

The Anglo-American World in TEFL in Portuguese Secondary Education

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1. Introduction

The year 1607 can be held to mark the birth of a new stage in the history of the English language, laying the foundations for its subsequent expansion worldwide and to the later phenomenon of its globalization as we know it nowadays. Although the history of the English language is, from its earlier roots, linked with geographical expansion and migration, namely to Wales, Scotland and Ireland under Norman power¹, that movement overseas was pivotal in such a process. With the first permanent settlement by English people in the newfound land of America, named Jamestown after King James I, English became autonomous from its country of origin. The succeeding development and consolidation of the British Empire, which reached its zenith during the Victorian Age, ruling one quarter of the earth's surface, further spurred such a process of linguistic expansion. Because of this extraordinary spread to the whole world, English is nowadays an official language or a language with a special status in at least seventy five countries, ranking fourth in the list of the most spoken languages in the globe as a native language, spoken by around 375 million people, while around 750 million people are believed to speak it as a foreign language.² Its geographical spread led to the birth of a

¹ Graddol, Leith & Swann (1996), consider the movement of people from England to Wales, to Ireland and to some parts of Scotland as a first diaspora.

² These are the official figures published by the British Council in its official webpage, based mainly on David Crystal's and David Graddol's seminal works: *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *English as a global language*, Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *The Future of*

significant number of types or varieties, partly born out of creoles.³ As a result, the plural form “Englishes” has been grammatically acknowledged and adopted by linguistic studies.

2. Language and Culture

This process of expansion and change, however, goes beyond the realm of language, inasmuch as a particular language cannot be separated from the culture where it was generated. The interdependent relation between language and culture has long been claimed, most notably by Sapir and later by Whorf, who both pointed out the crucial nature of language patterns within a group or community in the shaping of our mind; in turn, language is the key tool by which we organize the world around us (Hall 18). Though in different approaches, the sociocultural background of language was also acknowledged both by Mikhail Bakhtin, who pinpointed the underlying connection between each word and its social context, and by Wittgenstein, who highlighted the conventionalized patterns of communicative action within a culture group (Hall 8, 12).

In her study of language and culture in the context of teaching, Joan Hall’s synthesis of this sociocultural dimension of language is further enriched by a dynamic conception of language: “Culture is seen to reside in the meanings and shapes that our linguistic resources have accumulated from their past uses and with which we approach and work through our communicative activities” (16). Therefore, the concept of cultural identity relies also on the power of language itself: “At any communicative moment, through our linguistic actions, we choose particular ways to construe our worlds, to induce others to see our worlds in these ways, as we create and sustain particular kinds of relationships with them and thus make relevant some as opposed to other identities” (Hall 16). In addition, as such iden-

English? (London, British Council, 1997), respectively. Tom McArthur (*The English Languages*, Cambridge University Press, 1998) also provides relevant data in this field.

³ On the other hand, British English itself underwent a few changes as for instance the borrowing of foreign words, such as the words shampoo or pyjamas, of Hindi origin, or tycoon, of Japanese origin.

tities reflect our status of members of multiple groups and communities, language goes beyond its strictly linguistic limits, contributing as it does to the construction of memory and forms of representation. Hence, language is sensitive not only to personal but to cultural identities also (Sumara 85-97).

The particular relation between language and cultural identity has been largely addressed in literature. Major Portuguese writers excelled in this approach, such as Fernando Pessoa, who wrote that his homeland was the Portuguese language⁴, or Virgílio Ferreira, who linked the Portuguese language with the primeval, core role of the sea in Portuguese culture - in his brilliant words, our language enables us to see the world and shapes our worldview, our ways of feeling, our thoughts⁵.

3. The Portuguese Syllabus of English (Secondary Level)

The recognition of this important relationship between language and culture also underlies the rationale for the Portuguese Curriculum of English, which highlights the function of language learning in the process of students' global development and frames the learning of the language with a sociocultural background of major significance (Moreira et al 2003).

As noted above, the spread of the English language is in keeping with the major role of both Britain and of the United States as superpowers, economically and politically. The discussion of phenomena such as globalization, assimilation and acculturation versus the persistence of cultural roots and identity all belong in this process, but, regardless of the controversy that such issues may trigger, the impact of British and American culture worldwide cannot be overshadowed. Therefore, when we talk about Anglo-American Studies, it is mostly the idea of Britain and of the United States that prevails, although current research on language and culture, and

⁴ In Portuguese: "A minha pátria é a língua portuguesa".

