

Souza, A. (2014) 'Technology and language planning: the case of a Brazilian faith setting in London' in D. Mallows (ed) *Language issues in migration and integration: perspectives from teachers and learners*, London: British Council ESOL Nexus, 135-150.

Technology and language planning: the case of a Brazilian faith setting in London

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Introduction

The UK is one of the ten countries with the largest number of international migrants, i.e. individuals who have been living for one year or longer in a country other than the one in which they were born (UN, 2013). As migrants move, so do their faiths (Connor, 2012). As a consequence, the presence of religious groups from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds is common in cosmopolitan cities such as London.

London is the most ethnically diverse area in England and Wales, with over 40 per cent of its population belonging to minority ethnic groups (ONS, 2012). Churches have long considered these migrant groups to be in need of support as well as having an important role in supporting their formal religious activities. Father Steven Saxby¹, for example, has highlighted the role of churches in supporting migrants to connect with their religious identity and to integrate into the host society. Similarly, the role of migrants in contributing to the growing number of churches in England's capital has been noticeable. The London Churches Census shows that 27 per cent of the churches in London are either Pentecostal congregations attended by Black ethnic followers or smaller denomination churches attended by followers who are non-English (Brierley, 2013). This estimate is in addition to the number of migrants who attend larger denominations, such as Roman Catholic and Anglican churches.

In this chapter I focus on how the creation of virtual communities has impacted on the language choices of a Brazilian religious group based in London, the Kardecists. I will explore the interface of language, religion and technology with a focus on the faith lessons offered to the children of Kardecist Brazilian families. I will argue that the Kardecist faith leaders use technology to develop virtual transnational networks that support their language ideologies in relation to the transmission of religious beliefs.

The study

There are three main religions in Brazil that have been transplanted to the UK by migrants, and all of them are Christian: Catholicism, Pentecostalism and Kardecism. All three, represented by faith leaders from specific religious settings in London, were the focus of a pilot study I conducted in 2009. I explored issues of religious, ethnic and linguistic identities with the faith leaders through semi-structured interviews, with the aim of understanding the language planning and policy (LPP) being applied to the faith lessons designed for the children of the migrant families who attended their services. In addition to these interviews, I observed lessons, which allowed me to witness first hand the negotiation of languages between teacher-children and children-children.

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In trying to understand the LPP of faith settings, it became clear that technology, more specifically the internet, was playing an important role in the activities they organise. As Franklin (2007) highlights, 'accessing and moving with/in cyberspatial realms, engaging with other actors there ... remind us that any field, however defined, is porous rather than hermetic'. In other words, there is an interaction between online and offline domains. This interaction was acknowledged in this study and the websites mentioned by the faith leaders during their interviews were visited for a better understanding of their impact on the LPP of the faith settings and vice-versa.

The findings on the Catholic and the Pentecostal churches have been published elsewhere (see Souza et al., 2012). Therefore, this chapter examines the LPP of the Kardecist group with a special focus on the way technology is used to reinforce the language ideologies of its faith leaders.

Kardecist Brazilian migrants in London

The UK is in the top five European countries that contain the highest number of Brazilian migrants (IBGE, 2011). The latest official estimates show this group to have 118,000 members (MRE, 2012). This figure, coupled with unofficial estimates, means that Brazilians are the largest group of Latin Americans in London (McIlwaine et al., 2011), even though the movement of Brazilians abroad only started in earnest in the 1980s (cf. Jouët-Pastré and Braga, 2008). Moreover, Brazilians – unlike most migrant groups – are not linked to a specific area of London (Evans et al., 2011). Therefore, the Portuguese language can be used in all 33 boroughs of the English capital to do anything from buying food to attending therapy sessions (Souza, 2010). The significance of Portuguese was acknowledged in the 2012 London School Census, which shows it to be the eleventh most-spoken language among pupils in London schools (NALDIC, 2013). The Languages for the Future report reinforces the importance of Portuguese in the UK context and identifies it as one of the ten languages that should be learned to secure 'the UK's prosperity, security and influence in the world in the years ahead.' (Tinsley and Board, 2013:3)

