

A Review of Linguistic Policies Related to the Teaching of English From Colonial Times to Present Times in Argentina.

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ABSTRACT: *The study of the evolution of linguistic policies along the course of history helps us understand the underlying motivations of the decisions taken, and bring light into possible solutions to current problems. In Latin America in general and in Argentina in particular, the development of the ability to communicate in English in scientific studies- Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics - is little realized during the years at university. In this work, we present a brief journey through the history of linguistic policies in terms of the teaching of second languages in Argentina from colonial times to present times in pursue of understanding this low degree of realization.*

Keywords: *communicative competence, English, linguisticpolicies, scientificstudies*

I. INTRODUCTION

International context

The TuningProject was first launched in Europe in 2000. It was an initiative that pursued the creation of a European Space of Higher Education in order to offer a concrete approach to implement **Bologna Process** at higher education institutions and subject areas”[1]. An innovative feature of this project was the development of reference points expressed as learning outcomes and competences with the agreement and consensus of many universities – learning outcomes are understood as what the learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after the completion of a learning experience, i.e: *the level of competence*, and competences as dynamic combinations of cognitive and metacognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values[1].

In 2002, eight Latin-American universities¹ and seven European universities² presented the **Tuning – Latin American project**(Tuning-LA) to the ALFA program of the European committee³, project that was formally accepted in 2004. Tuning-LA sought to contribute to the development of comparable and comprehensible academic degrees so as to allow articulation between students and graduates from different universities of Latin-American countries [2]. In this respect, the starting point of the project was the exploration of common aspects based on the learning outcomes and competences that graduates need to develop so as to incorporate themselves effectively into their occupational fields (academic, professional or technical). Placing focus on competences instead of specific subjects strengthens the idea of academic and professional mobility, and still respects academic freedom, diversity and autonomy (libro Tuning). These common competences were classified and identified as “**generic competences**” and “**specific competences**”. Generic competences are defined by the Tuning-LA as those capacities or abilities that any graduate should develop during the course of university studies independently of the academic degree achieved, and specific competences vary and differ from discipline to discipline; these are abilities or capacities relevant for the exercise of a particular profession or area of knowledge. Under this spirit, by the end of 2004, Tuning-LA got involved in its first task: to come to an agreement of which were going to be considered the **generic competences** of the project. An intense work done mainly by academics of the universities involved resulted in a list of 27 generic competences [2].

A further step in the project was to administer a survey to **academics, graduates, students, and employers** to determine the **DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE** for the exercise of the profession, and the **DEGREE OF REALIZATION** – extent of achievement – during university grade studies for each of the 27 generic competences. The scale used to determine the degree of importance and realization had a range from 1 to 4: being 1= **NOTHING**, 2= **A LITTLE**, 3=**MUCH** and 4=**A LOT**. A total number of 22609 questionnaires were collected, that revealed at first sight a lower degree of realization than of importance for all 27 competences.

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³ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/alfa/index_es.htm

After coming to an agreement on the generic competences, consensus had to be found between members of the different discipline communities of which were the *specific competences* for the 12 subject areas considered in the project. In this study we will focus only on the generic competence n°7: *the ability to communicate in a second language*.

In the survey carried out by the Tuning-LA, this competence obtained the following results:

Cluster	Degree of Importance	Degree of Realization
Academics	3.321	1.98
Graduates	3.255	1.907
Employers	3.223	2.207
Students	3.112	2.061

Table 1. Degree of Importance and Realization for the **Ability to communicate in a Second Language** in the Tuning-LA project [2]

Accordingly, we will focus only on the *specific competences* related to the generic competence *ability to communicate in a second language* for those disciplines of the Basic Sciences involved at this stage in the Tuning-LA: Physics, Mathematics, and Chemistry.

The group of **Physics** identified the *ability to communicate concepts and results in written and oral language to peers, in teaching situations and popularization activities* as one of the specific competences. In the survey carried out to Academics, Graduates, Students, and Employers the results obtained showed in all four cases that this *specific competence* was very important, yet with a low degree of realization [2].

The group of **Mathematics** identified the *Knowledge of English to read, write and communicate documents in English, as well as to interact with other specialists* as one of the specific competences. In the survey administered to Academics, Graduates and Students, the results obtained for degree of importance were 3.58, 3.66 and 3.38, and for the degree of realization 2.50, 2.47 and 2.50⁴, respectively for each cluster [2].

The group of **Chemistry** identified the *Knowledge of the English language to read, write and communicate documents, as well as to interact with other researchers* as one of the specific competences. Results show that each of the clusters surveyed – Academics, Graduates, Students and Employers – valued this specific competence as very important (above the mean) and still very little realized during university studies [2].

As it was pointed out, the results in the Tuning-LA project related to the degree of importance and realization of the generic competence *ability to communicate in a second language*, and the specific competences in the areas of Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry related to this generic competence seemed to be at least puzzling. How is it that an ability that is claimed to be of much importance both for the achievement of any academic degree and specifically for the achievement of an academic degree related to the Basic Sciences is so little realized in many universities in Latin America? Why, in an era in which English is becoming more and more consolidated as the language of scientific communication (hyland, swales, etc), graduates from scientific studies, academics that teach in scientific disciplines and students of scientific studies, all claim that English is little realized during their university formation?

