito bem / mas muitas vezes não tem assim métodos nem / não conseguem (…) parece que não os ensinam a ensinar / assim métodos diferentes [ML – One thing that is noticeable is that, for instance, a teacher may have lots of knowledge and that well the teacher may understand pretty well / but most of the times he/she doesn't have methods or are able (…) it seems that they are not taught to teach / use different methods]

She also adds that, most of the times, the methods do not seem to be the most adequate or efficient.

MK – (…) parece que os professores estão sempre a tentar arranjar assim mais maneiras e de cativarem os alunos e… assim tácticas nas aulas ou, por exemplo, estudar um pouco, depois dar intervalo / ou trazer até filmes para os interessar e acho que, no fundo, acaba por só por baralhar assim mais as pessoas (…) [MK – (…) it seems that teacher are always trying to invent well more ways of getting students' attention and that / tactics in classes or, for example, study a bit, then a break / or bringing movies to interest them and I think that, in the end, it just ends up by muddling people up]

d) the "easiness" which characterises the Portuguese Educational System. Stating that classes in Portugal *"são boas para os alunos (…) que, no fundo, que não querem estudar muito"* *["are good for students (…) who, really, don't want to study hard"]*, MK considers that, in general terms, in Portugal, the teaching-learning process has low levels of expectations for the students, that is, if there is a student with more difficulties in class, the teachers prepare the contents and their classes thinking of that student, so that he/she can be successful, jeopardizing , therefore, the objectives of the teaching-learning process (field notes[16]).

e) the lack of preparation of some teachers in dealing with new realities, in spite of being constant and totally available.

MK – (…) acho que os professores / assim há quatro anos, para mim, não não estavam preparados (…) não sabiam o que é que haviam de fazer / por isso, muitas vezes, preferiam deixar-me assim um bocadinho de lado / a ver se eu percebia sozinha / mas depois estavam sempre disponíveis para tentarem explicar e assim [MK – (…) I think that teachers / were not ready for me four years ago (…) they didn't know what they should do / so, most of the times, they preferred to leave me a bit aside / in order to see if I understood by myself / but then they were always available to explain and that]

One aspect which the students do not agree on is the issue of the integration of foreign students in classes essentially made up of Portuguese students. While for MK this is an ideal situation, since it allows the full integration of the individuals and promotes their interaction with the Portuguese (one of the main means of learning the shelter language,

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[16] These are data obtained within the scope of an informal conversation held after one of the interviews and which were, afterwards, registered in the *Cahier de Terrain* of the researcher.

according to her), NL regards it as a problem due to the relationship problems she has been facing with the most part of her classmates: *"Eles sempre gostam rir e de me fazer coisas má"* [*"They always enjoy laughing and making me bad things"*].

When asked to present suggestions for a more efficient and adequate action – on behalf of School (as well as the Ministry of Education) and teachers – regarding the teaching of the Portuguese as a shelter language and the promotion of the integration of foreign students, MK and NL give some important clues:

- the need to inform teachers about the specificity of the academic background of non native students and of the difficulties they may face in the first moments, either in terms of school adaptation, or in the learning of the PL;
- the possibility of hiring Russian/Ukrainian teachers, not only to assist the learning process of the PL in the first moments, but also to provide the speakers of these languages with the opportunity of developing competences in their MTs (by creating Russian and Ukrainian classes);
- MK also suggests a curricular reorganization, in which the non disciplinary curricular areas would be substituted by tutor classes for those students who were, in fact, interested in learning.

An analysis of the students' representations towards these three domains allow us, once again, to conclude that the issue of the influence of the representations on academic success and integration of non native students must be a priority area of analysis and intervention on behalf of those responsible for the Education in Portugal.

In this specific case, and although they are one of the principal factors of social integration, the representations the students have about their MT and the PL seem not to pose, in themselves, any problem to the learning of the shelter country's language. In fact, there seems to exist, in these students, a "balanced/harmonious" relationship between the two languages which, besides not threatening the learning process of the PL, even stimulates them to optimize competences in this idiom.

However, this is not exactly the case of the representations that the students have about the countries and the educational systems, where there are, in fact, some remarks to be made.