It is in this context that at least 34 Brazilian churches in London flourished (Souza, forthcoming). One-third of these churches are in fact Kardecist groups. Kardecism is a Christian religion, which originated in France in the 19th century and which combines spirit-mediumship and reincarnationist beliefs. Brazilian migrants brought it to London in 1992 at a time when no other church catered for this specific group of migrants. Brazilian Kardecists in migration felt the need to meet for the study of the Spiritist Doctrine. Study groups are core activities for Kardecists, as the main aim of Spiritism is to 'morally transform individuals through rational faith'². The groups slowly grew and currently there are 11 Kardecist groups based in different boroughs in the four corners of London, including Greater London³. These groups, together with those in other parts of the UK, decided to organise themselves under one body. Therefore, the British Union of Spiritist Societies (BUSS) was founded in 1994. In fact, many of the BUSS workers belong to small centres (Centros Espíritas). BUSS is directly linked to the Spiritist Federation in Brazil (FEB4), which has an international council (CEI/ISC5). One of the main activities of BUSS is to promote and disseminate the Spiritist Doctrine through the organisation of international events with Brazilian guest speakers. However, each centre is responsible for organising its own activities, which may include open sessions to the general

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public, healing sessions, Spiritism Doctrine study groups, mediumship training, mediumship sessions, activities of social assistance, sessions catering specifically for families and study sessions for children.

The Kardecist study sessions for children

The Kardecist study lessons for children (Evangelição) take place once a week in parallel to the adults' study group meetings. They last one hour and 30 minutes and have an average of ten children per group. They aim to support the children in their psychological, emotional and moral development, with a focus on Christian values. In addition, depending on the children's age, the more scientific aspects of the Doctrine, such as reincarnation and life after death, are also explored.

Generally, the Kardecist co-ordinators in London have experience of Kardecism in Brazil and meet twice a year to design a curriculum. The co-ordinator of each centre and their teachers may also meet once a month to discuss the planning of individual lessons. The co-ordinators meet every two months with the co-ordinators of the adults' study groups in order to ensure symmetry between what is being studied by the children and by their parents. However, there is flexibility in relation to the time spent on a topic depending on the children's reaction and needs. The type of activities planned can also change, as in any teaching context.

One important aspect of Kardecism is that it has no intention of converting people from other religions. Science, philosophy and religion are three interconnected aspects of this Doctrine, which claims to respect and accept all other religions, as explained by one former co-ordinator:

We do not consider Spiritism to be the best religion in the world ... the Spiritist Doctrine is this, if you want to come, if you want to participate, you do not have to be Spiritist.⁷

As a consequence, Spiritism is taught to the children but the aim of the Evangelição sessions is not to ensure that they become Spiritists. Nevertheless, the former co-ordinator acknowledges that 'if [the children] become Spiritist, it is good because they are the ones who will take Spiritism forward,' a view that seems to influence the language policy of the activities being planned for their children.

Language planning and policy

In 1998, 75 per cent of the internet was in English and only 0,82 per cent was Portuguese⁸. The reasons for this were varied, but included the economic and geo-political status of the different countries where these languages are spoken and the status of English as a lingua franca in business, science and education (Palacios, 2001). Nevertheless, considering that the world population has three per cent more speakers of Latin languages than of English, the need for language planning in defence of cultural diversity and national identities was advocated by Alain Rouquié, the French Ambassador to Brazil between 2000 and 2003 (op.cit). The ambassador's perceived threat of the dominance of English on the internet in the beginning of the 21st century was also felt in relation to the maintenance of Portuguese by lay people in Brazil (Fiorin, 2008). English has indeed maintained its position as the dominant language on the internet. However, its use fell to 45 per cent in 2007⁹ and, contrary to the initial pessimistic forecasts, statistics in 2013 showed Portuguese to be the fifth most used language on the internet¹⁰ in general and third on Facebook and

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Nonetheless, the threat of technology to the transmission of minority languages due to English being accepted as the language of this medium remains and has been highlighted by Annamalai (2005). In his article on Indian languages, Annamalai presents the example of the Andamanese to discuss the negative impact of technology on multilingualism. This example is an extreme one, as acknowledged by Annamalai himself, in which a language did not have time to adapt to the technology introduced into a community as a consequence of social change. Independent of the depth of social change that accompanies the introduction (and/or development) of technology into a community, it is useful to know how technology is used, by whom and for what purpose to better understand its impact (Annamalai, 2005). In relation to language, it is relevant to consider the multiple functions of a language such as expressing thoughts and feelings, relating to others, experiencing life and praying (Fiorin, 2008). Indeed, religion plays an important role in the maintenance and shift of languages (Spolsky, 2003).

