

English as a language of instruction in the context of an inland  
university in Mato Grosso Do Sul-Brazil /  
*O inglês como língua de instrução no contexto de uma  
universidade interiorana de Mato Grosso Do Sul - Brasil*


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**ABSTRACT**

In this article, we aim to problematize the adoption of English as a language of instruction in Higher Education and identify possible representations that the English Language has reverberated in the academic practices of a university located in the inland of Mato Grosso do Sul. Immersed in the assumptions of Applied Linguistics (Moita Lopes, 2006), we begin the text by problematizing the equity between inland and metropolitan universities in promoting movements of Internationalization in Higher Education, multilingualism, and interculturality. Next, we conduct a theoretical review of the different elements that permeate the adoption of English as a language of instruction in universities, considering the movements of Internationalization of Higher Education, go into the concept of representation, describe the research context, and develop some analyses based on statements extracted from Guimarães' (2023) corpus. Finally, we offer some concluding remarks on the representations surrounding the (non) adoption of English as a language of instruction in the researched context.

**KEYWORDS:** English ; Language of Instruction ; Inland University ; Applied Linguistics.

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## RESUMO

*Neste artigo temos como objetivo problematizar a adoção do Inglês como língua de instrução na Educação Superior e identificar possíveis representações que a Língua Inglesa tem reverberado nas práticas acadêmicas de uma universidade situada no interior de Mato Grosso do Sul. Imersos nos pressupostos da Linguística Aplicada (Moita Lopes, 2006), iniciamos o texto problematizando a equidade existente entre as universidades interioranas e metropolitanas no âmbito da promoção dos movimentos de Internacionalização na Educação Superior, plurilinguismo e interculturalidade. Na sequência, tecemos uma revisão teórica a respeito dos diferentes elementos que permeiam a adoção do Inglês como língua de instrução nas universidades a despeito dos movimentos de Internacionalização da Educação Superior e, adiante, aprofundamos o conceito de representação, descrevemos o contexto de pesquisa e desenvolvemos algumas análises a partir de enunciados extraídos do corpus de Guimarães (2023). Por fim, tecemos algumas considerações finais sobre as representações envolvidas na (não) adoção do Inglês como língua de instrução no contexto pesquisado.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** 1. Inglês 2. Língua de Instrução. 3. Universidade Interiorana 4. Linguística Aplicada.

## Introduction

Recent research shows that the arrival of the internationalization movements in Higher Education has directly impacted organizational structures, curricula, and teaching and learning methods in universities around the world (Quiang, 2023; Bowles; Murphy, 2020; Chagas, 2021; Heleta; Chassi, 2023). In this context, the adoption of English as a language of instruction has become one of the elements that universities have equipped in an attempt to provide resources to launch themselves into global spheres of academic collaboration and into internationalization movements in Higher Education. Thus, curricular components that were previously taught in the mother tongue have begun to be offered using English as a medium of instruction, a fact that reconfigures Higher Education and the multiple ways of teaching, learning, and working in this context.

Several issues arise in this scenario. On the one hand, there is an argument that in the 21st century, students need to be educated with an international vision, prepared to interconnect societies and social systems and move across increasingly fluid borders; on the other, this demand is mediated by the need to protect local cultures, languages, knowledge and peoples (Bowles; Murphy, 2020). It should be noted that, aligned with these issues, there is the desire of universities to prepare students for a globalized world so that they can achieve good opportunities in the job market, and the demand for initiatives that enable academic staff for mobility, collaborative research and teaching practices at an international level (Quiang, 2003).

Little has been said, however, about the equity issues that arise with the need to implement English as a language of instruction, or even about how institutions have represented this action in their practices. Furthermore, there are few studies that explore the adoption of English as a

language of instruction in the inland contexts of Higher Education in Brazil, which have very different logistical, sociocultural and linguistic realities from those of large universities and metropolises. Considering these issues, this article aims to problematize the adoption of English as a language of instruction in Higher Education and identify possible representations that the English language has reverberated in the academic practices of a university located in the inland of Mato Grosso do Sul / Brazil.

Anchored in the assumptions of Applied Linguistics (Moita Lopes, 2006), we begin the text by problematizing the (in)equity that exists between inland and metropolitan universities in the context of promoting internationalization movements in Higher Education, plurilingualism and interculturality (Spolsky, 2024). Next, we provide a theoretical review of different elements that permeate the adoption of English as a language of instruction in universities despite the internationalization movements in Higher Education. Next, we make a review on the concept of representation, describe the research context and develop some analyses based on statements extracted from the corpus of Guimarães (2023). Finally, we make some final considerations on the representations involved in the (non)adoption of English as the language of instruction in the researched context. We hope that the proposed study can situate the context of inland universities in the dialogue on the adoption of English as a language of instruction in Higher Education and that it can serve as a basis for future studies on the subject.\*

## **1 Internationalization in Higher Education, Plurilingualism and Interculturality from the perspective of equity between inland and metropolitan universities**

The lack of knowledge of foreign languages is one of the biggest obstacles to make the movements and processes of internationalization in Higher Education accessible to the academic community and effective in its different spheres of comprehensiveness (Bowles; Murphy, 2020; Chagas, 2023; Höfling, 2023; Albuquerque; Mulinacci, 2024). The greater the range of linguistic knowledge of the student, teaching and technical body, the greater the possibilities for institutions to dialogue and collaborate with international partners and enable students for the demands of an increasingly interconnected and paradoxically unequal world (Crystal, 2001).

Qiang (2003) points out that the professional requirements that the job market has come to demand of recent graduates directly reflect the increasing interference of globalization in the economy and social organization of nations, a fact that requires universities to rethink their curricula

regarding the preparation they have given to graduates so that they can respond effectively to these impositions. This preparation does not only involve mastery of academic and professional knowledge, “but also intercultural, multilingual” and multicultural skills and attitudes, since today it is essential for citizens to exchange knowledge and dialogue with peers of other nationalities and cultures in their work environments and daily lives (Qiang, 2003, p. 248).

