

**(SELF) REFLECTION ON A REMOTE ENGLISH CLASS THROUGH THE  
DIALOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MEMES**

**(AUTO) REFLEXÃO SOBRE UMA AULA REMOTA DE LÍNGUA INGLESA POR  
MEIO DA ANÁLISE DIALÓGICA DE MEMES**

**(AUTO) REFLEXIÓN SOBRE UNA CLASE DE INGLÉS REMOTA A TRAVÉS  
DEL ANÁLISIS DIALÓGICO DE MEMES**

Samuel de Carvalho LIMA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** Under the light of the dialogical perspective of language, this paper presents a (self) reflection on a remote English class through the analysis of memes. The experience of promoting the dialog about the pandemic and the democratization of internet access with young people and adults from secondary education in a federal public school is discussed. The analysis of memes demonstrates that their verbal language responds creatively to images of scenes from a Brazilian soap opera and a Hollywood film, denouncing the lack of the democratization of internet access through humor and irony. It is concluded that the reading of memes in English class for young people and adults can both promote reflection on the expressive resources that constitute these texts and demand from students' responses to the discourses about internet access in Brazil.

**KEYWORDS:** Remote teaching. English language. Memes. Verb-visibility. Public school.

**RESUMO:** À luz da perspectiva dialógica da linguagem, este artigo apresenta uma (auto) reflexão sobre uma aula remota de língua inglesa por meio da análise de memes. Discute-se a experiência de promover o diálogo sobre a pandemia e a democratização do acesso à internet com jovens e adultos do ensino médio de uma escola pública federal. A análise de memes demonstra que a sua linguagem verbal responde criativamente a imagens de cenas de uma novela brasileira e de um filme hollywoodiano, denunciando a falta de democratização do acesso à internet por meio do humor e da ironia. Conclui-se que a leitura de memes, na aula de língua inglesa para jovens e adultos, pode promover a reflexão sobre os recursos expressivos que constituem esses textos e demandar dos estudantes respostas aos discursos sobre o acesso à internet no Brasil.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Ensino remoto. Língua Inglesa. Memes. Verbo-visualidade. Escola pública.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rio Grande do Norte (IFRN), Mossoró/Natal - RN - Brazil. Professor of the Graduate Program in Teaching (POSENSINO). PhD in Linguistics (UFC). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7145-3686>. E-mail: [samuel.lima@ifrn.edu.br](mailto:samuel.lima@ifrn.edu.br).

**RESUMEN:** *A la luz de la perspectiva dialógica del lenguaje, este artículo presenta una (auto) reflexión sobre una clase remota de lengua inglesa a través del análisis de memes. Se discute la experiencia de promover el diálogo sobre la pandemia y la democratización del acceso a internet con jóvenes y adultos de educación secundaria en una escuela pública federal. El análisis de memes demuestra que su lenguaje verbal responde creativamente a imágenes de escenas de una telenovela brasileña y una película de Hollywood, denunciando la falta de democratización del acceso a internet a través del humor e y la ironía. Se concluye que la lectura de memes en clase de inglés para jóvenes y adultos puede promover la reflexión sobre los recursos expresivos que constituyen estos textos y demandar respuestas de los estudiantes a los discursos sobre el acceso a internet en Brasil.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Enseñanza remota. Inglés. Memes. Verbo-visualidad. Escuela pública.*

## Introduction

The pandemic of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) and the consequent social distancing caused the adoption of remote education by Brazilian educational institutions. In response to this, the academic sphere has produced reflections on the relations between this socio-historical context and the public school (ALVES; SILVA, U.S.; BESSA, 2021; BASTOS; LIMA, 2020; PAES; FREITAS, 2020; among others). Considering the need to expand discussions on topics that require intelligibility in times of crisis, this article presents a (self) reflection on a remote English language class through the analysis of memes.

It is recognized that studies on the relationship between memes and English language teaching have been fruitful even before the pandemic, through investigations that share theoretical perspectives aimed at a pedagogy of multiliteracies (ARRUDA; RUE; ARAÚJO, 2017; GOOD LUCK; SANTOS, 2020; FERREIRA, FERREIRA, PESCE, 2019; XAVIER; OLIVEIRA; SOUZA, 2019). On the other hand, this article is based on the productivity of the interrelationship between the dialogical perspective of language and the teaching of English language in public schools, discussing the experience of promoting dialogue on the pandemic and the democratization of internet access with young people and adults of integrated high school of a federal public school.