⁵ "Uma língua é o lugar donde se vê o Mundo e em que se traçam os limites do nosso pensar e sentir. Da minha língua vê-se o mar. Da minha língua ouve-se o seu rumor, como da de outros se ouvirá o da floresta ou o silêncio do deserto. Por isso a voz do mar foi a da nossa inquietação" (*À Voz do Mar*, 1998)

specifically on the English language, has been giving increasing attention to other English-speaking countries, namely Canada or Australia.

The scope of Anglo-American Studies includes fields as diverse as culture, history, linguistics, arts and literature, formally organized in graduate and post-graduate courses worldwide. At secondary level, issues of that scope have been systematically included in the curricula of English.

A brief overview of the English Curriculum in Portuguese secondary education might be useful at this point (Moreira et al 2003). The content areas are organized in three major inter-related categories: text interpretation and production, socio-cultural component and English language. Leaving aside the theoretical framework of teaching a foreign language that also informs the syllabus, as it would go beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to note that the cultural background of the main English-speaking countries provides core material for all three areas, here briefly outlined:

(1) text interpretation and production - the four skills are approached and practised through different types of texts that illustrate various speech macro functions and communicative intentions;

(2) socio-cultural component - thematic scope, covering the topics:

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|-----------|--|
| 10th year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A world of many languages”; • “The technological world”; • “Media and global communication”; • “Young people in a global age”. |
| 11th year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The world around us”; • “Young people and consumerism”; • “The world of work”; • “A world of many cultures”. |
| 12th year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The English Language in the world”; • “Citizenship and multiculturalism”; • “Democracy in a global era”; • “Culture, art and society”. |

and

(3) English language - use of language, including the word, the sentence, and prosody.

Considering the main purpose of this paper, which aims to reflect on the role of Anglo-American culture and history in the context of the English syllabus at secondary level in Portuguese schools, it is important

to ponder how the three major curricular components we have outlined above address or reflect the Anglo-American world.

For instance, in terms of the English Language, we can refer to examples such as differences in terms of grammar, vocabulary, accent, pronunciation or spelling among the different varieties of English (British English, American English, Australian or New Zealand English, Canadian English and so forth). Even if these aspects may fall into the scope of linguistics, their cultural background is often examined, exploring particular aspects and, often, enlarging students' previous cultural repertoire, acquired through the constant exposure to artifacts and to varied expressions of popular culture specific of these countries, through media, cinema, music and the internet. Reggae music, for example, constitutes a popular vehicle with young people/learners to illustrate both Caribbean English, in its grammatical and lexical deviations, and to reflect on thematic issues such as role models or the importance of music in the spread of values.⁶ Interestingly, such a topic, despite its predominantly linguistic character, also promotes students' critical thinking by introducing certain topics for reflection, such as the coexistence of different types of English, the prevalence of some of them over others or the democratization and the open character of the English language as a *lingua franca*.⁷

As far as the socio-cultural component is concerned, it is particularly relevant to note how the cultural and historical patrimony both of Britain and of the United States, which pervades the syllabus's thematic range, converges with the humanist and democratic principles and aims that inform the curricular programme. In fact, these are firmly rooted in the assumption of a multilingual and multicultural Europe, where language learning goes beyond its communicative vocation, promoting an education oriented to citizenship, democracy and humanism (Moreira 2).

⁶ These are part of the 10th year syllabus, in its sociocultural component.

⁷ The importance of the varieties of English in the TEFL is discussed and defended by Raquel Cortez, who emphasizes the contribution of this topic to the enlargement of students' linguistic diversity and also to the development of their cultural tolerance and competence (*O Padrão e as outras variedades no ensino de ILE em Portugal: O caso do 12.º ano*. Dissertação de Mestrado. Lisboa: Universidade Católica, 2002).

Such principles are also rooted in the European approach to language learning, as determined by the Council of Europe, namely with the creation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), whose final version was published in 2001 by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe. Besides its homogenizing, normative role in terms of linguistic and communicative competence, this document established the link between language learning and cross-cultural awareness, reinforcing the importance of language learning in the construction of European Citizenship.⁸ Such an approach implies that language teaching should focus on cultures associated with the target languages so as to achieve humanistic goals, as understanding people of other societies and cultures is believed to increase tolerance and reduce prejudice (Aase et al 5).

Considering this ideological framework, it is important to mention that the study of the languages and cultures of the Anglo-American countries, namely of Britain and of the United States, provide subject-matters that converge with it. For example, the ideals stated in the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and in the American Constitution (signed in 1787) persist as enduring beacons of present-day democracy, rooted in the British parliamentary tradition or, even long before, in the proclamation of the Magna Carta in 1215, which, though initially intended to find a solution to a political crisis by establishing limits to the king's authority, is widely regarded as the root of modern civil rights and the inspiring source for North American, British and other European countries' Constitutions.