The qualification for multilingualism and interculturality, although is essential among the elements that are necessary for the effective implementation of internationalization processes and movements in Higher Education, is still timid as a teaching policy and practice in the reality of Brazilian universities, since we still have little government investment in this direction, the absence of national Language and Internationalization Policies in Higher Education that guarantee investments and regulations for this purpose, and a low valuation of foreign language teachers who work in these contexts (Chagas, 2021; 2024). Added to this is the fact that there is an inequality in the alignment between federal, state and municipal public universities and private ones regarding this issue. While federal universities have the Andifes “Languages without Borders” Network (LwB), which mobilizes a series of actions for multilingual and intercultural education for internationalization, for example, in the context of private universities, which still educate the majority of the graduates in Brazil, awareness of qualification in this direction is practically absent.

The effects of this hybridity mask the Brazilian inequalities in the area of equity between the educational potential of graduates from the country's public and private institutions and reveal that, although we talk a lot about internationalization in Higher Education in the national context, it is still far from being effective and culturally active in our universities. Furthermore, Brazil is a continental country with a complex cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic reality and with different university profiles, a fact that increases the inequalities when we compare Higher Education institutions located in the country's inland and in large metropolitan regions.

While in large cities, the universities have easy access to areas that are favorable for logistics, commerce, cultural production and dissemination, leisure, telecommunications and transportation services that are necessary to stimulate internationalization practices, in the interior, many suffer with the lack of all of these elements (or most of them), with the precariousness in the supply and provision of services, with the unavailability of educational and cultural contexts that are favorable to the promotion of interculturality and multilingualism, with the lack of effective professors and technicians, and with public authorities with little competence to intervene in these aspects. This presupposes that Brazilian inland and metropolitan universities do not have the same

conditions of access and belonging to internationalization movements in Higher Education, which means that there is no equity between them in this regard.

Bowles and Murphy (2020, p. 4) warn that, in the 21st century, the great challenge for Higher Education systems is to deal with the choice between, on the one hand, “educating academics with an international vision and preparing them for interconnected societies and social systems” with “fluid” borders; and, on the other, the need to take into account cultural, national, social and economic priorities for Higher Education, since all these elements are interdependent. With this in mind, if we do not have equity between inland and metropolitan universities in the country, in terms of operational and educational infrastructure and national policies to reduce these differences, which carefully look at the cultural, national, social and economic priorities that are necessary for Higher Education, it is natural that we will have barriers to effectively situate the internationalization of Higher Education in the educational discourses and practices of Brazilian universities.

Furthermore, to educate undergraduates with a critical international vision and prepare them for increasingly interconnected societies with “fluid” borders, it is necessary to foster multilingualism and interculturality in the national context in an equitable manner. While we don't have policies, funding and programs in this direction, it will be difficult for universities to promote internationalization in their practices. Another challenge is concerned with the overcoming of the lack of national logistical structures and telecommunications infrastructures, to favor the interconnection of inland universities and make it possible to empower them in relation to universities located in large centers. If this does not happen, it is difficult to establish an equitable national reality for institutional practices and policies for internationalization in Higher Education, a fact that mitigates the hybridisms and inequalities in the profiles of graduates leaving Brazilian universities and the segregation that the job market and academic opportunities impose on them, what may make the country inefficient in creating ideal conditions for citizens to have equal rights regarding access to science and Higher Education.

## **2 Internationalization of Higher Education and the appropriation of English as a Language of Instruction in university contexts**

In response to the demands for implementing multilingual and intercultural practices arising from the movements and processes of internationalization in Higher Education, in recent decades,

many universities have begun to adopt languages of instruction that are different from the national languages of the countries that they are domiciled. This action has been autonomous and guided by the choice of lingua francas, foreign or native languages for this purpose. The Federal University for Latin American Integration (UNILA), for example, has adopted Spanish and Portuguese as its languages of instruction for some years now, given that it is located on a border between Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, where both languages are considered lingua francas and native languages for the local community.

Other examples include Babeş-Bolyai University (BBU) in Romania, where Hungarian, Germanic and Romanian languages are adopted as languages of instruction, due to the fact that the country is surrounded by these cultures and peoples; and at the National University of Asuncion in Paraguay, where Guarani and Spanish became the two official languages of instruction, on account of the implementation of national language policies that began to popularize Guarani to guarantee access to higher education for native peoples. Although these are more specific cases, it should be noted, however, that in most cases, in addition to the national language, the language of instruction most often adopted by universities around the world is English by virtue of its rise as a lingua franca in recent decades. This has led to much of the scientific and academic production we have today and the written and oral international communication systems adopting the language as an official language. The advent of communication and information technologies, such as the internet, also contributed to the intensification of the process of popularization of English as a lingua franca and the assumption of the language as an official code of international interaction (Crystal, 2001; Dearden, 2014).

The fact that English has become popular as a language of instruction in the university context, and the common language that most universities are adopting for international academic interaction is a consequence of these movements of popularization of the language. However, a critical look at this rise of English as a language of instruction in universities is recommended, because there are several power issues implicit in this movement, ranging from its use to manipulate hegemonic colonial and national ideologies by countries where the language is the national language, to the lack of teaching and learning approaches that transcend traditional language teaching.

If not observed in detail, specifically in the Brazilian academic context, these issues can further increase existing hybridisms and inequalities, affecting the possibility of universities being guided by logics of equity in the national and international Higher Education relations that they

develop. It is also noticed a certain difficulty in promoting policies, linguistic planning and teaching practices that allow academic staff to effectively use English for communicative purposes and specific purposes in daily university interactions, and the persistence of stereotypes such as the ideal speaker and the native speaker of the idiom being assumed as linguistic targets (Bowles; Murphy, 2020). In some thesis or dissertation defense panels that are written and defended in English, for example, it is still common for some members of the evaluation committee to spend more time arguing about the deviations in linguistic variation existing in the text than addressing the scientific elements that were produced, which perhaps would not happen if the work were written and defended in Portuguese (Doiz; Lasagabaster; Sierra, 2013).

“It is not possible to pinpoint the beginning of the use of the approach” of English as the language of instruction in Brazilian Higher Education, “taking into account the sporadic and unofficial form” in which it is adopted; however, the concern in adopting the language for this purpose in Brazil was due, in large part, to the demands of the movements for the internationalization of Higher Education (Höfling, 2023, p. 159). The creation of the government program “English without Borders” (EwB) due to the need to linguistically train undergraduate students to participate in the government program “Science Without Borders” (SwB), in 2012, can be taken as an explicit example of this fact (Caramori; Albuquerque-Costa; Gregolin, 2023).

