

ORTIZ, Renato (2008).

A diversidade dos sotaques: o inglês e as Ciências Sociais

São Paulo, Brasiliense, 231 p.

Abstract

The book discusses the centrality of English in the globalized world, especially in the context of science, and the negative aspects or little problematised that the position of supremacy of English means for Social Sciences. For the author, the fact that sociological concepts are intrinsically linked to specific contexts, including the very language used, makes it impossible the idea that English can function as a lingua franca, or universal in the study of society. The belief in this possibility arises from an improper rapprochement between the notions of “universal” and “global”.

Key words: English, globalization, mundialisation, science

English accents and traps in Science

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ORTIZ, Renato. *A diversidade dos sotaques: o inglês e as Ciências Sociais*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 2008. 231p.

Renato Ortiz start his new book *A diversidade dos sotaques: o inglês e as Ciências Sociais*, using this synthetic and unquestioned formularization: “The globalization declines preferably in English”. This show the central subject of the study: the English hegemony in the contemporary world, which produces new hierarchies and relations of force in the social life, analyzed in science domain. In which way the predominance of the English affects the reflection on the society? This would be something natural, justifying the replacement of other languages by English, or could impoverish the knowledge produced by the Social Science? These questions, says Ortiz (p. 9-10), were points that guided the research, in which the axis of language allows sounding themes as the construction of the scientific object and the new structures that determine the intellectual work. At the same time, the line adopted gives continuation of an analysis of the globalization of culture that the author has favored in his books, since *Mundialização e cultura* (1994).

The book is organized in two parts and a conclusive text (“Final Digression”). In the first part, calls “Language and Society”, presents a historical context about the idea of creating a universal or common language, that “in the situation of globalization, became a frightening nightmare” (p. 15), characterized by dispersion and dispossession of English, which becomes therefore an expression of globalization. This part is divided in chapters “From the scourge of diversity to the nightmare monolingualism” and “From the international to the global”. The second part of the book, “Language and Social Sciences”, in which the question of the role of English in science is discussed, also has two chapters: “Natural Sciences and Social Sciences” and “Scientific, scientometrics and foolishness”.

The book’s touchstone is the reflexivity, Ortiz deal with an aspect that seems obvious to everyone - the centrality of English. The construction of the object discusses the character of that evidence, using some empirical data, conceptual discussions and other interpretations, with whom debate. The author questions the “common sense” on the issues, including the “scientific

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overlay”, mobilizing their knowledge of the classics of sociology, but also a relevant literature on various aspects of the discussed themes. It is interesting attention how the author analyzes certain groups of texts, in which limits and injunctions of politics and ideological order are pointed, but they reveal able to condense arguments that heuristically “talk” of the globalization process, articulating the problematic of language to a broader movement. This is the case of the analysis of the texts of the alleged discipline of Linguistics called “English worldwilde”, performed in the second chapter of the first part.

The globalization is rightly highlighted, from which derives the question: “There is a conceptual discrepancy between the statements ‘English is an international language’ and ‘English is a global language’, or would be they fruit of terminology inaccuracies without bigger consequences?” (p. 73). Ortiz believes there are substantial differences, starting showing the disconnection between the linguistic studies and the thematic of the globalization, as the theoretical issues raised in the scope of the global world are only found in oblique way for the whom interested in the “international language”.

In the other side, the terms diffusion and dispersion that mark this literature – as in diffusionist source as theory of imperialism – they claim the existence of a center, from which it gave the expansion of a determined phenomenon, and the existence of clear borders between the exterior and the interior. However, in the “modernity-world” is precisely this aspect that transforms, as the author’s argument. In this reflection, Ortiz shows, in first place, from Durkheim and Mauss, that the space is a social category, in way that the current transformations (flexible capitalism, transnational cultural industries etc.) affect the way as it is designed. And so, it is necessary to differentiate internationalization and globalization. While the international notion related with the existence of distinct units (the nations), that have separations, boundaries and borders, in globalization occurs a change of perspective. The sociological object must be constructed now from a totality that set up the different parts of the contemporary world (the nation, the place, the province). Consider the English an international language implies to conceive it as an integrity that runs between the nations, separated from each other by well-defined spaces. The author’s conclusion is different, he believes that in the context of the globalization the English “leaves of being foreign, an element that imposes from outside, part of the modern-world condition” (p. 77). It is for deterritorialize it is that English can take a hyper-central position on the planet, becoming a global language.

Although reject the rigid approach of cultural imperialism, Renato Ortiz makes clear

that the process of globalization of culture is not neutral or harmony; on the contrary, promotes contradictions, conflicts and new types of legitimacy on a global scale. By acquiring wide coverage, the English language has become a world-wide instance of consecration of the linguistic expectations, which makes to appear a new border of exclusion: to be unaware of the English is to be illiterate in the modernity-world. This problems and conflicts dimension closed at the spread of English in the world and science, in particular, is the axle of the second part of the book. Probably, this part is the high point of the work. In the initial chapter of this part (“Natural Sciences and Social Sciences”) Ortiz makes a discussion on the role of language in science, in which the examination guideth a sociological reflection on the epistemological and the link between language (s) and science(s). Thus, the author observes initially, that the centrality of English is related to a process, derived from the second industrial revolution, in which science and technology had approached, integrating in the same system, marked by United States supremacy. This is evidenced by statistical data regarding the article publication in some scientific areas, that show the growth of the use of the English language, in way that the utopia of a universal language gives rise to English hegemony.

