Three Continents, one Language: Studying English in a Portuguese Landscape (Brazil, Cape Verde and Portugal)

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If we are to have a natural universal language, that language should be English, and it will serve both as a cultural and as a natural language  
(Pessoa 1997: 114)

1. Introduction

Contact with diverse languages and cultures provides an excellent opportunity to foster the development of intercultural communicative competence. Through the ages, certain languages have taken on the role of a lingua franca in specific communities. In Europe, for instance, In the Middle Ages, Latin assumed the role of a contact language among the reigns, while later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, French was the chosen language. The Portuguese and Spanish maritime expansion from the fifteenth century onwards also contributed to the rise of the Portuguese and Spanish languages as lingua francas not only in South America and Africa, but in other parts of the world too. The spread of the British Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries propagated the influence of the English language across the globe. Much more recently, the effects of globalization, especially during the second half of the twentieth century, contributed to the reinforcement and implementation of English as the world’s most common lingua franca.

Unlike any other language, past or present, the English language has spread to all continents and become a truly global language. This relatively recent development has contributed to the wide exposure to English and to the growing influence of the language in societies worldwide. In many present day situations, it is currently being used with lingua franca
communicative purposes, which has undoubtedly raised issues in what concerns diverse pedagogical approaches for both teachers and learners.

In this presentation, we explore the role of English in three different countries — Brazil, Cape Verde and Portugal — located on three different continents, but having one common official language, Portuguese. Given the importance of English and Portuguese at both national and international levels, we first begin by briefly discussing the role of the Portuguese language in the world, specifically in these three countries. Afterwards, we center our attention on the role of English in these communities, particularly regarding English language education. In the remaining part of our talk, we reflect on three sociolinguistic case studies carried out in each of the above mentioned countries, focusing on students’ perspectives on English language teaching (ELT).

2. Portuguese around the world

Portuguese is currently considered the eighth most spoken language around the world with approximately two hundred and forty million speakers spread throughout the seven continents. These numbers continue to bear witness to the Portuguese maritime expansion that began in the fifteenth century and went from the Far East, to the Western shores of South America and along the coast of Africa. As a result, Portuguese became the language of contact in many far off communities; a common lingua franca spoken in local trade and commerce, later on contributing to Portuguese influenced pidgins and creoles. Today, Portuguese assumes the role of mother tongue in Portugal and Brazil, and it continues to have official status in countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau in Africa, and Malacca, Macau and Timor in the East.

After this brief overview of the influence of the language around the world, let us now reflect on the role Portuguese plays in each of the countries taken into consideration in this talk, Portugal, Brazil and Cape Verde.

2.1 Portuguese in Portugal

Portuguese is the country’s official language and the mother tongue of over ninety percent of the population in Portugal; it is also the second language
of many immigrant communities, some coming from former Portuguese colonies in Africa, others, belonging to more recent immigration waves, from Eastern Europe and Asia, namely China.

2.2 Portuguese in Brazil

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, Brazil was discovered by the Portuguese voyager Pedro Álvares Cabral, and since then, throughout the centuries, Portuguese has been the mother tongue for many millions of inhabitants of this South American country, roughly one hundred and seventy-five million nowadays. As it is normally expected, time and contact with other communities have contributed to the evolution of a separate variety when compared to European Portuguese, namely regarding accent, specific vocabulary and syntax structure.

2.3 Portuguese in Cape Verde

Located off the western coast of Africa, Cape Verde is a nation composed of ten islands of which nine are inhabited. However, when they were discovered and colonized by Portuguese in the fifteenth century it was not inhabited. The settlers arrived at Santiago Island in 1462, and founded there Ribeira Grande (now Cidade Velha)—the first permanent European settlement city in the tropics and soon slaves were brought from the West African coast to perform the hard labor.

The resident Africans spoke different languages among themselves, so communication with the colonizers was very difficult or even impossible, without a common language for interaction. As a result, they shaped the Portuguese language according to their needs, and this adaptation and simplification resulted in a sort of pidgin, which after lengthy contact with other European and African languages developed into a Creole, so that the colonizer and the colonized could mutually and intelligibility communicate.