Broadly speaking, the use of languages of instruction can be understood as “a teaching approach used to teach specific content using a target language as a ‘medium of instruction’; however, it is necessary to expand this conception (Hofling, 2023, p. 160). The Research Group on Language Policies and Internationalization of Higher Education (GPLIES) has worked with this purpose and argues that languages of instruction are verbal and symbolic structures used in multilingual educational contexts as an official means of regulating communication and interaction between faculty and students during teaching-learning processes and academic coexistence in classroom, supervision and professional instruction environments.

Conceived in this way, for GPLIES, the languages of instruction are, therefore, mother tongues, foreign or additional languages that are appropriated in as an interaction code and have the role of recording, channeling, normalizing, standardizing and regulating the processes of knowledge construction and mobilization of the most varied objects of knowledge in a multilingual context of formal education. In this sense, the assumption of the language of instruction in the academic space allows its users to produce hybrid speeches permeated by variants and idiolects,

or even to translanguaging<sup>1</sup>, since the focus of linguistic use is not the study and reproduction of the linguistic code or grammar in its idiomatic and native affection, but the intercomprehension, intercommunication, empathy, reciprocity, interculturality and the mediation of knowledge.

These notions allow us to see the languages of instruction beyond a “means” of communication, in itself, and open space for us to analyze the affections, purposes, ends and linguistic uses; the subjectivities of the speakers when they are enunciating throughout languages of instruction in the process of mediation of the academic knowledge; and allow us to situate the approaches and purposes that the languages of instruction perform in the context of Higher Education. Specifically in the context of the adoption of English as the language of instruction in the Brazilian context, for example, this perspective would allow us to see that “teaching practice in English contributes to the linguistic improvement of the professors [and students] in the target language and promotes the insertion of the professor [and students] as an international professional and researcher”, what projects the “institution in the international sphere”, as well as creates of a favorable space for intercomprehension, intercommunication, empathy, reciprocity, interculturality and academic collaboration, allowing internationalization to affect the subjectivity of those who live in the university space, and the identity and academic culture of the institutions (Höfling; Zacarias, 2017, p. 258; Finardi, 2016).

The adoption of English as a language of instruction in Brazilian universities can also be seen as an inclusive mechanism that allows academic communities to have access to living contexts in which the target language is used; to access the knowledge that is recorded and made available on it in different media and scientific journals; to naturalize the exchange of knowledge with other institutions; and to foster plurilingualism by creating other approaches to the English language that collaborate with the deconstruction of myths and beliefs about its uses in the academic context. Furthermore, it opens up space for understanding its variants, idiolects, and multiple study approaches by situating it in practical and living contexts of realization and intercomprehension, thus reconfiguring the idea that the target language is a mere linguistic code, medium, or idiomatic structure to be reproduced (Escudé; Olmo, 2019).

Wang (2020) adds that, in some areas, such as engineering and business, the use of English as the language of instruction seems to be more evident and popular in universities, since

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<sup>1</sup> We understand translanguaging based on Otheguy, García and Reid (2015), who suggest that a speaker has the ability to use a complete linguistic repertoire present in their living context without being limited by the political and social limits of named languages.



in these scientific fields it is more common to have contact with scientific information resources that are available in the language. As a result of the adoption of English as a language of instruction in many universities, the job market for professions linked to these areas began to consider proficiency in this language as a requirement for belonging to some professions. This shows us, for example, that the effects of adopting languages of instruction in the university context transcend the walls of the institution and contribute to our thinking about the process of internationalization of professions or the job market, putting the identity and subjectivity of graduates in gamble.

Another important issue to consider regarding the adoption of English as a language of instruction in Brazilian universities is that it increases the attractiveness of international students to the country; helps to prepare national students and professors for international academic commitments; supports universities to create their international identities and profiles; allows a significant increase in opportunities and practices for in-person and virtual mobility and telecollaboration; and serves as a soft power strategy for institutional collaborators to access specific research collaboration and funding networks that are in their interests (Wang, 2020; Chagas, 2021). From a decolonial perspective, the appropriation of English as a language of instruction would similarly allow us to dialogue with our peers about inequalities, injustices, the past and our colonial processes with the aim of giving meaning to our history to the world and collaborating with the promotion of an epistemic plurality of the nation which allows us to integrate critical, anti-hegemonic and anti-racist views on our society and our educational models (Heleta; Chasi, 2023).

In contrast to these premises, we cannot leave behind that the implementation of English as a language of instruction in universities is inevitably associated with competitiveness, advantages, prestige and inequalities in the context of international relations and knowledge diplomacy. Wang (2020, p. 106) points out that it also leads to the commodification of higher education, leading to “inequality of access and an uncritical attitude towards the quality of the educational experience”. In the same direction, Bowles and Murphy (2020, p. 17) warn that the communicative benefits of using English as a language of instruction “do not necessarily coincide with educational benefits”. For this reason, the choice and adoption of English as a language of instruction “should not be evaluated simply in linguistic terms” but based on the consideration of ideological, economic and social problems “that involve the choice of a language as a medium of instruction”, since the communicative need cannot fully explain the choice of English to occupy this function” (Wang, 2020, p. 105).

The arguments presented by Wang (2020) and Bowles and Murphy (2020) corroborate with the point of view of Blommaert (1999), who reinforces that the choice and adoption of a language as a language of instruction is by no means simply a linguistic issue, but addresses ideological concerns involving values, reasoning, symbolic qualities of languages and their varieties, as well as social, cultural and political ideals and beliefs related to the chosen language and implicit in the process of its choice. In China, for example, English was adopted by most universities as the language of instruction in a very thoughtless way, a fact that generated a tension between the aspiration of the bases for access to the language and a restriction on who can access it to mediate knowledge. This case serves as a reflection for what we are doing in Brazil, since, in many cases, the adoption of English as the language of instruction in our universities can further increase the lack of equity between inland and metropolitan universities in the internationalization processes, since, in inland there are few incentives for teaching and learning the language.

According to Wang (2020, p. 120), the lack of a planned choice also led to the emergence, in China, of “a parallel tension between a powerful promotion of English as a medium of instruction through educational policies and media narratives” and the lack of resources for universities to invest in the implementation of English as a language of instruction and make its practice effective in the provision of the curricular components. This fact meant that the access to English as a language of instruction in the country's universities, and to curricular components that are mediated by the language, became preconditioned on the proof of linguistic proficiency in English, which, in most cases, is assessed and decided based on exams prepared by native English speakers, a fact that has intensified linguistic colonialities in China.