It is worth mentioning that the discussion of this article is part of the set of research of (self) reflections on English language teaching in the context of the public school that have been carried out by the members of the Research Group on Language Teaching-Learning - GEL (IFRN/CNPq) in Oeste Potiguar, Rio Grande do Norte (DANTAS,

LIMA, 2021; LIMA, 2021; Lima, LIMA; MENDES, 2020. Such research endorses the positioning of an Applied Linguistics that claims that "[...] the theories and approaches in the Metropolis do not always serve the interests of the periphery" (RAJAGOPALAN, 2013, p. 154).

The article is organized into 5 sections. In addition to this introduction, the next section characterizes the meme as enunciated/text constituted by a verb-visually in the light of the dialogical perspective of language. Later, the understanding about English language teaching and how it was updated in a remote class for reading memes is explained. In the analysis section of the memes, the relationships between verbal language and the image that constitute the texts that were addressed in the English language class are demonstrated. Finally, in the final considerations, the pedagogical and methodological implications of the discussion are presented.

### **Meme as utterance/verb-visual text**

To characterize the meme as enunciated/text constituted verbal-visually, it is based on the dialogical perspective of language, which understands language as discursive interaction (VOLÓCHINOV, 2018). In this perspective, the language is studied in its process of realization, assuming uninterrupted and linked to its ideological content. Thus, language as a social practice is conceived as a materialized discourse through its units of the discursive flow, that is, the concrete utterances/texts. As units of the discursive flow, every utterance responds to something and is oriented to a response, all uttered "[...] participates in a kind of large-scale ideological discussion: it responds, refutes, or confirms something, anticipates possible responses and criticisms, seeks support and so on" (VOLÓCHINOV, 2018, p. 219). Assuming the dialogue broadly, that is, any form of discursive interaction, we discuss the coexistence of what Bakhtin (2015) calls contradictions between present and past and between different times of the past, seeking to understand the extraverbal situation closer and the broad situation of the texts circulating in society.

Bakhtin (2016, p. 12, emphasis added) stresses that "each particular utterance is individual, but each field of use of the language *elaborates its relatively stable types of utterances*", the genres of the discourse. Every utterance has a subject who, when he/she realizes his discursive intention, determines the completeness of the utterance: the choice of object, limits and semantic-object exhaustibility. Thus, as a unit of discursive

communication, the limits of each utterance are defined by the alternation of the subjects who participate in the dialogue.

According to Brait (2016), addressing utterances/texts, taking into account Bakhtin's studies and the Circle, motivated what is called today's dialogical analysis/theory of discourse, a perspective that has proved very productive in Brazil (cf. BRAIT, 2016; 2017). In this theory, the utterance/text is considered the primary data of linguistic, philological, literary and human sciences analysis in general, because "the text is conceived in the broad sense as any coherent set of signs [...] thoughts about thoughts, experiences of experiences, words about words, texts on texts" (BAKHTIN, 2016, p. 71-72).

The plasticity of Bakhtinian contributions has enabled the discussion about the texts that are constituted through the relationship between verbal language and image. In Brazil, since the 1990s, Beth Brait has been treating what the author calls the verb-visual dimension of a text in a dialogical perspective. In dealing with the whole of Bakhtin's work and the Circle, Brait (2013, p. 45) points out that these studies contribute to a theory of language in a broad way, enabling the treatment of visuality, also considering the reflections on the treatment of the visual stemming from "aesthetics, philosophy, sometimes from an aesthetic-philosophical, the different semiotics (Peircean, Russian), of Roland Barthes' semiology in his texts on photography, rhetoric of the image." The author distinguishes studies from the visual, especially related to art, from a study that discusses the verbal and visual articulated in a single text, "what can happen in art or outside it" (BRAIT, 2013, p. 50), the focus of her interest to deal with texts situated in which dialogical relationships are taken as a founding category that allows discussion about its constitutive verb-visuality. In these texts:

both verbal and visual language play a constitutive role in the production of meanings, of meaning effects, and cannot be separated, under penalty of amputating a part of the plane of expression and, consequently, the understanding of the forms of production of meaning of this utterance, since it is seen/read simultaneously (BRAIT, 2013, p. 43, our translation).

In the light of the dialogical perspective of language, therefore, in this study, the meme is characterized as a verbal-visual text, because verbal language and image play a constitutive role in the production of meanings. It is also assumed that in dialogical research there is permeability of the convictions, experiences and experiences of the researcher in relation to his research, and it is up to the researcher to try to distance himself

from his objects to hear them and reflect on them (ROHLING, 2014). Thus, it is possible to make (self) reflections on English language teaching, in the context of public school, from the analysis of the memes used in a remote class for young people and adults, on the pandemic and the democratization of internet access. The next section explains the understanding of English language teaching and how it was updated in a remote class for reading memes.