NL's conceptions about, for example, the Portuguese people (a result of the process of integration in course) may, eventually, have negative consequences both on her academic performance and (especially) in terms of integration. Apart from other causes which may be at the origin of the problem, we are aware of the inhibition that situations as the ones that were described by NL may cause on non native students (cf. Dimakos & Tasiopoulou, 2003). We, thus, consider that School's role, at this level, will have to undoubtedly include the promotion of a true intercultural pedagogy, as defined by Abdallah-Pretceille (1999: 56) consisting, in the fist place, in the encouragement of reflection on *"la manière dont on voit l'Autre, à la manière dont on se voit"*, being the Other the non native speaker or any other subject, in a constant struggle for the tolerance and respect of each individual's integrity.

On the other hand, the students' representations towards the Educational Systems also allow us to arrive at some important conclusions:

a) the need to follow these students' process of adaptation to an educational system which is absolutely strange to them, by readjusting measures, actions and procedures;
b) the urgency of taking some measures in order to eradicate some of the problems

which are destroying Portuguese Schools – such as indiscipline –, whose consequences, not affecting exclusively non native students, may acquire greater proportions in these cases;

c) and, within the scope of Didactics of Portuguese, as a non mother tongue, the development of specific measures in relation to the training of language teachers, so that they can develop adequate methodologies for a shelter language teaching-learning process.

2. Awareness of the learning process of the PL

In relation to the awareness shown by students at this level, we will consider the following aspects: (A) Linguistic Competences; (B) Sociolinguistic Competences; (C) Learning Competences; (D) Role of the MT (or other languages) in the learning of the PL.

The main problems/mistakes mentioned (and produced) by the students are synthesised in the following tables.

A – Linguistic Competences

Domain	Problem	Example
Phonetics/ Phonology	Distinction between the phonemes [r] and [R]; the phoneme [α]; the nasal phonemes and diphthongs	*MK – Os [R] e depois os assim [α] no meio das palavras / por exemplo, o "mas" eu eu dizia "m[a]s" / não sei / aquele [α] assim mais fechado / aqueles sons nasais também / eram mais complicados [MK – The [R] and then the [α] in the middle of the words / for example, the "mas" I said "m[a]s" / I don't know / that [α] more closed / those nasal sounds too / they were more complicated]* *MK – Era, era, por exemplo, "pão" e "pau" / não sei / não conseguia distinguir muito bem [MK – for instance, "pão" [bread] and "pau" [stick] / I don't know / I wasn't able to distinguish very well]* *MK – Porque não… acho que não existe assim esta distinção em Russo / não há assim muitos sons parecidos* *[MK – Because this distinction doesn't exist in Russian / there are no similar sounds]*
	The Portuguese rhythm of the discourse	*MK – Ao princípio eu achava que falavam muito rápido / mas depois quando acho que também vais aprendendo parece que começam a falar mais devagar / como vais percebendo [MK – At the beginning I though they spoke too fast / but then when you begin to learn [the language] it seems that they start talking more slowly / as you begin to understand]*
	Varieties	*NL – é… eu não sei dizer bem mas eles dizem "t[αj]nho" / aqui nós dizemos "t[α]nho" / a eles dizem "t[αj]" "t[αj]" / é é acho que é assim / que é isso [NL – I don't know well how to say it but they say "t[αj]nho"/ here we say "t[α]nho" / they say "t[αj]" "t[αj]" / I think that it is like this / that it is it]* *MK – agora um brasileiro / também depende do brasileiro / às vezes, vejo um filme, as novelas que não percebo mesmo nada [MK – now a Brazilian / it also depends on the Brazilian / sometimes, I watch a film, the soap operas and I don't understand a thing]*
Orthography	Phoneme-grapheme	*NL – custa-me… só letras / por exemplo, uma letra O assim é outra / pode ser assim U [a aluna escreve as letras no caderno] / uma letra E*