The tensions created a scenario in which, today, “only a small number of Chinese students access” the knowledge mobilized using English as a language of instruction. In fact, it has been noted that the activities developed in the language are mostly attended by international students who are in China on student mobility and not by Chinese (Wang, 2020, p.124). Consequently, the use of English as a language of instruction began to divide Chinese students into two groups, a minority elite and a majority non-elite, and gave rise to a monolingual perspective of the language that “treats ‘English’ as the ‘native English’ in educational policies and media discourses” and not as a lingua franca (Wang, 2020, p.125).

Bowles and Murphy (2020) emphasize that, in order to avoid such occurrences in China, local and regional languages must be considered and recognized as integral parts of the process of choosing and adopting the languages of instruction that universities will use to develop their

internationalization practices. Furthermore, it is important to assess the level of student's involvement in the process of adopting languages of instruction, considering that political, cultural, and social engagement, as well as their identities, counterbalance and cushion the attempt to hegemonize English and approach it from a monolingual perspective. In this sense, for an effective implementation of English as a language of instruction, a multidisciplinary perspective must be adopted in the selection process, what encompasses all the social, linguistic practices, and power relations that permeate a given institution.

The education of professors who work in contexts where curricular components are offered through English as a language of instruction, as well as their conception of the usage of the language and the certification of their linguistic proficiency is also a factor that must be considered, as these elements directly interfere in the relationship that these teachers will build with students and the university community that wishes to engage in an internationalized environment. Höfling (2023, p.168) considers that, for the process “of internationalization to actually occur, the institution must be clear about its actions and about the Linguistic Planning established in the different sectors and for the different individuals of the internal academic community” involved in the process. This therefore requires mapping the different perceptions and roles of the institutional actors engaged in internationalization and the construction of a Language Policy that foresees the impacts of the adoption of English as a language of instruction on academic practices and institutional identity.

In inland contexts, for example, where the access to additional language education is scarcer, the university plays a leading role in preparing the academic community so that it can welcome, learn, and use English and other languages as languages of instruction. This is because, in many cases, the university is the first place where students have contact with the complex use of the language. In fact, the conceptions that many of them bring from Basic Education about ‘knowing’ and ‘using’ English must be transcended, giving way to linguistic approaches that conceive the language of instruction as an element that allows them to situate themselves before the other/different and engage in practices of intercomprehension, intercommunication, empathy, reciprocity, interculturality, and academic collaboration.

Furthermore, reflections should also be promoted over the English as a lingua franca adopted by multiple peoples and university cultures and, as a result, on the fact that it has become the predominant language of instruction, after all, it is necessary to encourage students to learn about the language. So, it is up to institutions to consider, in their Language Policies, that the affection for languages of instruction will also depend on the area and course. In some areas, for

example, English will be more popular than others; in the same way, in some courses other languages such as French, Spanish and German may be more interesting than English for international purposes, and this is natural. Therefore, the adoption of languages of instruction by universities should always be a natural and committed process driven by broad long-term planning.

It is known that many universities resist the possibility of adopting languages of instruction. It is important to note, however, that in the 21st century, higher education practices no longer have the option of remaining monolingual, since this choice put them at risk and lead them underpreparing their graduates, who will be required to use additional languages when they access the job market, seek opportunities for mobility and academic interaction, participate in international collaborative actions, or even find themselves in a world of “reduced” borders (Crystal, 2001). The choice of English as the language of instruction to be adopted in the academic environment is strategic in order to put students and professors in contact with the most preponderant verbal and symbolic structure in international interaction and in the sharing of scientific information. However, we must always remember that if the approach chosen by the institution in the adoption process is not guided by a critical, intercultural and multilingual perspective, it will face issues of exclusion, hegemony and power that are inherent in linguistic uses and choices.

In the current situation, many Brazilian universities are unprepared for the process of implementing and using languages of instruction with the focus on the effectiveness of internationalization processes and practices in Higher Education. Höfling (2023, p. 168) emphasizes that “for the internationalization process to actually occur, the institution must be clear about its actions, the linguistic planning established in the different sectors and for the different individuals in the internal and external academic community”. Therefore, it is important that, before anything else, institutions must begin to develop studies and design plans and processes that culminate in the construction of linguistic and internationalization policies that meet local interests and needs and consider, above all, issues of equity.

### **3 A study about the representations of English as a language of instruction in the context of an inland university in Mato Grosso do Sul**

The studies of representations has helped us to understand, interpret and signify the reality and the common sense that we produce in society and, from this gesture, to identify the multiple relationships that exist between subjects, spaces, bodies, discourses, ideologies, languages and

policies that regulate human relations in different contexts. The word representation has its etymological origin in the Latin “*repraesentare*”, which in its broad sense presupposes presenting again or making present “someone or something absent, including an idea, through the presence of an object” or signifier (Makowiecky, 2003, p. 3). Wachelke and Camargo (2007, n.p.) suggest that the process of representation helps us to construct common sense theories that are shared and socially elaborated by different social groups, which have “functions of explaining relevant aspects of reality, defining group identity, guiding social practices and justifying actions and positions taken after they are carried out”.

For Wachelke and Camargo (2007 s.p.), representations are not faithful copies of objects existing in objective reality, “but a collective construction” represented through the language that allows the appropriation of lay knowledge by scientific knowledge and the objectification or naming of different phenomena, processes, and facts that are often transparent to societies. From this perspective, the study of representations enables members of a specific social group to (re)construct and (re)perceive their worldviews, contributing so that their social identities can be (re)visited and (re)elaborated.

Studies on representation address several issues and have multiple perspectives. Chartier (1991), for example, conceives representation as the product of the result of a social practice. Consequently, from this perspective, representations bring to light facts that create references to bring us closer to the discourses, objects, or signifiers that are produced in social practices, enabling us to signify and establish meanings from the symbolic elements that effervesce from the experienced fact. Literature, arts, journalism, interviews, social media, or even public monuments are, for example, excerpts of language that allow us to access the social practices of a given community and signify and establish meanings of facts, stories, or imagined things that tell us about the social identities that are present in the observed context (Makowiecky, 2003).