The universality of such principles has also been a source of inspiration at both European and world levels - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), in the aftermath of World War II, as a formal, consensual tool to preclude the repetition of those atrocities, for instance, relies significantly on many articles of the American Constitution. It is also against this ideological background that the discussion of the constraints, flaws and paradoxes of contemporary society is promoted in the syllabus,

⁸ The CEFR was developed, precisely, within the scope of the project «Language Learning for European Citizenship» (1989-1996).

thereby aiming to trigger young people's development, nurturing responsible, critical, tolerant citizenship, an idea primarily stated in the preamble to the programme: making contact with other languages and cultures contributes to the construction of students' identities, while language learning itself enhances an analytical, questioning, critical attitude as regards society, thus helping youngsters become active and intervening citizens in their future lives (Moreira 2). This idea is also expressed as one of the general objectives of the syllabus: promoting education for citizenship, fostering a culture of liberty, participation, cooperation, reflection and evaluation and encouraging attitudes of personal responsibility and social intervention (6).

One example of this is the study of "Democracy in a global era", in the twelfth year, which involves the study of historical episodes, of social events, of political ideologies or regimes, of defenders of human rights such as Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks or Mahatma Gandhi, to cite but a few, and most naturally of the corresponding historical and cultural contexts. Another relevant example is the topic "A world of many cultures", in which students reflect on the phenomena of mass immigration, multiculturalism and xenophobia and other forms of discrimination, not only in British and in American societies, but also in other English-speaking parts of the world; and, within another study unit, environmental threats to our world may bring to light the action of prominent figures, sometimes controversial, from Al Gore to film and pop and rock stars. These examples, and the last one in particular, conform, too, to the idea stated in the Syllabus of English (2003) that the subject matter to be taught within each level of English must focus on the increasingly complex ongoing social, cultural, technological and economic changes in contemporary society (Moreira et al 21).

As in many other topics, the thematic approach converges with the promotion of a spirit of multicultural tolerance and democratic citizenship, informed by historical evidence and knowledge, on the one hand, and by a constant method of questioning, reflection and critical discussion, on the other, as mentioned above. As the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe stated about the characteristics of modern languages, besides promoting communication between people with different mother-tongues, they combine humanistic purposes with utilitarian or pragmatic ones, so as to meet present-day needs of global communication at a variety of levels

of human life (Aase et al, 4). Thus, the teaching of modern languages is inevitably more comprehensive, not only in scope and purposes, but also in terms of teaching strategies and tools.

Additionally, we should not overlook the relevance of the resources used for these teaching purposes. Course books at secondary level include a variety of authentic resources that range from newspapers and magazine articles, information from reliable websites, to book excerpts and so on. What is more, in the technological era we live in, information and research are permanently available and thus consistently integrated in the teaching of English, as a way to develop digital skills and to enlarge students' knowledge of the world around them. The authenticity and timeliness of the teaching materials is precisely one of the aspects highlighted in the syllabus, among the principles required to develop multicultural awareness and exchange (which is one of the stated aims of the topic "Sociocultural component" - Moreira 24).

4. The role of Reading and of the Literary Text in TEFL and in the Portuguese Syllabus of English

This variety of resources available and well-suited to teaching purposes correlates with the first area of the curriculum (text production and interpretation), which it defines as its main focus (Moreira et al 39). Despite being considered in the syllabus as an autonomous content area, it must be acknowledged that "text production and interpretation" serves mainly as the fundamental tool that enables the study of the other two content areas. Reading probably assumes the role of dominant skill, even when taken in an integrated framework, and the written text is the prime teaching material. A random look at a number of course books would provide immediate evidence of this, although recent works have been increasingly paying more attention to the balance of the four skills. Therefore, using a comprehensive diversity of text types meets the variety of communicative situations and contexts.

Extensive reading, whether of literary or of non-literary texts, is referred to in the syllabus within the scope of text types. The syllabus further clarifies that the concept of extensive reading does not refer to the literary text only, relying rather on text diversity and extension and aiming

at promoting general understanding and reading habits (Moreira et al 18). As a result of this, the reading of complete literary works of diverse genres (most of these falling into the category of extensive reading) should be implemented gradually in terms of complexity, according to students' age and maturity level, since such a type of reading also aims to promote their critical thinking (Moreira et al 19).