### **The English language classes**

In the context of the health crisis of the new coronavirus and the consequent social distancing, internet access *is a sine qua non condition* for the adoption of remote education. Thus, the debate about how English language teaching in Brazilian public school has addressed this social reality is fundamental.

The National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) provides for the understanding of the English language as a lingua franca. By adopting this nomenclature, the various uses that subjects make of the English language to communicate and exercise their citizenships in the globalized world are considered (BRASIL, 2018). Considering that this perspective can be taken to the English language classroom through different pedagogical proposals (methods and approaches), this article opts for the discussion proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2016).

The reflections proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2016) denounce the discourses they have operated before and during the 21st century to promote discrimination and inequality in the area of English language teaching. One of these discriminatory discourses is still capable of subordinate English-speaking Brazilians through the idealization of the native speaker, also criticized by Rajagopalan (2013), Anjos (2019) and others. It is understood that, in the relationship between native speakers and non-native speakers, Brazilians discriminate against each other by wishing to resemble the native who will never be, while being subordinated by those who use this myth to promote asymmetries between language teachers, because this myth determines that the native speaker is the only authority in the debate on methods and materials for teaching English.

To combat this problem, it is proposed the circulation of a discourse that fights the asymmetries between English language teachers, legitimizing them by their academic background to teach the English language as an expressive resource that enables subjects to interact with each other in a heterogeneous and diverse globalized world. Thus, based

on Gramsci's philosophy (1971) and Mignolo's decoloniality (2010), Kumaravadivelu (2016) points out five possibilities for the construction of an agenda for the teaching of the English language, summarized below (Chart 1):

**Table 1** - Summary of Kumaravadivelu's proposal (2016) for English language teaching.

I.	Promote results-oriented strategies focused on intelligibility.
II.	Develop specific instructional strategies in and to the local historical, political, social, cultural and educational context.
III.	Prepare materials appropriate to the specific context and teaching strategies developed.
IV.	Restructure teacher training with a view to training producers and not just consumers of knowledge and materials.
V.	Do proactive research through original knowledge.

Source: Prepared by the author

It is based, therefore, on these reflections and the premise that "the educator is no longer what he only educates, but what, as an education, is educated, in dialogue with the student who, when educated, also educates" (FREIRE, 2019, p. 95-96), to promote dialogue about the pandemic and the democratization of internet access in an English language class that sought to develop specific strategies of and for the historical context, political, social, cultural and educational local.

To explain how English language teaching was updated in a remote class for reading memes, this study approaches the characteristics of autoethnography, i.e.: ethnographic, interpretive and autobiographical basis. Thus, "reflexivity assumes a very important role [...] imposes the constant awareness, evaluation and reassessment made by the researcher of his own contribution" (SANTOS, 2017, p. 218). Taking this into account, the context of the research is described, that is, the context of the researcher's professional practice, while the materials for analysis are being used in the remote class.

The context of the professional practice of the author of this article refers to a federal public school that offers, among other courses, high school integrated to professional education in the modality of Youth and Adult Education. Due to the social distancing, after a certain period of adaptation, the institution began to adopt a plan for the resumption of its activities, which regulates remote education through the use of digital resources, for the development of synchronous and asynchronous activities. In this context, it was defined that the teaching work plan should include a variety of digital technologies to offer 70 to 90% of the disciplines with asynchronous activities (video classes, forms, reading materials, etc.) and, consequently, 10 to 30% with synchronous activities.

In response to the agreed regulations, a 60-minute class was planned for the English II discipline in the modality of Youth and Adults. The class aimed to read texts in English so that it was possible to reflect on contemporary themes that corresponded to the social reality of the students – historical, political, social, cultural and local educational context. We chose to search for materials appropriate to this specific context, selecting memes that circulated in digital environments and dealt with the theme about internet access. Thus, the memes were treated as authentic texts, easy access, quick sharing, wide circulation, through which it was also possible to approach the grammatical content provided for in the program of the discipline on the use of verbal tenses to talk about *ongoing actions and past events (present continuous; simple past, past continuous, present perfect etc.)*, since the meme can be described by using *present continuous* to inform what is happening in the image at the present time and by the *use of simple past* and *continuous past* to inform what happened and was happening in the image in the context of production from which it was removed.

