



Portraying the Public Image of the English Teachers

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Abstract

The focus of this work brings to the surface, on the one hand, the ways English teachers in Bogotá have been portrayed in mass media and how its public image has been affected, ignoring English teachers' own voices, provoking silencing and inequality. In this sense, through collecting statements delivered by the main newspapers in their web versions, it was possible to define some particular issues which are silenced or promoted regarding the English Teacher and the English teaching in Colombia, particularly in its capital Bogotá since the establishment of current governmental programs (e.g. Bogotá Bilingüe, acuerdo 253 del Concejo de Bogotá 2006). On the other hand, it explores the role of British Council as an "access point" (Giddens, 1994), a place where the expert system fixes the low level of the English language foreign speakers, also it promotes a native-like identity that excludes other ways of being English teachers. The role of institutions and their relationship with a phenomenon as the subjectivity construction of English teachers during the last ten years was also perceivable in the collection of statements. These data have been put into circulation by the analyzed mass media, sometimes making some features more relevant than others and shaping the image of the English teacher.

Keywords: English Teacher, Bilingualism, Silencing, Access Point

1. Introduction

This paper gathers findings of the research project called *English Teacher Subjetividad y enseñanza del Inglés 2004-2016*. This research uses the archaeological perspective provided by Foucault (2008) to analyze notions such as subjectivity and the performance of power-knowledge as a regime of truth. Subjectivity serves as a domain to understand the role of the English teacher that has been built during the program *Bogotá Bilingüe* (2004) and its effects on the society and Education. The project of shaping Bogotá as a bilingual city set up an environment where it is possible to build subjectivity, institutions, and programs related to knowledge and forces of power that affect our way of thinking about the bilingual education and EFL teachers in Colombia. This work focuses on the media's role in the constitution of the English teacher and British Council's role in Colombia in charge of planning and applying for government programs.

2. English Teacher and Mass Media

This analysis is an archaeological exercise explaining the historical formation of English teaching through the revision of news about English teaching and the *Bogotá Bilingüe* program. For each piece of news, we check ways in which these matters are presented: the need for learning English, the depiction of its teaching, institutions, and programs to pursue Bogotá being a bilingual city.

English learning has been shown by media mainly as a way to ascend the social ladder, a need unsuccessfully fulfilled by teachers and institutions and a government duty for the country's development. The press speaks about the meaning of English learning as an authorized force which provokes reactions due to its direct statements. Media express opinions presented as unquestionable truths, promoting programs such as: "Plan Nacional Decenal de Educación (2006-2016)", "Plan Sectorial de Educación (2004-2008)", "Bogotá: Una Gran Escuela para que Niños, Niñas y Jóvenes Aprendan más y mejor" and "Bogotá Bilingüe (2004-2014)". Furthermore, media establish what matters when learning English, the way teaching has been managed in Bogotá, challenges it represents and results of different international tests that have been applied in Colombia, supported by the following: (taken mainly from *Revista Semana* (RS hereafter), *El Espectador* (EE hereafter), and *El Tiempo* (ET hereafter) making these elements relevant for the intervention in the public image of EFL teachers. We analyse those views through theoretical elaborations on discourse analysis coined by Chomsky (1991), Foucault (1982), and Touraine (2006) as provisional tools to back up this definition.

We unveil constitutive elements of "English teacher" viewed as the performer of specific practices. To illustrate this, in an article entitled: *Can the country change into bilingualism?* (Excerpts original in Spanish) published in *Educación* (2016) by RS it is stated: "the vital axis of the change into bilingualism is teachers

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(excerpts original in Spanish)” (p. 57). Here teachers are considered the focus in the problem. Then, some pages after, we find *English as the transformation engine* (excerpts original in Spanish) where we read: “To the British Council (BC hereafter) EFL teachers should be something more than instructors (excerpts original in Spanish)” (p.62). Again these statements label the EFL Teacher as needing repairing and intervention. To complete this vision of teachers, we read in *Why Don't We Speak English?* (Excerpts original in Spanish) (p.62) “most teachers, almost 65% have barely basic knowledge of English and only 33% reaches intermediate levels, accordingly to a research done by the Ministry of Education [MEN hereafter] in 2006 (excerpts original in Spanish)” (p. 22).

The presence of the MEN and the BC is noticeable in news as contributors to the “English teacher” image, presenting deficiencies. However, there are other attacks on bilingual practices and mother tongue competencies that media have promoted; in the RS web page in the article entitled: *The Ministry Strikes Back with Its Own Figures about Bilingualism* (excerpts original in Spanish) it is stated that “Gina Parody confirmed problems in Colombia regarding teachers who teach this language, and claimed that many teachers teach the English class using Spanish (excerpts original in Spanish)” (2015). And in the same issue, an article *Why Learn English If We Don't Speak Spanish Well Yet?* The following question is asked: “What is the purpose of adopting the mandatory second language teaching when in the mother tongue we do not get the minimum level in reading comprehension and neither the minimum in thinking development and ethical competences? (Excerpts original in Spanish)” (2014). This regards the Colombian educational system. However, how affecting can this be? So far, we call these points “struggles” which are the policies and institutions, teacher's and media's views that present and interpret this practice. Also, the “English teacher” is a phenomenon constituted by discontinuity. Nowadays, Mass media impacts should be understood as problem-cause. This involves now-called branches of thought and acute perspective.