	correspondence	*assim e pode ser assim I / é que ahm é custa muit… isso [NL – it is hard for me… only letters / for example, a letter O like this is another / it can be like this U [the student writes the letters in the notebook] / a letter E like this and it can be like this I / it is very difficult that]*
		NL – É que fala-se a mesma coisa [s] / é [s] / ou mas escreve-se a outras letras / já percebi [NL – [the problem] is that we speak in the same way [s] / it is [s] / but we write different letters / I got it]
		MK – "calçado" por ter C com cedilha (Ç) também / "próximo" por causa de [s] ser com X / depois "passar" por causa dos dois S [MK – "calçado" because it has a Ç too / "próximo" because [s] is with X / then "passar" due to the double S]
	Stress/accent (graphical markings)	*MK – Os a… os acentos / pôr os acentos [MK – The graphical markings / to put the accents]* *MK – Então, porque em Russo não existem acentos [MK – Well, because in Russian there are no graphical markings]*
Morphology	Gender inflexion	*MK – eram complicadas porque tinhas as terminações / e pronto / agora já não não me baralho / mas, por exemplo, reparo o meu pai que já está aqui há muito tempo / e também é complicado com ele (…) por exemplo, "planeta" (…) acaba em A / por exemplo, agora em Francês também pra mim é confuso / é a mesma coisa e é confuso [MK – They were complicated because you had the "endings" / and well now I don't mix up / but, for example, I notice that my father who has been here for a long time / and it is also complicated for him (…) for example, "planeta" (…) ends up with an A / for example now in French it is also confusing for me / it is the same thing and it is confusing]*
Lexicon	Unfamiliar words	*NL – é que só algumas palavras que eles eles podem utilizar algumas palavras que eu não percebo [NL – It is only some words that they may use / some words that I don't understand]*
Syntax	Word order (the order of the adjective in the nominal expression)	*MK – Pronto, assim traduzindo em palavra é "eu comprei novo livro" ☺ [MK – Translating word-for-word it is "I bought new book" ☺]* *MK – Pois, porque é / primeiro vem o novo e depois o livro [em Russo] [MK – Right, because first comes "new" and then the "book" [in Russian]]*
	Use of verbs "Ser" and "Estar"	*NL – é que nós só dizemos "eu advogada" [NL – We just say "I lawyer"]* *E – Vocês não utilizam então o verbo estar / por exemplo, "eu estou aqui"* *MK – Não* *E – Como é que tu dirias?* *MK – Я ЗДЕСЬ* *[E – Don't you use the verb "estar" / for instance, "I am here"* *MK – No* *E – How would you say this?* *MK – Я ЗДЕСЬ [I here]]*
	Use of articles	*NL – Aqui ahm também "O" desaparece e fica-se "Ivan vai à praia" (…) é que nós não utilizamos "O [NL – here the "O" also disappears and it gets Иван иде на пляж (…) because we don't use "O"]*

	Use of prepositions	MK – *as preposições / por exemplo, "estou vestida de vermelho" / era o "de" que faltava sempre lá / porque também em Russo não se diz assim* [MK – the prepositions / for instance, "estou vestida de vermelho" [I am dressed in red] / it was the "in" which was always missing there / because in Russian we don't say it like this too] MK – *E depois à Maria é / não temos essa palavra / e é na palavra Maria que / pomos assim outra uma terminação que depois quer dizer que é a Maria que se deu o bolo* [MK – And the "à Maria" is / we don't have that word / and it is in the word "Maria" that we put another ending that means that Maria is the person who the cake was given to]
Morphossintax	Verbal agreement / coherence	MK – *Eu não sei / às vezes baralhava muito os verbos / porque era assim sempre muito diferentes / e ouvia, por exemplo, as pessoas a falarem e depois dizia da mesma maneira / quando já devia tar a conjugar o verbo diferente* [MK – I don't know / sometimes I mixed up a lot the verbs / because they were always a lot different / and I heard, for example, people talking and then I spoke in the same way / when I should already be making the inflection of the verb]