Although the literary text assumes particular relevance in the Languages and Literatures course, the extensive reading of short stories is a minimum requirement in all courses. Primarily based on the range of topics covered by the socio-cultural component, with which they are obliged to comply, suggested works in the curriculum are by authors as diverse as Maya Angelou, Nadine Gordimer, Stephen King, Alice Munro, James Baldwin, Truman Capote, Alice Walker, Graham Greene, or David Lodge, to mention only a few.

Apparently, this wide range of reading possibilities suggests the relevance ascribed to the literary text in the programme. However, its transversal character makes it subsidiary to other specific components of the syllabus, namely the "sociocultural" and the "text interpretation and production" ones, as mentioned earlier, thus undermining its autonomy. Because of this, the potential of the literary text, and of extensive reading in general, as consistent working tools in class, gets somewhat overshadowed by the diverse requirements of the programme. Even so, understanding extensive texts, both literary and non-literary, is an explicit goal set up within the framework of competences that an English learner in Portuguese secondary education is expected to acquire, according to the syllabus (Moreira et al 10, 11).

Yet, using literary texts in the realm of study material of TEFL further poses the question of the relevance of literature as an essential element in the already mentioned and acknowledged combination of language and culture. Even if it is not the aim of this article to reflect on the social role of literature or, conversely, on the "art for art's sake" theory, it is important to mention that art, and literature in particular, may either reflect or provide insight into a given culture and, even if unintentionally, suggest its author's views. Hence, the aesthetic object (in this case, the literary text), as Madelénat contends in his study of literature and society, does not exist outside the real (104). Although the literary text may surpass

its space and time perimeters and be readable for a number of other reasons (its subject-matter, its polysemy, its universal character, or the aesthetic experience it allows, for example), it somehow, and to varying degrees, depending on the genre, anchors in the empirical, historical, chronological world, often reading as a testament to cultural reality.

In addition to its relation with culture, the literary text is (in)valuable as a language resource, due to its paramount potential of linguistic possibilities, strictly linked, as Isabel Fernandes mentions, to the diversity of experiences that it represents (31). Brumfit and Carter, in their study of the relation between language, literature and education, state the self-sufficiency of the literary text as a “language artefact” (3), a general premise for its use in language teaching.

The value of using the literary text in TEFL has been widely studied, especially from the nineteen eighties onwards. Among the advantages most often pointed out are those related with language improvement and accuracy, integrated development of the four skills, promotion of critical thought and deep insight, and cultural enrichment (Collie and Slater, 1987; Maley, 1989, Brumfit and Carter, 2000, Sumara, 2002, Hi mano lu, 2005). The relevance of using the literary text relies on its very nature, which Maley (1989) classifies according to the following items: universality (covering experience potentially applicable to all human beings); non-triviality (it is authentic and genuine); personal relevance (enabling the reader to connect it with his/her own experience); variety (diversity of subject-matter); interest (it is intrinsically interesting and hence able to engage the readers’ interest); economy and suggestive power (it fosters further ideas and discussion); and ambiguity (diversity of interpretations and promotion of exchange of ideas) (Hi mano lu, 56).

In order to argue in favour of the use of literature in the context of English learning as a second language, Khatib suggests a more comprehensive list, combining both the features of the literary text and its practical benefits in terms of language learning. Relying on a number of major studies of this issue, namely Widdowson (1986), Brumfit and Carter (1986), Van (2009), Ghosn (2002), McRay (2011), and also Maley, he puts forward the following: authenticity, motivation, cultural/intercultural awareness and globalization, intensive and extensive reading practice, sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge, grammar and vocabulary knowledge, language

skills, emotional intelligence and critical thinking (202-3).

This model is particularly relevant for the aims of this essay, because in addition to the specific aspects of language learning listed, it encompasses the sociocultural dimension and skills related to education for citizenship (critical thinking, for example), which are central to the rationale of the Portuguese Curriculum of English, as mentioned earlier. Hence, the relevance of using the literary text in the context of language learning relies globally on its particular nature, including aspects related to its sociocultural value, to its linguistic potential, and to its interpretative and aesthetic dimensions, as well as to the humanist and citizenship qualities that it may boost.

In terms of Anglo-American Studies, we come to the conclusion that the approach to the socio-cultural and linguistic components of the Portuguese syllabi of English, at secondary level, could be successfully based on a much more intensive and extensive use of the literary text, taken as an intersection field of all three components of the syllabus: text interpretation and production, sociocultural themes and the English language. Making the reading of a few literary texts compulsory, in each level, from the wide range of suggestions given in the programme, could add to the accomplishment of such goals.