Since Cape Verde became independent in 1975, Portuguese has remained the official language in the archipelago. It is first introduced in the primary educational system at the age of 5 or 6, and is the medium of instruction from here onwards. It is also the language of media, of parliament and of diplomacy; meanwhile Creole has become the language
of communication for Cape Verdeans in all regions, as well as the language of literature, alongside Portuguese.

3. English in a Portuguese Landscape

English has had a crucial role as a foreign language in traditionally denoted expanding circle countries or, as better referred to today, as the language for international communication, and the Portuguese landscape is no exception, having shown ties with the English language from early on.

In this section, we first refer to the implementation of the English language in the three selected countries and secondly, reflect on pedagogical implications that have risen through time.

3.1 English in Portugal

Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935), one of the most emblematic poets of the Portuguese language, once wrote on the advantages of a universal language, and claimed that English and Portuguese could co-exist, each one used for distinctive purposes in different domains:

“If we use English as a general and scientific language, we will use Portuguese as a literary and private language. We will have a domestic life and a public life. For what we want to learn, we will read in English; for what we want to feel, Portuguese. For what we want to teach, we will speak English; for what we want to say, we will say it in Portuguese.”

(Pessoa 1997: 151)

English has been present in the Portuguese society for a long time now. The country has one of the oldest alliances with the United Kingdom and already in the eighteenth century, English was taught at some faculties and military schools. However, it is only in the nineteenth century with the creation of secondary schools that ELT begins to play an important role in the educational system. Later, with the Reform of 1947, special relevance is given to English due to its role in international relations, namely because of its growing importance worldwide, the strong political and commercial relations between Portugal and England, and the neighboring colonies of both countries.
Several reforms have taken place since then, of which three are worth mentioning: the 1995 Syllabus for Basic and Secondary Education, the 2001 Basic Education Curriculum and the 2002 Secondary Education Syllabus. The first reform emphasizes the two major English-speaking cultures, The United Kingdom and The Unites States, and their standard varieties, the second one stresses the intercultural function of the language, making reference to the cultures which use it as the target language, and lastly, the most recent syllabus introduces the concept of English as the world’s lingua franca and the importance of referring to its native cultures in the ELT context.

The recent awareness towards the growing role of English as an international language is obvious in the shift from the monopoly of the UK and US paradigms, to other English native cultures. However, emphasis continues to be given to communities of English expression (i.e. other inner circle countries or outer circle countries, as well), rather than to all communities using the language, namely those belonging to the expanding circle. In addition, when reference is actually made to other communities, it continues to stress cultural factors rather than adopt a linguistic approach.

3.2 English in Brazil

Brazil’s first contact with the English language was most likely around 1530 when an Englishman, William Hawkins, a slave trader, disembarked on the Brazilian coast, and established relations with the Portuguese and the natives. The presence of the English from here onwards was visible due to trade and the influence of English companies established in Brazil. Consequently, the need to use English for professional purposes and for the development of the country contributed to the implementation of ELT at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Today, foreign language learning, especially English, is associated with the notions of globalization and “global citizenship”, so that students may one day be a part of a multilingual and multicultural world. Unfortunately, learners attending only the public school system are unable to achieve high levels of English proficiency due to many deficiencies in the system. For that reason, many private language schools have proliferated around the country, offering courses to those who aim at achieving native
proficiency in order to progress both academically and professionally.

Therefore, we can conclude that English knowledge is intimately linked with the notions of social status and success as Friedrich notes:

The desire for learning English to get a better job or promotion indicates that English works as a means of social ascension. It also implies that in Brazil there is a social attitude towards English that draws people to learn the language. This social attitude equates knowing English with being more materially successful.