It can be argued that religious organisations should be included in the group of institutions that can make their own language policy (Souza et al., 2012). Religious institutions are social spaces that have their own policies. They may control the internal forces of their domain but are also influenced by external forces (Spolsky, 2007). As internal forces of a domain, Spolsky (2007) presents three components of language policy: practices, beliefs, and management.

- Language practices are what people do with the languages in their repertoire
- Language beliefs, also referred to as ideology, are the values assigned to the different languages and their varieties.
- Language management, also known as planning, is the effort made to modify the practices and the beliefs of a group.

These components are used to explore the LPP of the Kardecist group in this chapter.

Language practices

As explained above, Kardecism is mainly practised by Brazilian Portuguese speakers and its roots have been moved from France to a mother institution in Brazil, FEB – the Brazilian Spiritist Federation. The language used on FEB's website¹² is Portuguese, including on the sub-link for CEI¹³, their international department. In order to find information in English, a number of pages in Portuguese have to be read before the link to the page in English¹⁴ is found. Even within the international link, the prevalence of Portuguese is obvious. The international newsletter available through this link is downloaded in Portuguese at least twice as many times as in English. Interestingly, however, the number of downloads of courses on Spiritism is the same in English but falls to zero in Portuguese.

These differences appear to indicate that the English speakers are new followers who are learning its basic concepts. The Portuguese speakers, in turn, seem to be accessing recent information on the activities of the different centres as well as articles on recent developments of the Doctrine.

The prevalence of the use of Portuguese by Kardecists is confirmed by the fact that most of the books available for adults in the FEB online bookshop are in Portuguese¹⁵. There is a rich collection of Kardecist books for children in Portuguese but these are only found via other

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publishers. Nonetheless, FEB has a special department dedicated to the religious education of children and young people, DIJ. The information here is also in Portuguese, both for the co-ordinators and teachers¹⁶ as well as for the children¹⁷ themselves. Even TVcei¹⁸ – a site within the FEB's international DIJ and which links the Spiritism Doctrine to everyday life through a large number of activities including videos, music, painting, poetry, art craft, stories, science experiments, games and health tips – is all in Portuguese.

There is a striking change in the online language practices of the Kardecist centres in London in comparison to the ones in Brazil. As explained above, the Kardecist centres in London were started by Brazilian migrants. Therefore, it was natural for their first websites to be in Portuguese as all of their face-to-face services were offered in Portuguese only. As time went by, despite not having conversion as a key issue, migrant Kardecists realised the importance of ensuring the survival of their beliefs by disseminating them to people of other ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, many of the centres nowadays offer separate services in English. It is also usual practice for events to be translated into English to the small groups of non-Brazilians who attend, as can be seen in a number of presentations available on YouTube¹⁹. This change from mainly supporting Brazilian migrants to also disseminating the Doctrine has led to the adoption of the local language online. The spiritists website BUSS²⁰ is nowadays entirely in English.

This change in the language practices of Kardecists in London has also affected the study sessions they offer to children (Evangelição). Until 2009, Portuguese was the language used in these sessions by both the teachers and the children. From 2010, however, English has been selected as the language of communication in the delivery of these lessons. Both practices, the initial adoption of a Portuguese-only policy and the present English-only policy, were based on the values assigned to these languages by the Kardecist leaders (i.e. co-ordinators and teachers).

Language beliefs

Traditional religions that are part of larger denominations tend to give importance to the maintenance of the original language of their sacred texts (Spolsky, 2003). As typical examples, it is possible to mention the sacred role of Arabic for Muslims and Hebrew for Jews (Joseph, 2004). Latin used to be a sacred language for Catholics, but was replaced by the use of vernacular languages in the Second Vatican Council of 1962–65 (Woods, 2006). Protestant and Pentecostal Christians have always favoured communication with God in vernacular languages to emphasise the personal nature of their relationship with God (Woods, 2004). The case of Kardecism is very interesting as it originated in France but really flourished in Brazil, meaning that Portuguese is the main language used in publications and online sources, as described in the previous section. With the emigration flows from Brazil in the last 30 years or so, Kardecist leaders in the UK and other English-speaking countries have considered it relevant to adopt the local language in their activities. One of the reasons given by one of their teachers is as follows:

It is important to learn the words, as they are different from the ones we use in everyday life. There are specific words [and] I had to buy the Book of the Spirits in English to learn them ...