A few drawbacks must be mentioned, though. In order to comply with all the components of the programme in a diversity of regional, social and cultural contexts, present-day teaching of English at secondary level has to continually manage the guidelines set up in that official document, guaranteeing that a common core, as extensive as possible, reaches all types of learners. The choice of course books is, to a great extent, determined by these different needs, and because most of them nowadays excel in diversity, materials and supplementary technological tools, teachers' range of options in terms of texts becomes, paradoxically, more limited, as they get more and more confined to the adopted course book. The high price of course books, in addition to secondary education in Portugal having become compulsory, thwarts the acquisition of other books by students. However, making the most of the short stories already included in course books themselves could pave the way to a more consistent use of literary texts, thus providing a larger, more comprehensive representation and discussion of issues of the Anglo-American world in class, as well as of language itself.

5. Conclusion

As stated above, the syllabus's thematic scope converges with and covers several aspects of Anglo-American Studies. In fact, we can even consider that the richness, diversity, complexity, the often paradoxical nature of the sociocultural history and identity of the Anglo-American world provide subject matter that fully fulfills the goals and objectives of the Portuguese syllabi, both in terms of language perspectives and of the relation to students' global education for citizenship. To a significant extent, the Anglo-American socio-cultural component of the programme becomes universal and the value of its learning and knowledge is restated through the many possibilities for reflection both on past and on contemporary time that they keep offering.

Using the literary text more systematically would contribute to learners' enrichment as regards all these aspects, as a primary source full of linguistic, sociocultural and aesthetic potential. Additionally, such an approach would also strengthen students' critical thinking (an aspect we mentioned above under Maley's headings "Economy and Suggestive Power" and "Ambiguity", and also formally assumed in the syllabus) and contribute to the creation of "deep"⁹ learners, capable of thinking, rethinking, of questioning and of fully participating as citizens in a world of which formal syllabi provide them with an open, extensive, challenging, but necessarily incomplete view. Together with the vast array of resources available today, it would give them a key tool, a prime, authentic material (or artifact, in Brumfit's terminology), to access the Anglo-American experience in its multiple representations.

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⁹ Deep learning, opposing surface learning, focuses mainly on "what is signified" and on the ability to relate previous knowledge to new knowledge (Marten and Säljö, 1976; Ramsden, 1992).

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ABSTRACT

Anglo-American culture pervades the Portuguese national syllabus for the teaching of English as a foreign language throughout the seven or eight years of its obligatory school study, ranging from very simple references to common, accepted, often stereotyped behaviors or traditions, in the early years, to far more complex issues in the upper levels, such as, to name but two, the Civil Rights Movement in the US or multiculturalism as a trait of British society.

Primarily acknowledging the bond between language and culture, this essay aims to reflect on the role of Anglo-American culture and history in the broader context of the English syllabus at secondary level in Portuguese schools. Furthermore, it takes into account the current approaches that reinforce the contribution of Anglo-American studies to the achievement of the aims informing the rationale of the official programmes, in particular, those related to cross-cultural awareness, citizenship and tolerance. The contribution of the literary text to the teaching of English as a second language, namely as a tool for looking into Anglo-American culture and society, is also considered.

The discussion of such issues might hopefully contribute to the debate over the current impact of Anglo-American studies in Portugal and the possibilities and paths lying ahead.

KEYWORDS

Anglo-American culture; language; literary text; curricula; TEFL

RESUMO

A cultura anglo-americana permeia o programa nacional para o ensino do Inglês como língua estrangeira ao longo dos sete ou oito anos de estudo obrigatório, desde simples referências a comportamentos comuns, aceites e frequentemente estereotipados, nos anos de iniciação, a questões mais complexas nos níveis superiores, como, por exemplo, o movimento de direitos cívicos nos EUA ou o multiculturalismo como traço da sociedade britânica.

Assumindo a relação entre língua e cultura, este ensaio procura reflectir sobre o papel da cultura e história anglo-americanas no contexto alargado do programa de Inglês no ensino secundário português. Procura também tomar em consideração as abordagens que reforçam a contribuição dos Estudos Anglo-Americanos na concretização dos objectivos definidos pelos programas oficiais, em particular os referentes à consciência inter-cultural, à cidadania e à tolerância. O contributo do texto literário no ensino do Inglês como língua estrangeira, nomeadamente enquanto forma de olhar a cultura e sociedade anglo-americanas, é também tomada em consideração.

Espera-se que a discussão destas questões possa contribuir para o debate sobre o impacto dos Estudos Anglo-Americanos em Portugal, bem como as possibilidades e caminhos a tomar no futuro.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Cultura anglo-americana; Língua; Texto Literário; Currículo; TEFL