Considering the development of results-oriented strategies focused on intelligibility, we chose to discuss memes with expressive resources in Portuguese at the first moment of the class, starting from what students already know, familiarizing students with reading these verb-visual texts before presenting them in English. Approaching the memes as utterances, these texts were taken to the English-language classroom. In the next section, the relationships between verbal language and image are the memes that were addressed in the remote English language class are demonstrated.

### **Dialogical analysis of memes**

In the memes selected for analysis, it is possible to notice that the verbal and visual are articulated in a single text. As previously pointed out, when considering the specific instructional strategy of the local cultural and educational context, highlighted by Kumaravadivelu (2016), and the target audience – young students and Brazilian adults – we chose to approach memes with verbal language in Portuguese at the beginning of the English language class. It is recognized that the strategy adopted openly polemizes with the pedagogical discourse on English language teaching that insists on demand that an English class, even among Brazilians, be taught all in English and/ or with materials exclusively in English. However, the perspective of English language teaching adopted in the integrated high school legitimizes the use of Portuguese and English in an English

class, since its participants feel more comfortable with the use of both languages, mainly due to the lack of familiarity with the expressive resources in English language on the part of the students. Thus, it is chosen to integrate memes that are culturally articulated with the Brazilian context to start the dialogue (Figure 1).

**Figure 1** - Meme on internet access.



Source: Meme Generator (2021)

The text "I'm rich!" gained great popularity in the Brazilian everyday sphere, after being told by Norma, character of the actress Carolina Ferraz, in a scene from the Brazilian telenovela entitled *Beleza Pura*, from Rede Globo, broadcast on open TV in 2008. In the narrative of the novel, "I am rich" challenges the discourse of justice, because its authorship is of a subject who, due to the accumulation of material goods, can commit crimes and go unpunished in the country. In portraying this narrative at 7:00 p.m., the telenovelist discourse openly criticizes the Brazilian justice system, using irony to stereotype this economically privileged character and its harmonious relationship with the transgression of national laws.

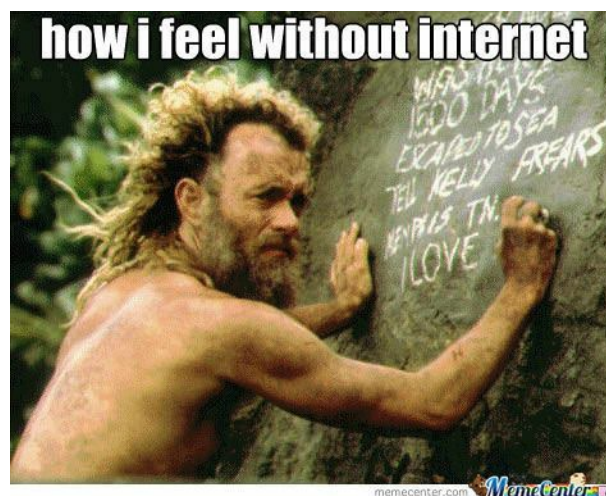
When the photo of the character, Norma, in the scene of the novel, is brought to the constitution of the meme circulating in the context of the pandemic in 2020, one notices how much the popularity of her senses, effects of meaning, remains high to the present day. Constitutively integrating the meme on canvas, the character's authoritarianism is stylized both by the facial expressions of the image and by the repetition/quadrupling of expressive resources to produce the sense effect of an elongated cry: reiteration of vowel "i" and the letter "h" and exclamation point. In the meme, the verbal text "HAS INTERNET ON MOBILE. I AM RIIICHHH!!!!" is born separately from the visual text, although part of it remains explicitly alluding to the 2008 image. This dialogical relationship between the verbal text and the visual text is explained by



Brait (2013, p. 52, the author's griffin) in his analysis of Dostoevsky's narrative of *The Double*, a version illustrated by Alfred Kubin (1877-1959): "The relationship that is established between both, however, is not simple and submissive legend, but, on the contrary, it is one of *enthening*, response to the creative process of the former [...]". In this case, verbal language and image are interrelated in the constitution of the selected meme in a non-controversial way, sticking to each other, and verbal language responds to the creative process of the soap scene.

In 2020, when social distancing and the consequent remote teaching are intensely based on the journalistic sphere, cases of lack of access to digital technologies, especially the Internet, multiplied in the news of the major Brazilian media. Although the verb-visual interrelations constitutive of the meme selected by the teacher-researcher are of the non-controversial type, the meme, as text and authentic material for language teaching, when approached in the remote English class, enters into the large-scale ideological discussion to denounce the lack of democratization of the Internet, that is, the fata of access to digital technologies with the necessary quality to guarantee the constitutional right to basic education for much of the Brazilian society, with its offer restricted to the most economically favored. In the English language class, the discussion about this meme can be characterized as a warm-up of the class, and the reiteration of expressive resources in its written text can serve to raise awareness of the variation of uses and forms of the language for the intended meaning effects. Then, the second meme is observed (Figure 2).