B – Sociolinguistic competences

Domain	Problem	Example
Sociolinguistics	Forms of address	MK – *Fazia muita confusão, porque lá (…) por exemplo, ao professor chamamos pelo primeiro e último nome (…) por exemplo, uma criança que vai-se dirigir a uma pessoa assim adulta / na na rua chama por você, sempre / e depois uma pessoa que conhece, adulta, chama pelo primeiro e pelo último nome / e como se fosse assim outro estatuto / assim a pessoas mais velhas e professores e médicos e assim / e a mim fazia-me confusão porque aqui não há desses nomes / e então eles chamam professora / e, por exemplo, aqui faz impressão porque há alunos que têm uma professora muitos anos e não sabem o nome porque não a tratam pelo nome* [MK – It made me feel confused because there (…) for example, we address the teacher by using his/her first and last name (…) for example, in the street a child always addresses an adult by calling him/her by "você" / and then an adult that the child knows is addressed by his/her first and last name / it is as if it was another status / older people and teachers and doctors and so on / and to me it made me feel confused because here there are no such names / and then they address the teacher / and, for example, here it astonishes me because there are students who have the same teacher for many years and they don't know his/her name because they do not treat him/her by his/her name]

The analysis not only of the representations the students have in relation to the different domains of the PL, but also of their speeches allow us to reach some important conclusions. On the one hand, it allows us to identify the main cause of the problems mentioned by the students and perceived by us in the course of the interviews, which seems to be almost totally related to the influence their MTs on the shelter language. In fact, it is language distance that seems to be in the origin of the following problems: the distinction between the phonemes [r] and [R], the pronunciation of the phoneme [ɑ], the nasal phonemes and diphthongs; the comprehension of the Brazilian variety (whose

phonetic/phonologic system is even more different from their MTs than the PL); the phoneme-grapheme correspondence and graphical markings; gender inflection; word order; the use of articles and prepositions; verbal agreement and forms of address. These are, therefore, some of the main difficulties that Slavic students may have to face during the learning process of the PL and those towards which the teachers should pay particular attention. Otherwise, similar testimonies may follow: *"MK – Então, porque em Russo não existem acentos / ahm era assim uma coisa nova e às vezes não percebi porque é que estava ali (…) se calhar as professoras também não explicavam muito / como os outros alunos já eram evidente para eles / não não explicavam assim porque não era preciso para os outros também"* [*"MK – Well, because in Russian there are no graphical markings / ahm it was something new and sometimes I didn't understand why it was there (…) maybe the teachers didn't explain much / as for the other students it wasn't something new / they [the teachers] didn't explain because it wasn't necessary for the others too"*].

On the other hand, this analysis also allows us to evaluate the degree of LA shown by the students in the course of the life narratives, as well as the consequences that may result from that regarding the development of competences in the shelter language. We notice, then, a substantial difference between the students at this level. MK, notwithstanding the fact of not using – at least in a systematic way – metalanguage[17], she proves to be able to reflect consciously and with acuteness, not only about the similarities and the differences that exist between the languages of her repertoire, but also about the grammar rules that regulate the use of those idioms. Among other manifestations of LA, we notice in MK a certain easiness in distinguishing between the types of transfer that may (or may not) be useful in the learning process of the PL. As a main consequence of this fact, she was able, in the 5 years she has been living in Portugal, to optimise in a very efficient way her skills in this language.

NL, on the contrary, is in a previous stage of LA. Besides not being aware, most of the times, of the causes of the problems she faces in the learning of the PL, in some situations she also doesn't have a perception of the mistakes she makes. In spite of the limits that there are imposed on her by her linguistic repertoire – which, being more reduced, does not allow her to have an enlarged vision of the way linguistic systems work –, the student also reveals to have some difficulties in doing cross-linguistic analysis. We believe, however, that LA is, in NL, a potential skill, given the notorious way in which, in the course of the interviews, the student became aware of some of the issues analysed: *"É que fala-se a mesma coisa [s] / é [s] / ou mas escreve-se a outras letras / **já percebi**"* [*"[the problem] is that we speak in the same way [s] / it is [s] / but we write different letters / **I got it**"*].

C – Learning Competences

The strategies mentioned by the students as being those which are more frequently used in the learning process of the PL are summed up in the following table[18].

Category	Type of strategy	Example
Metacognitive strategies	Speaking more in Portuguese (self monitoring)	*NL – Ahm / quando às vezes falo no no trabalho onde minha mãe trabalha tá senhoras / às vezes falo com eles [NL – Ahm / sometimes, where my mother works, there are ladies there / sometimes I talk to*

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[17] The use of metalaguage is not a *sine qua non* condition in order to consider an individual as being aware in linguistic terms (cf. James, 1996: 140).