Pesavento (1995), when exploring the way that societies construct their symbolic orders, proposes that the reality in which we live does not exist; it is, therefore, a mere representation that allows the subjects involved in a given social order to exist in history and to situate themselves within it. From this point of view, reality is, at the same time, representation and concreteness, which allows us to situate bodies, subjects and spaces in history through multiple significant objects, such as images, language(s) and things that are present in a given society. Thus, language(s) act as our main means of operationalizing representations, since it is in and from them

that the realities of multiple social groups are represented, operationalized and signified, thus producing their histories and identities.

Wachelke and Camargo (2007 s.p.) emphasize that the study of representations is an effective path for sciences that are guided by critical paradigms and a great element to problematize social reality (Moita-Lopes, 2006), since the process of representation “allows people to interpret and conceive aspects of reality in order to act in relation to them, since the representation takes the place of the social object to which it refers and becomes reality for social actors”. Therefore, mapping social representations can help us to “classify the events of social life according to a grid of group interpretation, allowing actions related to these events” (Wachelke; Camargo, 2007 s.p.). Moscovici (1961) adds that mapping social representations helps us to build knowledge that allows us to transform what is strange into something familiar, since it adds novelty to existing knowledge structures.

In this regard, Valsiner (2003) *apud* Wachelke and Camargo (2007 s.p.) proposes that “the process of social representation concerns the construction of signs to deal with an unknown immediate future, delimiting its uncertainty. In this sense, social representations transform the future into the past”. In other words, once we are able to represent the different elements and everyday facts of a given community and turn them into signs, we have the opportunity to impact their stories and open paradigms that allow the studied community to move towards the new, giving them possibilities to (re)signify, (re)visit and (re)elaborate their identities and social practices.

The notion of representation can help us understanding the different elements that affect English as a Language of Instruction in the university context studied, since the process of mapping and analyzing the different meanings present in common sense about this object of study can enable a reflective gesture by the academic community that culminates in its (re)signification and (re)elaboration in the social and pedagogical practices experienced in the different courses at the university studied. In addition, it opens the door for future studies to contrast the reality of inland and metropolitan universities in order to think about inclusive policies or measures, in both contexts, to strengthen English as a language of instruction and plurilingualism in the multiple contexts of Internationalization of Higher Education in Brazil and, from this, situate them with greater strength in the logics of global academic interaction resulting from this movement.

### 3.1 The nature of the research

In the previous pages, we have explored a series of issues inherent to the adoption of English as a language of instruction and how its adoption in university practices has impacted the relations of equity and inequality of opportunities for inland and metropolitan universities to interact and participate in the movements of internationalization in Higher Education. In this part of the article, we will focus on these issues, based on the researched context and considering the concept of representation, aiming to explore different elements that permeate the adoption of English as a language of instruction and to reflect on the interfaces of this gesture with the promotion of the movements of internationalization in Higher Education at the inland university researched.

Anchored in the assumptions of Applied Linguistics, and guided by a critical notion of research, the present study is characterized by a changeable and dynamic methodological approach that manages to pay attention to the different language issues that are eminent in the researched context and that can produce meaning(s) or representation(s) about the adoption of English as a language of instruction. With the purpose to achieve our goals, a *corpus* of analyses was composed, based on data extracted from a study carried out by Guimarães (2023) in the researched context, which aimed to understand the different factors intertwined in the process of adopting English as the language of instruction at the same university. The data comes from interviews and, in this study, was analyzed from the perspective of Ginzburg's (1979) evidentiary paradigm, that is, a research procedure that proposes establishing a path of analysis and interpretation that is interested in the details, clues and indications observed in a given fact or linguistic element that allow us to identify representations or common senses about a given object in the researched context.

According to Chagas (2021, p. 109), “evidentiary characteristics help to reveal and signify what is on the margins, that is, what cannot be easily perceived in the centralities of social praxis”. To make it possible, “the researcher must use his/her intuition and sensitivity to perceive the repetitions that contribute to the construction of enunciative marks identified in the data” that make up the *corpus* of the investigation and identify representations in them Chagas (2021, p. 109).

### 3.2 The social context of the research and data collection

The study was developed based on data extracted from a survey developed by Guimarães (2023), which had as its reference context the social and educational reality of a university unit (campus) of a public university located in Cassilândia in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul (MS) -

Brazil, a city with 22 thousand inhabitants and approximately 426 kilometers from the state capital, Campo Grande, and 640 kilometers from the national capital Brasília - DF. The university unit is located in a rural area, 9 kilometers from the city, on the MS-306 highway, and has three permanent undergraduate courses in operation: Agronomy, which operates during the day; and a Bachelor's Degree in Portuguese/English Language(s) and Literature, and a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics, that operate at night. In addition to these courses, the university unit temporarily receives an extension of the Undergraduate Course in Law, which occurs in the morning; and has a permanent Postgraduate Program in Agronomy, which occurs during the day.

The university unit has approximately 350 undergraduate students in four courses and 40 post-graduate students. There are currently approximately 36 full-time professors, 4 in the Portuguese/English Language(s) and Literature course, 5 in the Mathematics course and 18 in Agronomy, all with PhD; and approximately 15 temporary lecturer, mainly in the Portuguese/English Language and Literature and Mathematics courses, which have curricular components in common, and most of them with PhD. The university community that attends the institution is hybrid and composed of people from Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás, São Paulo and Minas Gerais, states that border Cassilândia-MS, but with distinct cultures and political backgrounds.

In general, the university unit serves students from lower social classes and rural areas who, in many cases, have never moved to other cities and have little contact with metropolis and popular cultures of other social groups, what restricts, to a certain extent, their access to intercultural experiences or contact with communities that speak other languages. In the city, there is only one private language school that offers English and the university does not have any projects in Cassilândia-MS to promote the language and internationalization practices. It is worth noting, however, that the Portuguese/English Language and Literature Course has two Venezuelan students and develops extension projects focused on welcoming immigrants in refugees and teaching Portuguese as a Second Language.