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this way I can explain [what Spiritism is] to other people. I think that all [our activities] should be in English ... [so that] we can disseminate [the Spiritism to non-Brazilians].

The strong links of migrant churches with religion are to be expected. Nevertheless, as shown in a 2012 study by Souza et al., the strength of the links with ethnicity and language vary among different religious organisations. The REL triangle – a threedimensional framework which examines religion, ethnicity and language as relevant aspects of identity being negotiated in migrant churches – was developed in that study. The application of the REL triangle shows that the theological orientations of the faith leaders in Catholic and Pentecostal congregations – along with the linguistic and cultural identity they and their followers hold to their countries of origin, as well as those held by their teachers, the children who attend the faith lessons and their parents – guided their decisions about language planning for the children's faith lessons. In the case of the Kardecist leaders, language was initially seen as closely linked to ethnicity as well as providing support for the adult Brazilian migrants and enabling the children to maintain links with their Brazilian heritage. This view changed in 2010, as the teacher explains:

[The children] are born here but have Brazilian parents, the parents want the children to practise their Portuguese in the Kardecist study sessions ... but these lessons are not Portuguese lessons. Of course, we are Brazilian but everything is in English.

In other words, the Kardecists value their religious identities over their ethnic and linguistic identities, in spite of highlighting the links that speaking Portuguese and being Brazilian have for them. These beliefs have led to explicit management of the language practices in the Kardecist study sessions offered to the children.

Language management

The Kardecist parents had expressed their preference for the use of Portuguese in the Evangelização sessions as a way of developing their children's linguistic competence in this language, as illustrated above. The first group of coordinators and teachers respected that and ensured that Portuguese was the only language used in the sessions. However, conflicts between the beliefs of different stakeholders are common (Spolsky, 2007; Souza et al., 2012). In 2010, the Kardecist groups signalled a move towards a stronger emphasis on the religious aspect of their identities and away from their linguistic identity as speakers of Portuguese. Therefore, English was selected as the language of communication, an imposition on both the parents and the children, as explained by one of the teachers:

[The children] have no option; they have to speak English. It is so much so that when I told them [about the use of English in our sessions], they said no, they did not want it ... they are children of Brazilian parents, the parents know each other, they socialise, so the children are used to speaking Portuguese to each other.

Nevertheless, the Kardecist leaders' decision to adopt English for the Evangelização has found support elsewhere, as explained by the present co-ordinator:

[One of our teachers] has personal and online contacts in other Englishspeaking countries. We access the plans provided by FEB online in Portuguese and translate them. We then exchange lesson plans [with the groups in other English-speaking countries] via the internet.

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In other words, the teaching materials that used to be produced locally in Portuguese are now exchanged online with Brazilian Kardecist migrants in other parts of the world such as Canada and the USA. Besides translating the booklets made available online by FEB, materials designed in Portuguese by Kardecists based in Brazil are shared online with other groups in that country and abroad via the website of a Brazilian Kardecist centre. This is an example of online connections that have offline roots (Hutchings, 2010 in Lundby, 2011:1,225). In this case, the roots are based on the Kardecist centre called Seara do Mestre, which is based in a small town in the south of Brazil. The Kardecists abroad select the materials that they find interesting and translate them, mainly into English, but there are also translations into Spanish and German, reflecting Brazilian migration to countries that speak these languages. That most of the materials are produced in Portuguese and then translated into English, however, is clear from the list of links presented on the Seara do Mestre website²¹ – a result of patterns of Brazilian emigration which has resulted in over 40 per cent of its members living in English-speaking countries (MRE, 2012).