[18] Strategies have been categorized according to O'Malley & Chamot's classification (1990).

		them]
Cognitive strategies	Reading (out loud)	*MK – houve uma altura em que tinha que ler muito / foi a ler que / e ler e depois ler em voz alta [MK – There was a time in which I had to read a lot / it was by reading that / and reading and then reading out loud]*
	Repetition (oral and written)	*MK – Pronto, havia alturas em que em que escrevia mesmo muitas vezes os verbos / só que depois quando comecei a ir pra escola já não tinha tanto tempo / e acho que depois / ao fim de algum tempo fui só ouvindo e escrevendo [MK - Well, there were times in which I copied the verbs many times / but afterwards when I started to go to school I didn't have much time / and I think that afterwards / after some time I just heard and wrote]*
	Memorization	*MK – Ah, mas isso (…) a minha mãe obrigou-me lá a decorar (…) depois já sabia o que queriam dizer [MK – Oh, but that (…) my mother forced me to memorise (…) then I already knew what they meant]*
	Documental research	*NL – eu posso ver no… dicionário [NL – I can see in the dictionary]*
	Inference	*MK – Quando não sabia, às vezes, tinha dificuldades em algumas palavras que ouvia e eram assim estranhas ao ouvido / e depois tinha que por outras coisas que percebi da frase, tinha que chegar aquilo que me queriam dizer [MK – Sometimes, when I didn't know, I had difficulties in some words I heard and they were weird to listen to / and then, by other things that I understood in the sentence, I had to guess what they wanted me to say]*
	Transfer	*NL – eu, por exemplo, quero dizer uma frase (…) eu primeiro penso na ahm língua ucraniana o que é que eu queria dizer / depois traduzo a Português [ML – for example I want to say a sentence (…) I first think in Ukrainian what I want to say / then I translate into Portuguese]*
	Paraphrase	*MK – (…) queria dizer uma coisa e depois faltavam palavras no meio / então tinha que buscar assim palavras que, se calhar, nem tinham muito a ver para dizer aquilo [MK – (…) I wanted to say something and then there were words missing in the middle / so I had to find words that, maybe, didn't have much to do in order to say it]*
	Taking notes	*MK – mas a estudar costumo escrever sempre / não não consigo assim, por exemplo, só ler / porque acho que não fica assim muito na cabeça / então tenho que tar sempre a escrever (…) fazendo resumos [MK – but when I'm studying I usually write, always / I am not able to just read for example / because I think that I don't memorise it / so I must always write / summarizing]*
Social/affective strategies	Questioning for clarification (teachers, schoolmates, friends and relatives)	*NL – se eu não percebo, eu digo / se percebo digo assim "professora, percebi o que era isso" [NL – If I don't understand, I say / if I understand I say "teacher, I have understood what this is"]*
		NL – Quando eu não percebo uma palavra eu / procuro no dicionário ou pergunto à mãe o que significa aquela palavra [NL – When I don't understand a word / I look it up in the dictionary or I ask mom what that word means]
		MK – quando estavam [os colegas] a falar directamente comigo, perguntava outra vez o que é que tava a dizer [MK – When [my schoolmates] were speaking directly to me, asked once again what they were saying]
	Cooperation	*MK – Pois, foi mais falando com as pessoas e na escola e depois fora da*

	(interaction with other people)	*escola, com os amigos / depois os amigos também vão sempre corrigindo / por exemplo, se eu digo mal qualquer coisa / que queria dizer / que eles ouvissem aquilo que eu dizia / e eles corrigiam* [MK – It was more by talking with people and at school and then outside school, with friends / then friends always correct me too / for example, if I say something / that I wanted to say / that they heard what I said / and they corrected me]

By analysing the strategies that the students say they resort to, we immediately come to the conclusion of the predominance in the use of the cognitive strategies, which are then followed by the social/affective ones. The prominence of the first type of strategies may be justified by the kind of learning process promoted in the students' origin countries, since according to their discourses, there the direct interaction between the student and the learning contents seems to be a privileged. The students are, therefore, transferring study techniques acquired and developed in the origin education system to the learning of Portuguese. One of the aspects which seems, in a way, to differentiate students at this level is the fact that MK, besides recognising resorting to some cognitive strategies, essentially prefers the social/affective ones, arguing that it is *"a falar é o que que se aprende mais" [by talking one learns more]*. Maybe, in this case, the good relationship MK has always established with the people who surrounded her, namely her peers, has contributed to the process.