The adoption of internationalization practices in Higher Education has been a novelty at the university, apart from the Portuguese/English Language and Literature Course, which in 2022, has incorporated several actions and perspectives of “internationalization at home” in the offering of disciplines and in the construction of the Course’s political-pedagogical project (Beelen; Jones, 2015). Recently, the Graduate Program in Agronomy also welcomed a student from Haiti who came to complete the Master’s Course, however, this is an action that has not yet reverberated in curricular practices related to internationalization. The Agronomy and Mathematics Degree courses



have gradually begun to engage in dialogue with the movement. Although, there is a complaint that the lack of telecommunications services in the region and the low quality of the internet at the university is a barrier for the institution to develop internationalization actions via virtual international mobility.

The data extracted from the research developed by Guimarães (2023) came from interviews conducted with the coordinators of the Mathematics, Portuguese/English Language and Literature and Agronomy Courses from the university unit. The interviews were conducted in March 2023 and supported the Scientific Initiation work entitled “An exploratory study on English as a language of instruction in the context of a public university in the inland of Mato Grosso do Sul”, which was developed with funding from CNPq and supervised by Prof. Dr. Lucas Araujo Chagas. Given the need to make excerpts, the study reported in this article uses data from only some of the various elements investigated by Guimarães (2023) on the adoption of English as a language of instruction at the institution. Below, we present the elements analyzed specifically.

### **3.3 Data analysis: some representations about the use of English as a language of instruction in the academic practices of the studied inland university**

The notion of representation makes it possible for us to understand how English as a language of instruction is objectified in the different utterances of the institutional actors. In the exercise of elaborating reflections on the object-signifier, these institutional actors focus on understanding their reality and produce signs to deal with what seems strange, unknown and uncertain and, in this analytical gesture, they construct common senses that allow the interpretation and conception of the reality so that one can (re)act in relation to it (Wachelke; Camargo, 2007).

If we look at the production of representations in the researched university context, we can consider that course coordinators are like the spokespeople of a social group circumscribed in a given academic context that moves by a common discourse. When we interview the course coordinators, we capture, therefore, enunciative marks or utterances that are representative of the reality experienced by the social group that they represent and about the relationships of these institutional actors with the object-signifier in focus that is the English as a language of instruction. In Guimarães' *corpus* (2023), when coordinators were asked whether there is a collective awareness in the university unit regarding the importance of the English language for the institution's academic practices, the following utterances were produced:

**Table 1:** Utterances about the collective consciousness regarding the importance of the English language for academic practices in contemporary times

|   |  |
|---|--|
| COORDINATION OF THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN MATHEMATICS                                | There is an awareness regarding the reading of texts in English and materials, due to the research that are carried out, but there is no awareness of the oral use of the language. We do not consider this as something real.   |
| COORDINATION OF THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN PORTUGUESE/ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE | Yes, as this is a Portuguese/English Language and Literature Course, the collegium understands the importance of the English language. The curriculum was recently reformulated, and much emphasis was placed on the subjects of teaching and learning the English language and on various issues of internationalization. In fact, English language subjects with a focus on conversation were incorporated into the course, which will be open to the entire academic community. |
| COORDINATION OF THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN AGRONOMY                                   | Among the teachers, I think it is unanimous. Among the students, there are inquiries. Since it is an Agricultural Sciences course, many do not understand that English is no longer a differential, but rather a requirement for the job market. Today, in most companies in the agricultural sector, English is no longer a differential and has become a positive point among employees. Academics still do not have this implicit market vision in the profession.              |

In the utterances, we can see that each course has a representation regarding the importance of the English language for the academic practices of the institution. While in the Mathematics Degree Course, there are signs of greater usefulness of English for reading texts and materials for the production of research; in the Portuguese/English Language and Literature Degree Course, the English is part of the course's scope of studies, is linked, in some way, to the purposes of internationalization and is offered for communicative purposes; and in the Agronomy Course, there is, therefore, a recognition of the importance of the language in academic practices, but a denial of it by the students. It is also perceived an association of the practice of the English language with the demands of the job market, reinforcing Wang's (2020) propositions that, in some

areas, the prominence of English is greater than in others, which also means that, in many professions, the language is already adopted as an essential skill for the professional practice.

By interpreting more comprehensively the three utterances, we can see in them evidences of representations that English is a “means”, or even an instrument for accessing texts and research materials and knowledges that are essential for the professional education; a means of communication and conversation; or even a tool for accessing the job market, representations that are characteristics of common discourses on the adoption of English as a language of instruction (Höfling, 2023; Bowles; Murphy, 2020). This allows us to say that even though the courses are in the inland context, the studied institution reverberates the discourses of English as a language of instruction, which is very present in universities located in metropolitan areas, what suggests that there is no ideological distance regarding the issue between inland and metropolitan universities.

It is also noteworthy that, with the exception of the Bachelor's Degree in Portuguese/English Language and Literature, the others do not associate the adoption of the English language with internationalization practices, what indicates that this representation is perhaps more prominent in the field of course, which directly studies the topic and the language. This perception is important because, in some way, it signals that the adoption of the English language as a strategy for promoting internationalization does not seem to be enlighten, or even taken as a way, for the other courses, to situate the movement in their educational practices and curriculum.

When asked about the barriers, difficulties and deadlocks that the university unit has faced in adopting English as the language of instruction in its academic practices, the coordinators interviewed produced the following utterances:

**Table 2:** Utterances about the barriers, difficulties and deadlocks that the researched university unit faces in adopting English as the language of instruction

|   |  |
|---|--|
| COORDINATION OF<br>THE BACHELOR'S<br>DEGREE IN<br>MATHEMATICS       | The main barrier is the fluency in English, what make the students unable to attend any subject in English.  |
| COORDINATION OF<br>THE BACHELOR'S<br>DEGREE IN<br>PORTUGUESE/ENGLIS | The problem is the basic education, which reproduces a vicious cycle of myths and beliefs about language that end up reaching the Portuguese/English Language and Literature course and interfere in the education of language teachers, especially in English. When |

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| H LANGUAGE AND<br>LITERATURE                               | they return to basic education or even during their undergraduate studies, they do not experience what they could as a teacher, and then they are not able to provide a complete education for their students in basic education, especially in the public educational system, regarding the effective use of the language. Thinking about the context of the university unit, we cannot generalize all courses but thinking about our reality in the Portuguese/English Language and Literature course, where the majority of students come from the public basic education of the municipality, students already arrive at the university with language deficiencies from basic education. We should not limit this problem only to basic education, but it is also necessary to relate it to policies that should be broader in terms of interculturality and on the promotion of access to foreign languages, especially English, which is today a lingua franca and very important and necessary for the development of various social actions. |
| COORDINATION OF<br>THE BACHELOR'S<br>DEGREE IN<br>AGRONOMY | The biggest difficulty is that the students arrive at university with poor basic knowledge, and this affects the dynamics within the university. Another important point that comes to our attention is that they are not on a course to learn English, but agricultural techniques.   |