This website is an example of Web 2.0, with the user seen as a producer of information, instead of just a consumer (O'Reilly, 2005 in Shelton et al., 2012:604). This technology enables interplay between old and new media, which allows for new forms of participation and collaboration and, thus, transforms how producers and consumers relate to each other (Jenkins, 2006 in Oosterbaan, 2011:58). In the case of the Kardecist group in London, traditional lesson plans are being shared through the use of a website. This sharing is allowing their religious beliefs and identities to be maintained at the same time as it enables the faith leaders and teachers abroad to implement changes to their LPP.

Concluding remarks

The use of media by organised religions increased in the 1980s (Lindlof, 2002), when it also started to be documented (Campbell, 2005). The global spread of Pentecostal churches has been accompanied by a steady appropriation and use of many types of mass media (Oosterbaan, 2011). Although there is a belief that mass media solely target evangelical Christian churches, this chapter shows that other Christian religions, such as Kardecism, also draw on media and technology to reach their followers. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the internet, a new way through which people can make connections to engage in religious matters (Campbell, 2004). The internet is an online space, which interacts with, and influences, offline spaces (Oosterbaan, 2010). One example of this online-offline interaction is in language maintenance. The internet enables contact between migrants and their countries of origin and thus can support the maintenance of multilingualism (Annamalai, 2005). The Catholic congregations in Souza et al.'s 2012 study confirm the role of technology in supporting the maintenance of heritage languages through links with their countries of origin, while also supporting the addition of the language of the host country to the linguistic repertoire of migrants. In other words, they are part of a transnational context in which they have been established in a host country but continue to have links to their countries of origin (Levitt, 2003). In the case of the Kardecist group in this chapter, it is clear that their transnational links are not limited to these two places – host country and country of origin. On the contrary, the Kardecists have developed a web of different links in the modes of the transnational religious

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spaces described by Sheringham (2011), and which includes Brazilians in Brazil and Brazilian migrants in other parts of the globe. Furthermore, the Kardecists' transnational religious spaces include Brazilian and other ethnic groups that share the same religious beliefs both in the UK and abroad.

This complex web has led Portuguese to be maintained as a key language within Kardecism. Nevertheless, spaces have been created online and offline for the use of other languages, such as English, Spanish and German. In the case of the centre discussed in this chapter, the faith leaders report that they believe that the Kardecist lessons for children should always be delivered in English. Nevertheless, the power that the language practices of individuals has in the micro-level of language planning (Ferguson, 2010) is noted by the faith leaders themselves at two different levels. Firstly, there is the autonomy that the different centres linked to

BUSS have in relation to the choices they make about a number of issues, including LPP. As illustrated below by a teacher, there is recognition that not all centres adopt English with the children.

A previous co-ordinator in [this other centre] said: 'I will only be the coordinator if [the Kardecist study lessons for children] are in English.' ... now I think they are back using Portuguese because [this co-ordinator] has left.

The quote above also shows that the language policies in the centres may change as migrants move. The movement of migrants also affects the language practices, especially when newly arrived migrants are yet to master the local language. In spite of being encouraged to improve their English, both newly arrived teachers and children are allowed to draw on Portuguese in order to fully participate in the religious activities. Nevertheless, the use of Portuguese by children who have already mastered English has also been witnessed in the lesson observations and acknowledged by the co-ordinator:

... all the children speak Portuguese [and] it is interesting [to notice] that they mix [languages]. They are speaking English [as part of the lesson] then suddenly they turn to a colleague and speak Portuguese.

In conclusion, this chapter shows that Kardecist faith leaders in London use the internet for two purposes. The first is to connect with offline spaces that strengthen their religious beliefs, while the second is to implement changes in the language practices of the sessions they offer to children via the creation of a virtual community. The micro-perspective adopted in this chapter (i.e. the focus on micro-planning initiatives of a community) has enabled an understanding of the internal forces of the language policy Kardecist faith leaders adopt in the religious context and how these choices are supported by the use of technology. This initial exploration of the interface of language, religion and technology suggests a set of new questions: How are the language choices of the Kardecist leaders affected outside of the study lessons they deliver? What is the effect of the limited number of materials on Kardecism in English for children, both online and offline? How far, how and for what purpose is technology being used by the children? Addressing these questions will enrich future studies on whether technology is contributing to or threatening the transmission of minority languages.

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