Apart from the choices made (and the causes that may be inherent to them), the pieces of information collected in this domain indicate that not only are the students aware of what they should do in order to improve competences in the shelter language, but also the selected strategies seem to be adjusted to the difficulties encountered. Revealing a certain autonomy in the way they learn, the students predisposition to improve their performance in the PL becomes clear.

D – Role of the MT (or other languages) in the learning of the PL

"Perceived language distance, i.e. the degree of similarity or divergence that learners perceive between their L1 and their target language, plays an important role in the transfer behaviour of the second language learner" (Ridley & Singleton, 1995: 125 *apud* Jessner, 1999: 206).

The students' representations with regard to the role played by their MTs in the learning process of Portuguese are very clear. In general terms, they consider resorting to Russian and Ukrainian as something which is harmful to the learning of the PL. Conscious or not of the language distance underlying this statement[19], both students state assertively that it is easier to think, write and study in the language of the shelter country. Even NL, who is still at a phase of the learning of Portuguese which requires resorting to her MT – *"é, eu penso em ucraniano" [yes, I think in Ukrainan]* –, refuses to study in any other language besides Portuguese, because, according to the student's words, *"vai ser muito embrulhado"[it will be very confusing]*.

Although the language distance inhibits MK to transfer from her MT to the PL, the student already has other references which, in her opinion, play a more active and efficient role in the learning of the PL: *"é mais o Inglês e o Português que são parecidos" [it is more English and Portuguese which are alike]*. This FL, whose learning process began in Ukraine, has

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[19] As we have seen before, NL possesses a less accurate LA at this level.

functioned, for MK, as a facilitating element in the learning of Portuguese (especially due to the alphabet). However, it is already curious to perceive the inversion of the situations: *"agora, se calhar, é mais o Português para Inglês" [maybe now it is more Portuguese to Engligh]*. We then notice in MK, and as argued by several authors, the dynamism inherent to the formation/development of the plurilingual competence (cf. for example, Jessner, 1999).

The students' narratives at this level allow us to confirm the distinction that exists between them in terms of LA, that is, of their capacity of using metacognition and managing all their pre-knowledge. While MK is closer to LA, as defined by James (1996: 140), NL is still at an elementary level, almost intuitive, of this process.

The data obtained in these three sub-categories related to the consciousness, on behalf of the students, of the learning process of the PL, strengthen our convictions in what concerns the need for the development of programmes/methodologies specifically oriented for the enlargement of students' LA. We argue, therefore, in favour of the development, in the classroom, of activities which promote cross-linguistic reflections which might simultaneously promote the subjects' awareness of grammar rules and the explanation of the role played by each linguistic system in the learning process of a new language. The transformation of the implicit knowledge into explicit will then give the students the opportunity of optimizing the knowledge and competences previously acquired and, eventually, to refine and enlarge their capacity for language(s) use (cf. James, 1996: 140).

Final remarks

With this paper we have tried to reach two different objectives: on the one hand, to identify the factors which may affect the learning of Portuguese and, on the other hand, to show the potential of Life Narratives within the scope of the Didactics of Non Mother Tongues, as a privileged space to create consciousness, to explain and to construct representations concerning the learning of a shelter language.

Concerning the first objective, we find that the example presented is paradigmatic in what concerns the main role played by representations and LA in the learning process of a shelter language. We have tried to make it evident in which way the relationship between those two domains and the communicative and learning practices of two Slavic students can or cannot affect the appropriation of the PL.

With regard to the second aim, we believe that the methodology used in this research was appropriate because it allowed us to hear the voice of those who are the main actors of the entire teaching-learning process and thus build relevant knowledge for the subsequent development of new practices at several levels, such as: teacher training, specific methodologies for the teaching-learning process of a shelter language, and the educational and linguistic policies of the Portuguese Educational System.

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