In our case, bilingualism is the “transversal struggle” (Foucault; 1982) in this so-called globalized world. The magazine SR and the newspaper ET were our sources to evidence power exercised through a determination of the “English Teacher” as a “policies' promoter” performing their duty dwelling on the thought of English as a font of energy for economy. Finally, we may conclude that EFL teachers are depicted mainly through general assumptions, and many “antagonisms of strategies” (Foucault; p. 780) are invisible due to different media's interests. Upon diagnostic actions that constitute this set of administrative agents, we accept that English teaching degree programs are acquainted with what media such as RS, ET or EE have published. Many teachers who are not a part of this promoted negative view are teachers representing resistance to power.

3. British Landing

We analyse how the BC has been the ruling institution in the project *Bogotá Bilingüe*, its role in training policies of EFL teachers and as an “access point” (Giddens, 1994) where the system fixes the low level of English language foreign speakers and promotes a native-like identity that excludes other ways of being EFL teachers. Then, we depict how institutions such as BC, MEN, and *Secretaría de Educación de Bogotá* have been making policies about bilingual education following a specific purpose, taking advantage of the economic reality. To do this, firstly we show how the BC has developed the notion of cultural relationship. Secondly, how the *Bogotá Bilingüe* has been attached to governmental policies which follow BC standards through standardized exams, schools and teachers, even due “inglés estándar” (MEN, 2005). Finally, we describe the notion of access point that explains institution's discourses.

Since the end of the First World War the British government started to spread its culture around the world in order to create cultural relationships between the UK and the rest of the world. The BC was created by the UK in 1934 and has always been attached to the British Government's Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the British Embassy in countries where the UK embassy has been situated. It is a specialized institution which deals with the creation of cultural exchanging networks, building understanding and displaying British culture as an object providing economic value and hence, useful for the market society. In order to attain its objective, the BC has worked as a tailor of cultural relationships creating educational opportunities for British citizens and for citizens of allied countries. The BC's mission states that it is the main organization in the field of international cultural relationships (British Council, 2017a). From the definition of cultural relationship, involving face-to-face government-person and govern-govern relationships it can be said that English language, arts, and education grow as powerful tools to establish commercial relationships with the UK.

The advent of the BC has supported educational institutions following the pattern above. For instance, In Colombia there are 36 bilingual schools sponsored by the BC endorsed by the University of Cambridge through the International Certificate of Education (CIE). Ergo, those educational centres are boosted for the preservation and support of British culture. Using this, we explain the relationship among the *Bogotá Bilingüe* project, BC and the standard of the English teaching in Colombia. Firstly, the BC is the institution in charge of advising the government on standards of English as a foreign language. This organization and MEN have shaped guidelines to assess the English education by the tool named *Basic Standards of Competencies in*



Foreign Languages (excerpt original in Spanish) (MEN, 2006). Those standards were attached to the national bilingual program in association with the BC as advisor (MEN, 2006, p. 39).

In 2015, the BC launched a research around the richness of the bilingual program in Bogotá. Its findings were condensed in “English in Colombia: An examination of policy, perceptions and influencing factors” (British Council, 2015). They depicted the topic of international evaluation in Colombia in relation to the Common European Framework, and portray how the project on bilingualism in Colombia has been executed. Results were segmented by population characteristics and educative centres, in addition to the analysis of the last decade’s results of the BC’s English standardized exams.

The BC affirms it is an expert in the field of English Teacher Training (British Council, 2017b). On its web site, users can find a wide range of teacher’s courses. Those courses provide printed and multimedia material as well as evaluations, BC also sponsors Teacher Network. In relation to this we find a pedagogical approach the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL hereafter). CLIL promotes foreign language learning by studying a content-based subject (British Council, 2006). We infer that the teacher training is focused on teachers from different subjects who can enhance their professional development through this training in a foreign language. In October 2012, more than 100 teachers were trained following CLIL as the main approach (Darn, S, 2006). Its whole educative offer is supported by marketing strategies that involve mass media broadcasting and, of course, political lobbying. For instance, one of their strategies is based on building narrative threads that use statements provided by teachers “The advice and feedback provided by instructors really helped me to improve my teaching development and I feel that when the course ended I became a better teacher (excerpt original in Spanish)” (British Council, 2017c).

Nowadays, our society is moving towards technical knowledge, and teaching is no exception. Teachers are qualified by the teaching career ladder and, in terms of research, by COLCIENCIAS. At the same time, English teachers are qualified by the BC through standardized exams that allow them to be part of the market, thus setting up the BC as an “access point” (Giddens, 1994). An access point is where the expert system has contact with members of a specific community or society. Therefore, someone can become an expert when they have contact with the access point. Additionally, Helder (2000) states that “the development of expert systems has been generating a detachment between the expert knowledge and daily practices (excerpt original in Spanish)” (p 15).

Scientific knowledge has been developed in an endogenous way, therefore, the disclosure of its advances towards the society is problematic. As scientific advances (especially in human sciences) are not known by regular citizens in Colombia, a low cultural access is shown. The outcome of this is homogenization and silencing as “modern societies require in a growing way more consensus, increasing the risk of the dissent and conflict (excerpt original in Spanish)” (Helder, 2000, p. 16). Thus, expert institutions homogenize subjects and their subjectivity in relation to cultural and economic issues. The triumph of the British landing consists of the imposition of its culture, rich in expressions and knowledge, as a form of social staggering in Colombian society.

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