(Friedrich 2000: 222)

3.3 English in Cape Verde

Positioned on the great trade routes between Africa, Europe and the New World, Cape Verde prospered from the transatlantic slave trade, but when it declined in the nineteenth century, the archipelago suffered a great blow in its economy. It was around this time that Cape Verdeans started emigrating to the United States where they were recruited to work on New England whaling ships. With the advent of the ocean liner, the island’s position astride Atlantic shipping lanes made it an ideal location for resupplying ships with fuel (imported coal), water and livestock. So, during the nineteenth century, the island of São Vicente and its excellent harbor became an important commercial center mainly because the British used Cape Verde as a storage depot for coal, which was bound for the Americas.

Despite this early contact with the English language, up until about a decade ago, French was the most influential foreign language in the archipelago and the first foreign language to be introduced in the education system due to geo-political reasons. English was the second foreign language in the curriculum, chosen as an optional language when children entered secondary education. However, from 1995 onwards due to the educational reform, English has become one the most prominent foreign languages, either in education or in society. In general, most of the students tend to choose English as their first foreign language for many different reasons, such as the influence of American music and films, and to communicate with their relatives in the Diaspora.
4. Case study

Our analysis has taken into consideration three separate sociolinguistic studies developed in the three countries so as to compare and contrast each ELT framework regarding general pedagogical contexts, sex and age of the informant learners, varieties of English used in ELT and the attitudes towards the relative evaluation of native vs. non-native English teachers educational performance.

The studies here observed are part of three MA theses supervised by Professor Luísa Azuaga presented to the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon:

— Cavalheiro, Lili. 2008. English as a European Lingua Franca: A Sociolinguistic Profile of Students and Teachers at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon.

Let us now consider each of the studies’ findings.

4.1 Situating our study

As above mentioned, we take into consideration three studies, one carried out in Portugal, another in Brazil and another in Cape Verde.

The Portuguese case study (Cavalheiro 2008) is aimed at both a group of undergraduate students attending different levels of English classes at the Faculty of Letters of the University Lisbon (FLUL) and a group of English language teachers working at the same institution. Of the universe enquired, 70% are female students. As for the average age of students, it is of 24 years of age, however, numbers range from as young as 18 to as old as 60.

In the case of the Brazilian study (Berto 2009), it focuses on teacher training courses in four Brazilian universities in the region of Porto Alegre. Of those enquired, all have some experience in ELT; 80% are female students and their average age is 27, ranging from 20 to 37 years of age.
As for the study carried out in Cape Verde (Nunes 2010), it is centered on secondary schools located on the Island of Santiago, especially focusing on schools in the center, periphery and rural areas of the island. Contrary to the two previous studies, the subjects of this one are equally balanced according to sex. 50% of them are female, and 50% are male. Regarding age, the average is 17.5, ranging from 16, the youngest, to 19, the oldest. It is worth noting that students from rural areas are older when compared to those in the center and periphery areas.

4.2 Varieties of English in ELT

When reflecting on ELT, one issue that requires some consideration is the variety of English that should be taught in the classroom. It is interesting to compare the results obtained concerning these attitudes with those about English language use outside the classroom, the variety the informants believe they actually speak.

In the study conducted in Portugal (Cavalheiro 2008), opinions diverge somewhat when regarding the variety the subjects believe they speak and the varieties that should be taught. However, in both cases the stress is always laid down in the two main native varieties — American English (AmE) and British English (BrE). When enquired on the variety they believe they speak, half of the students think they are influenced by the American variety, while the other half believes they follow the British variety. However, when asked about the varieties that should be taught, the balance tips towards BrE with 71% believing it should be the norm taught in class, contrasting with only 29% who favor AmE. Worth noting is the fact that none of the students refer to other varieties, showing a deep ingrained influence of both native varieties in the Portuguese society, especially regarding BrE.

In the case of Brazil (Berto 2009), attitudes demonstrate that teacher trainees are more open-minded when it comes to what variety should be taught, as can be seen in the following table (see table 1):
Table 1. Varieties to be taught.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only AmE</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both AmE and BrE</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In addition to standard varieties, there should also be contact with ESL</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No other variety is needed besides ELF</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All varieties (AmE, BrE, ESL, ELF)</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must have contact with at least 2 varieties (AmE + ELF, AmE + BrE + ELF)</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results may reflect students’ experiences in ELT outside their degree in private schools where they teach older students and adults for professional reasons, and where language proficiency aims are different when compared to those in the academic sphere. In the former cases, students’ objectives are largely centered on communication in a multi-lingual and multicultural environment so as to prosper in their careers.