**Figure 2** - Meme on *Internet access*.



Source: Pandomonium (2021)

The visual text constitutive of this meme refers to the narrative of the Hollywood film *Cast Away*, released in 2000. In the narrative, the character Chuck Noland, played by Tom Hanks – nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor for this performance – is totally isolated on an uninhabited island for approximately 4 years after a plane crash. In the narrative, the suffering of the character on the uninhabited island comes into controversy with the neoliberal discourse, since the accident is the consequence of another of several trips to work present in the busy agenda of the character, which makes her distance herself from her loving relationship that walked to marriage. In Hollywood's cinematic discourse, due to his resistance to survive, Noland ends up gaining the viewer's sympathy, especially when, creatively, he personifies a Wilson volleyball, with whom he can maintain a dialogue on the island, which favors the viewer's laughter through the ironic pun and comicality.

Thus, when Noland's photo on the desert island is interrelated to *the verbal text "how I feel without internet"*, it is possible to notice the emergence of new effects of meaning, on social distancing, which in the film referred to an uninhabited island and, in contemporary times, is much more strongly characterized by the impossibility of communication with the use of the Internet. Through non-controversial constitutive verbal-visual interrelations, the meme as a text and, therefore, authentic material for the English language class, dialogues, with humor and irony, with the reality of most young students and Brazilian adults who need quality internet for their *professional practices in home office* and the continuity of his studies in the socio-historical context of Brazil during the pandemic of the new coronavirus. In relation to the remote English class, verbal language can also be explored due to the variation of uses and forms of the language, as it is integrated by the use of the personal pronoun in first person of the singular in its lowercase form "I", contrary to the prescription of use in the capital "I". In addition, encouraging students to watch *cast away* with or without English subtitles can be one of the asynchronous activities that complement remote English language teaching in times of pandemic.

When circulating in the English language class, the memes, as authentic texts, become the object of teaching-learning languages, whose practice of reading and writing should consider the verb-visuality for the production and dispute of meanings, besides enabling, in the pedagogical discourse, the reflection on the expressive resources that constitute them. The analysis of the two memes demonstrates that their verbal language responds creatively to images of scenes from a Brazilian soap opera and a Hollywood

film, denouncing the lack of democratization of internet access through humor and irony resulting from the relationship of ingraining in its constitutive verb-visibility. Thus, in the remote class of the English II discipline for young people and adults in public school, discussing the interrelations between the verb-visibility constitutive of the memes in order to insert them in the chain of discursive interaction in the context of the pandemic can promote reflection on the expressive resources that constitute these texts and demand from students' responses to discourses on internet access in Brazil. Next, in the final considerations, the implications of these choices are discussed.

### Final considerations

This article aimed to present a (self) reflection on a remote English language class through the analysis of memes. The experience of promoting dialogue on the pandemic and democratization of internet access with young people and adults of integrated high school of a federal public school was discussed. For this, it was based on the productive interrelationship of the theoretical-methodological-pedagogical perspectives of language as a social practice and the teaching of English. This articulation allowed the realization of a reflection on the teaching of English language in the context of the integrated high school public school that remains open to criticisms, suggestions and adaptations of peers: teachers-researchers of English language teaching in public school and other interested in the theme, to whom the article is addressed.

Regarding the pedagogical implications, the recommendation of a permanent discussion about controversial and current topics in school spaces is in a clear, open and democratic way. Thus, the English language class can become a space for dialogue about the social realities of students. *Fake news*, environmental impact, access/democratization of digital technologies and internet, health crisis, precariousness of work, emotional impact, *fast food*, among others, constitute a never exhaustive list of topics to be addressed in the (remote) teaching of English language in public school.

Regarding the methodological implications, it is emphasized that, due to the ethical rigor in science, particularly the need for the opinion of the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) for research with interaction with human beings, it was not possible to bring to the analysis the interactions between teacher and students in the remote class. In the case investigated, these interactions motivated the production of memes by young and adult students in response to the practice of reading the texts discussed in the synchronous

English language class. This methodological limitation is recorded so that it can encourage continuities of further investigations attentive to the cep schedule and the *constitution of a more expanded corpus*, which also involves the data of interaction during classes and the creative production of students, whose rich verbal-visual interrelations can constitute powerful texts against social inequalities in our country.

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