When analyzing the utterances above, we can see signs that each course has a representation regarding the barriers, difficulties and deadlocks that the university unit studied faces in adopting English as a language of instruction. The Mathematics Degree Course, for example, sees the students' lack of fluency in the language as a barrier, which unable them to participate in subjects offered in English; the Portuguese/English Language and Literature Degree Course adds that these barriers arise from the educational gap that students bring from basic education, and the vicious cycle of poor education for teaching English, as well as the lack of policies to promote interculturality and the language, and the reproduction of myths and beliefs about it and its uses; and for the Agronomy Degree Course, in addition to the English language gap that students bring from the basic education, the idea that in their educational trajectory at the university students should only learn agricultural techniques also consolidates a barrier.

In general, a harmonious view is indicated among the courses regarding the representation that the educational gap in English arising from the basic education is a major barrier to the implementation of English as the language of instruction in the university context in which the research was developed. It is remarkable the representation of a “monolingual” and “colonial” discourse that in the Agronomy Degree Course one should only learn the knowledge that is typical of agricultural techniques, a view that is distant from the inter/multi/transdisciplinary demands that national higher education policies have imposed. It also distances the students of the course from the ideals of multiculturalism and the plurality of knowledge that is necessary for the exercise of any profession. Another striking element, which can be indicated as a representation, focuses on the lack of adequate education for English language teachers and the incipience of public policies that encourage interculturality and the promotion of the language in multiple educational contexts.

If not carefully examined by the researched university unit, these elements may end up reproducing, in the future, what happened in China, where the lack of planning for the adoption of English as a language of instruction ended up dividing students into a minority elite and a majority non-elite, increasing inequalities in access to science and job market in the country (Wang, 2020). Furthermore, it should be noted that, since students already arrive at basic education with gaps and a lack of proficiency in the language, the university must, before proceeding with any regulatory action for English as a language of instruction in courses, create means for students to learn the language before using it. This will certainly require closer dialogue between basic education and the university with the aim to provide improvements in the education of English language teachers and in the valuing the language in basic education, as suggested by Höfling (2023).

When asked about what the courses have done to encourage the inclusion of English as a language of instruction in political-pedagogical projects and academic practices, the coordinators interviewed produced the following utterances:

**Table 3:** Utterances about the incentives that the courses are making to include English as a language of instruction in the curriculum (political-pedagogical projects) and academic practices of the university unit

|   |  |
|---|--|
| COORDINATION OF<br>THE BACHELOR'S<br>DEGREE IN<br>MATHEMATICS | The course has been encouraging students to participate in language courses offered by the Campo Grande-MS Language Center (NEL). The possibility of offering a subject in English has even been discussed among professors, but we have reached the impasse that the subject itself must be in a language that students |
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|  | <p>need to understand. They have difficulty to comprehend mathematics in Portuguese, we cannot see them understanding it in English. That is why there was no adoption of a subject to be offered in English and an inclusion of it in the curriculum (political-pedagogical project).</p>  |
| <p>COORDINATION OF THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN PORTUGUESE/ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE</p> | <p>Nothing. I believe that the university has done nothing to overcome barriers and encourage the use of the language among the different courses that make up the academic community. The the Portuguese/English Language and Literature course has done something, but the university has not taken any action. For example, we already have courses that are offered in English, we offer English workshops for the community and in schools, and we have already designated the language as the language of instruction in curricular components that are not focused on teaching and learning English, such as some in the area of literature, for example. Furthermore, English was included in the linguistic policy of the course's curriculum (political-pedagogical project).</p> |
| <p>COORDINATION OF THE BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN AGRONOMY</p>                                   | <p>The university unit has a partnership with ARELIN in Dourados-MS, but it is for students. I am not aware of any incentives. When we need to make a post or publish in English, we pay for the translation out of our own pockets. ARELIN should have a specific work for the Professors. An awareness among the faculty and students is needed.</p>  |

Although there is an awareness of the importance of promoting English in the context of the university unit studied, the utterances above indicate that little has been done to ensure that the language is adopted as a language of instruction in the institution's curriculums (political-pedagogical projects) and academic practices. Some representations of how the coordinators imagine it is possible to include English as a language of instruction in the curriculums (political-pedagogical projects) and academic practices of the courses can also be observed. For the Mathematics Degree Course, it is necessary to offer a subject in English and encourage students to participate in language courses; for the Portuguese/English Language and Literature Degree

Course, in addition to offering subjects in English, including it in curricular components in which the teaching and learning of the language is not the focus, English workshops should also be promoted for the community and in schools and the language should be included in the course's language policy; and for the Agronomy Degree Course, the translation of posts and academic publications in the language should be encouraged.

In the point of view of the Bachelor's Degree in Portuguese/English Language and Literature Course, the university unit has done nothing to encourage the inclusion of English as a language of instruction in the university's curriculums (political-pedagogical projects) and academic practices. The Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and Agronomy, on the other hand, highlights the provision of language courses promoted by the International Relations Office (ARELIN) located in Dourados-MS, and the Language Center (NEL), located in Campo Grande-MS, as a stimulus action developed by the university unit. It is worth noting, however, that the language courses mentioned are not offered or designed by the university unit, but rather by instances of the university's general administration that are far from the context of demand and research, which are located in large cities.

It is important to note that many universities that have several campuses or administrative units do not promote on-site activities equally for all the units (campuses), as is the case of the university studied. In the university studied, all the courses offered by NEL and ARELIN, mentioned by the coordinators, reach the units only online and, specifically in the case of NEL, in Campo Grande-MS, they are offered in-person. We know that offering courses online has become popular and can be effective for universities; however, when we talk about the development of intercultural skills, in-person teaching is still more effective, since “eye to eye contact”, observing the gestures that the body produces when speaking, and the perception of bodies in an interactive space makes a difference. In virtual environments junior students lose these perceptions and manifestations of language.