In Cape Verde (Nunes 2010), students’ opinions vary according to the different regions they belong to — center, periphery and rural areas. In the center, the number of students who believe they speak BrE is relatively high, 70% in total; however, as we distance ourselves from the city center, to the periphery and rural areas, students’ perception of their accents changes in favor of AmE with numbers as high as 50% and 80% respectively in each of the areas.

When comparing these results to those obtained concerning the variety that should be taught to Cape Verdaen students, the numbers seem quite similar, contrary to what was verified in Portugal. In the central area, 70% of the subjects believe BrE should be the variety taught, while in the periphery there is a 50/50 divide between BrE and AmE. Quite prominent is the number of students in rural areas who believe AmE is the variety that should be taught in schools, 90% to only 10% in favor of BrE.

These contrasting percentages may have to do with the fact that Cape Verdeans have long emigrated to the United States to escape poverty in the more rural and remote areas of the island; therefore, students’ contact with English in these areas is mostly with family members who are abroad, and many of them also intend to follow the same path.
4.3 The Issue of Native or Non-native English Teachers

In ELT, much has been discussed on the role of native and non-native teachers in expanding circle environments, debating on whether one or the other are the best models for language learning. In each of the case studies we analyze, this issue is also taken into consideration so as to receive some feedback from students, teacher trainees and ELT teachers.

In Cavalheiro’s study (2008), a group of ELT teachers (consisting of an equal number of native speakers and non-native speakers) are questioned, on a 4-point scale varying from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’, about native speaking teachers and non-native speaking teachers’ role in correct English language usage. In the first case, findings reveal native speakers have great influence in the correct usage of the language (66.7% ‘mostly agree’). However, all non-native teachers ‘mostly agree’ with the fundamental role of native speakers in correct English usage, but do not ‘strongly’ agree. These opinions may be associated with the fact that non-native teachers are traditionally not connoted with the same ideal status as their native colleagues. Nonetheless, they may be more prepared to explain and teach a language that they have learned as well, therefore, sharing the same doubts and anguishes as the learners. In the case of non-native English speaking teachers, respondents generally also agree with the fundamental role of non-native teachers in ELT (33.3% ‘strongly agree’ and 50% ‘mostly agree’). The only exception is one non-native speaker who ‘mostly disagreed’ with the statement. This may have to do with the fact that non-natives are English teachers as well and at times they may doubt themselves because they do not consider they are the most suitable when compared to natives. Gnurzmann (1999: 160) refers to this feeling as the “inferiority complex” on the part of the non-native speaker. Achieving a native speaker command of the language was traditionally the main objective for language teachers, however, nowadays native speaker competence is considered as an unrealistic and even counterproductive goal for non-native speakers. Recent findings reveal non-native teachers have a larger advantage when compared to their native colleagues in terms of common knowledge of their culture and the difficulties shared in learning English (i.e. false friends, syntax and vocabulary).
In Berto’s questionnaire (2009), 50% of the subjects were of the opinion that native speakers of English are the ones who have the right to dictate the rules of the language (comparing with 42% who disagree and 8% who do not know), while 63% claimed that non-native speakers must follow such rules (in comparison with 33% who do not agree and 4% who do not know). Most of the participants who share these beliefs were majoring in English and Portuguese, which may explain why they do not feel confident with their own use and/or knowledge of the language and, thus, do not see themselves as being able to “dictate” any rules.

When the subjects are questioned on whether native English teachers are in a better position to teach non-native students, the vast majority disagreed (92%) compared to only 8% who agreed. However, when asked if non-native teachers are in a better position than native teachers to judge which English should be taught to non-native students, opinions seem a bit ambiguous with 54% of the subjects agreeing, 33% who disagree and 13% who do not know.

Although these teacher trainees in Brazil seem more open minded when considering ELF in ELT, the idea of nativeness still seems to persist when concerning what varieties should be taught.