Although the situation receives critical, there is relative consensus among scientists about the use of English, which Ortiz interprets as the instrumentality that the language presents scientific speech in the natural sciences. This functional dimension of language and content of speech in the science of nature associates a type to it of use of the language that it looks to strip of all sociocultural load. In this manner, are produced sub-disciplinary languages, in which the sentences have certain positions, which means that the speech seeks to eliminate its maximum external characteristics, in favor of the information. The speech of natural sciences also operates from a series of interdictions (the taboo of the ego, the narrative and the metaphor), related to trying to produce in the reader an objectivity idea. Therefore, a language that fulfills such requirements can function as common language.

But this occurs in Social Sciences? From contributions such as Jean-Claude Passeron, who remembers that sociological concepts are tied to the particular contexts of research, Ortiz contests the possibility that English language functions as a standard language of Social Sciences. The sociological thinking is

between the ideal of universality (which is needed) and the roots of social phenomena. But in the search context we should add another point: the language. The sociological language comes marked for the requirements of its linguistic support. Context and language combine with each other. The

construction of the sociological object becomes through the language, use this or that language is not something fortuitous, mere subtlety of style, but a decisive dimension in the final formularization. The speech of natural sciences is justified because it can reduce the language, purified it from sociocultural impurity, something unthinkable in what it says respect to the understanding of the society. In this case, the English can't function as common language, not as a matter of moral principle or of national pride, but in virtue of the proper nature of constructed knowing. (p. 105-106)

The author gives examples of this characteristic of Social Sciences - that make the translations always more costly and less immediate, compared with the natural sciences. Between these, the proper genesis of the concept of “mundialisation”, elaborated by Ortiz to refer to the cultural dimension (non-homogenized) of the world in the process of “globalization”, a concept which, in turn, is connected to an idea of unity and uniformity in aspects such as economy and technology.

However, retaking the sociological discussion, Ortiz presents indices of publication and citation of works in English. The results shows, despite the inconsistency with the standards of Social Sciences, English impose itself as the “common language” in education (except certain differences in terms of disciplines and areas of knowledge). In the diversity of accents, a single language enjoys of the authority, able to establish a subtle hierarchy, placing itself at the center of the dominant linguistic relations.

The attempt to explain this situation is an aspect that gives unit to the following chapter of the book (“Scientific, scientometrics and foolishness”), that has as main argument the idea that the generalization of certain standards, naturalized and assumed with low criticality under science has favored the use of English. Thus, the use of quantitative analysis of science, derived of approach between the functionalist sociology and scientometrics, claims a scientific unicity that tends to understand the production of knowledge, because this activity is now viewed only in terms of its products (texts published or discoveries). The “foolishness” would be not in the use of the quantitative method, but in perceiving the pointers as the proper reality of the scientific field. However, this is crossed by disputes, in which the agents search to accumulate symbolic capital, gain greater authority. However, it is crossed by disputes, in which the players search to accumulate symbolic capital, gain greater authority. In this manner, in the processes of evaluation introduced by internal instances, amount is reappropriate by researchers in dispute for best competitive positions in the field, and just focus acquire institutional legitimacy. For the author's speech purpose, most important is emphasizing that

the English language becomes, in this context, a strategy of maximizing profits for actors, since the English allows researchers to assess higher incomes.

The negative in such logical is the institutionalization, on a large scale, what Merton called “Mateus effect” (due to the passage in the Gospel of St. Matthew which says: “For one who has much is given, he will have plenty, for which it has nothing will be withdrawn until it has the same”), which articulated from a whole chain of events: excellency - recognition - visibility - citations - language. In this process, in which the terms do not possess independent identity, the completeness of the cycle is favored by the use of the English language.

There are therefore a continuing devaluation of other languages, evidences, for example, in composition of the journals from databases, such as the Institute for Science Information (ISI), marked by linguistic distortion which has not prevented the use as instrument of mediation and criteria for distribution of symbolic capital. Ortiz emphasized that this model the “centrality in the world market of goods language implies the strengthening of a few nations” (p. 172), an internalisation of criteria for domination, therefore, the indiscriminate use of such indices would show, in the peripheral countries to the system. This is a significant example of the type of analysis that Ortiz searches to carry through. Based on the totality of globalization for, thus, understand local dynamic affected by it. In that sense, he notes that the configuration of the transnational linguistic market promotes to the center certain countries (U.S., but not to Rhodesia, despite the same language) and put others for their edge (more Spain and less Denmark).

At the end of the book, in “Final Digression”, the author makes an attempt to explain why, despite the shortcomings discussed, English becomes dominant in Social Sciences. This would be related to the capacity of the English “guide” the debate on a global scale, selecting and making visible certain issues. Presents a negative characteristic of standardization that produces no critical consensus, “a common sense planetarium, a mineralized know that no more doubts of himself” (p. 189). Ortiz believes that this trend to the standardization and pacification becomes current in the universe of the Humanities. Its makes that certain procedures and methodological problems (exemplified in the case of “cultural studies” and “multiculturalism”) are thought in so decontextualized in relation to their areas of origin, imposing itself as “universal” – maybe possible due to an improper equivalence between the notions of globalization and universalization. This approach would be problematic for deriving from the temptation of a spatial metaphor, ignoring that the “universal” is a philosophical

category, while “global” refers to a sociological context.

By put the universality of science in the language and not in the impersonal criteria, which the arguments must be submitted, such specific imperatives of the scientific universe stay in second plain. This promotes the collective illusion that the universal is what is delivered in English, while the provincialism down the other languages.

Against this and other traps, *A diversidade dos sotaques* warns their readers and interlocutors, among them certainly those interested in the issue of the scientific evaluation, their meanings and possibilities, particularly in Social Science. In this direction, since the theme of the evaluation contains not only a dimension of “technical management” of science, but also the social and ethical aspects, in accordance with internal (among researchers) and external (in the relationship between science and society), it will be interesting monitor possible extension of the reflection of himself Renato Ortiz, on this point, and the debates that the book can stimulate about it.