We also noticed that there is a lack of specific actions that can be taken to effectively implement English as the language of instruction in the context studied, which requires, as suggested by the coordinators of the Agronomy Course, an awareness of the faculty and students regarding the issue. We emphasize that an awareness in this direction can help members of the academic community to map social representations that can help them add knowledge to the common sense about the English language that already exists, turning what is strange into something familiar (Moscovici, 1961). As proposed by Höfling (2023), training in this direction can

help the academic community studied to move towards the new, giving them possibilities to (re)signify, (re)visit and (re)elaborate their identities and social practices based on the adoption of English as language of instruction.

Finally, when asked about how students on the course in which they work can access the knowledge present in the texts, materials and manuals written in English that are part of the course syllabus and curriculum, the coordinators produced the following utterances:

**Table 4:** Utterances about how students can access the knowledge presented in the texts, materials and manuals written in English that are part of the course syllabus and curriculum

|  |  |
|--|--|
| COORDINATION OF<br>THE BACHELOR'S<br>DEGREE IN<br>MATHEMATICS                                      | When necessary, translators found on the internet are used and then an assessment is made to see if the translation is consistent.   |
| COORDINATION OF<br>THE BACHELOR'S<br>DEGREE IN<br>PORTUGUESE/ENGLISH<br>LANGUAGE AND<br>LITERATURE | The materials are available in the university library, and the university even has a digital library. This digital library offers a greater amount of educational content for students in English. |
| COORDINATION OF<br>THE BACHELOR'S<br>DEGREE IN<br>AGRONOMY   | Most students use Google Translator. Some students who participate in research programs are required to know at least the basics, but few of them do.  |

When analyzing the utterances, we realized that the courses construct distinct representations about the accessibility of knowledge present in the texts, materials and manuals written in English that are part of the course syllabus and curriculum. In the view of the Mathematics and Agronomy courses, accessibility can be achieved through the use of translation tools, such as Google Translator; and for the Portuguese/English Language and Literature Degree Course, it is consolidated with the provision of materials in English in the institution's physical and online libraries. We noticed in the statements, however, a simplified representation of accessibility issues related to scientific knowledge that, today, is mostly written and made available in English (Crystal, 2001). After all, it is not enough to use translators to have access, or even to make books available



in libraries for the academic community to consult them. It is necessary to “literate” students, teachers and technicians in the discourses and linguistic elements characteristic of English so that they can read, interpret, or even appropriately construct meanings, in and from the referred language, about the scientific knowledge in study.

The growth of translation tools in academia has unfortunately led to the false idea that they are translators, but they are not. Many of these tools are not adequately prepared to effectively translate texts from English into Portuguese, for example, and this is even worse when translating scientific texts that have their own technical language. Some scientific translations made by translation tools and with no professional review can even spread false information about certain studies or processes described in academic journals. It is undeniable that translation tools help in the process of accessing knowledge, but for its correct management, their users must know first the source and target languages. This can only be done with linguistic education and literacy in foreign languages, such as English, for example.

Specifically in the utterances made by the coordinator of the Agronomy Course, there is a representation that deserves attention: that students need to know the basics of the English language to participate in certain research programs, but few do. This reinforces the exclusionary nature that the lack of English proficiency can bring to the academic environment, so that only the minority elite who are proficient in the language can enjoy academic spaces in which it is the means of signification and from which subjectivities are constituted and meanings are produced (Wang, 2020). Therefore, one question remains: do students who do not know English and enjoy these spaces in which the language is a language of instruction and interaction have the same opportunities for subjectivation and potential to produce meanings in their respective research areas? We can also ask if there is equity between English-speaking and non-English-speaking students who use these spaces. Finally, there are several issues that emerge from this fact that indicate that the ineffectiveness of English as a language of instruction in the academic environment can increase the inequalities of opportunity among students, thus reducing equity among them.

## **Final Considerations**

Throughout this article, we have reflected on the adoption of English as a language of instruction in the university context and the different internationalization issues implicit in this action. We began the text by problematizing the (in)equity that exists between inland and metropolitan universities in what concerns the promotion of internationalization movements in Higher Education, plurilingualism and interculturality; later, we provided a theoretical review regarding the different elements that permeate the adoption of English as a language of instruction in universities focusing on internationalization matters; and we described the researched context and developed the analyses.

Over the study, it was possible to demonstrate that the adoption of English as a language of instruction in the university unit context is represented in different ways. It can be associated with the demands of the job market, or even as a differential for accessing it; considered as a tool for accessing texts and research materials; perceived as a means of communication and conversation; and seen as essential knowledge for higher education. The representations evidenced in the studied context are similar to the representations characteristic of common discourses on the adoption of English as a language of instruction. Therefore, it is possible to attest that there is a reverberation of the discourses of English as the language of instruction in the studied institution that is very similar to those present in universities located in metropolitan areas, what suggests that there is no ideological distance regarding the issue between inland and metropolitan universities.

The study also revealed that the educational gap that the students bring from basic education, the lack of policies to promote interculturality and language, and the reproduction of myths and beliefs about it and its uses are major barriers to the implementation of English as a language of instruction in the university context in which the research was developed. It was also shown that the growth in the use of translation tools in academia has led to the false representation that they have solved the problems of multilingual communication, a fact that should be observed more critically, since we know that poor translations can lead to the spread of false scientific information in academia, which can compromise the higher education offered by institutions.

Furthermore, it was observed that in the studied context, the lack of proficiency in English can also be a limiting factor for students to have access to academic opportunities, a fact that can increase inequalities and impact on equity of opportunities and make that only a minority group that is proficient in the language can enjoy academic spaces in which it is the means of signification and from which subjectivities are constituted and meanings are produced. Finally, it is observed in the indicated representations that, with the exception of the Portuguese/English Language and

Literature Degree Course, there is still little association with the adoption of English as a language of instruction and the potentiality of this action to expand the possibilities of the university to ascend to the internationalization movements of Higher Education. Perhaps, after the analyses, it is pertinent to say that, despite the representations raised throughout the research, it can be said that English has not yet been regularly adopted as the language of instruction by the courses at the institution studied.

We hope that this study can contribute to future research and that it helps the institution studied and other institutions to (re)produce and (re)verberate English as a language of instruction in discourses, common sense and academic practices in the Brazilian context, so that we can also equip ourselves, as a nation, to expand the possibilities of internationalization of Higher Education in our country.

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