Lastly, in Cape Verde, subjects in general also believe that a non-native English speaking teacher can better suit their needs and realities (90% in the center, 70% in the periphery and 40% in the rural area). These numbers indicate that importance is given to qualified instructors, whether they are native to the language or not, especially in the center of the island; in the periphery and rural area, only 10% and 30%, respectively, believe an untrained native speaker is the most appropriate teacher for the archipelago — this may have to do with the fact that many from these areas have immigrated to native speaking countries and the learners wish to achieve similar competence as their family members. In addition, in the rural area, 30% of the students think that teachers who can help them achieve native-like competence in English are the most suitable for their context, therefore, these informants favor traditional teaching practices which focus on the acquisition of British lexicogrammatical features and phonology (RP pronunciation).
5. Final Remarks

In short, from the case studies here analyzed we can conclude that English plays a fundamental role in all three Portuguese speaking countries’ societies and that some reflection has already taken place concerning the particular context of ELT. It seems major native varieties, American and British English Standard still have significant influence over the communities, especially in the academic sphere. In the professional field, an ELF approach has a more favorable feedback, as communication is the ultimate aim, contrary to native speaker likeness many times implemented by teachers in the classroom. Nonetheless, the significant role of the non-native English speaker teacher seems to be present in all countries, as they are probably more familiar with the learners’ own experiences and with the ELT context of the country, contrary to most native speakers. All in all, these studies hope to pave the way to a better understanding of local practices and how they are integrated in the global context, in particular in these three countries which also share another lingua franca in common — Portuguese.

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ABSTRACT
Unlike other languages, English has spread to all continents and become a truly global language, a process observable in countries, like Brazil, Cape Verde, and Portugal, located in three different continents, and sharing a common official language: Portuguese.

This relatively recent development has contributed to the wide exposure to English and the growing influence of the language in their societies, being used with lingua franca communicative purposes, which raises pedagogical issues.

Our aim is to map the exposure and use of English as a Lingua Franca in these Portuguese speaking countries through a comparative study of the results from three case studies (Berto 2009, Cavaleiro 2008 and Nunes 2010).

By taking into consideration the findings from questionnaires answered by students and teachers of English, it compares and contrasts the respondents’ opinions on the profile of English teachers — native vs. non-native —, the varieties of English to be taught, and the language teaching resources available. In addition, it explores the learners’ interests, motives and purposes in relation to English and the potential communicative interactions between all speakers, so as to better understand ELF in English language education, and how these factors affect or should affect pedagogical practices in a Portuguese environment.

KEYWORDS
English as a lingua franca; Portuguese language; English language teaching; Non-native speakers

RESUMO
Ao contrário de outras línguas que existem, o inglês está presente em todos os continentes, tendo-se tornado numa verdadeira língua global, como por exemplo no Brasil, Cabo Verde e Portugal, localizados em continentes diferentes e com o português como língua oficial.

A expansão do inglês tem contribuído para um crescente contacto com a
língua, exercendo uma grande influência sobre as sociedades que usam com fins comunicativos. Esta realidade inevitavelmente levanta várias questões, especialmente no ensino.

Este artigo pretende delinear a realidade do inglês como língua franca nestes países de expressão portuguesa, desenvolvendo um estudo comparativo de três estudos de caso destinados a alunos e professores de inglês (Berto 2009, Cavalheiro 2008 and Nunes 2010). Reflectindo sobre as respostas dos questionários, este estudo compara e contrasta as opiniões relativamente ao perfil dos professores de inglês — falantes nativos vs. falantes não-nativos —, às variedades linguísticas a serem ensinadas e aos recursos disponíveis para o ensino. É ainda explorado os interesses, motivos e objectivos dos alunos ao aprenderem inglês, e as potenciais interações comunicativas entre falantes nativos e não-nativos, de modo a entender a função do inglês como língua franca no ensino, e como estes factores afectam as práticas pedagógicas no panorama português.

Palavras-chave
Inglês língua franca; Língua portuguesa; Ensino do inglês; Falantes não-nativos