Local context

In light of the results obtained by the Tuning-LA project, a local research group⁵ oriented towards the study of competences in higher scientific studies implemented a similar methodology to learn about what academics and students of Chemistry think about the degree of importance and realization of the **Specific Competences** for the area of Chemistry in the Facultad de Ciencias Exactas y Naturales⁶ of the UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE CUYO (FCEN-UNCUYO). Twenty three questionnaires were collected from academics and fifteen of advanced students of Chemistry [3].

The results obtained varied little from those obtained by the Tuning-LA. As regards the specific competence *Knowledge of the English language to read, write and communicate documents, as well as to interact with other researchers*, the average value of Degree of Importance assigned by Academics was 3.5, and 3.5 by students, and of Degree of Realization was 2.2 and 2.6, respectively [3]. And again, the same questions arose: Why is the development of the ability to communicate in English so little realized in scientific university studies in Mendoza, Argentina? Do linguistic policies in Argentina accompany political interest of scientific growth? In order to understand the current situation of linguistic policies as regards the teaching of English in Argentinean universities, we present a brief history of their evolution with respect to the teaching of second languages in this country. The present work is part of a wider investigation related to the specification of communicational standards in a second language: English for higher scientific studies in Argentina.

⁵ The author of this paper is a member of this research group

⁶ At the moment of the survey the FCEN was still named INSTITUTO DE CIENCIAS BÁSICAS (ICB)

II. LINGUISTIC POLICIES

2.1 From colonial times to Independence times

The institutionalization of Education as we know it nowadays started in Latin America as a tool of domination of the Spanish Crown over native tribes. After centuries of war against the Arabic people, a war that had turned to be a “war against the unfaithful”, the Spanish monarchy had fused the political ideal to the religious ideal [4]. Hence, having proclaimed themselves as the only ones with the right to educate, Spanish people installed Education in these faraway lands with an evangelizing purpose[5].

A royal decree of 1509 stated that a house should be built next to a church, house in which every child should be taught to read, write and the catholic faith by an ecclesiastic person. In 1518 a Zaragoza ordinance ordered the sons of every native chief to be given to the Dominicans and Franciscans to be educated. Education was always imparted in Spanish.

By 1613, the first University in what we now know as Argentinean territory was created: the *Colegio Mayor de Córdoba*, institution that later on would be named University of Córdoba. This institution belonged to the Jesuitical order and teaching was scholastic, oriented towards the Education of clerical members [4]. Being an inspiring source of the Counter reform, a strategical decision of the Church to adapt to the demands of modern commercial capitalism, and a way of upgrading Catholic Church, the University of Córdoba was intended to prepare the future leaders of the country [6].

So far, no linguistic policies had been formally stated – besides the implicit ones under which classes were given in Spanish at schools or houses and Latin at university – until the royal decree of Aranjuez in 1770. Charles III ordered the elimination of every native language and the absolute imposition of Spanish as the only language to be spoken, written or read in the colonies.

The decisions around linguistic aspects in the colonial territory were based on the Spanish political and religious pursue: the imposition of the Spanish Crown as the “owner” of the land, and of the Catholic Faith as the only religious belief, both things for which they needed to impose Spanish as the official language. At university level things were different. University was intended not for massive education but for those who would become either leaders of the country or clerical members, classes were therefore mainly imparted in Latin, a language that only a privileged group of people mastered.

2.2 From Independence times to present times

After the advent of a new Nation sovereign and independent, in 1810, educational policies began to have a much more important role in the government’s agenda, especially those connected to primary and secondary education, since what happened at University level was still mainly in hands of the Church.

During the first decade after May’s Revolution in 1810, (Revolución de Mayo) teachers were ordered to finish classes every day with a patriotic song and once a week they had to go to the *Plaza de la Victoria* and sing the National Anthem. These first ten years of organization were witnesses of many educational initiatives. However disperse, they all shared the common objective of introducing scientific knowledge to schools, since it was believed that the popularization of this kind of knowledge would bring progress to the country (solari), in Bernardino Rivadavia’s words “*the government would have to answer for the evils that were to turn obsolete the fruits of such a hard to get Liberty, if it were to abandon the promotion of Science*” [4]⁷.

Manuel Belgrano, founder of the *Academia de Geometría, Perspectiva, Arquitectura y Dibujo*, the *Academia de Náutica* in 1799, and the *Escuela de Matemática* in 1810, introduced the first educational ideas that molded the system until present days. In 1812 he signed in Jujuy a school regulation that included as necessary subjects Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Grammar, Social Sciences, Religion and Moral, eliminated punishment to children and luxury, reduced holidays and promoted love for order, work and respect to God.

Bernardino Rivadavia was also a national leader with great impact on the educational system prior to Faustino Sarmiento. His ideas and proposals, marked by the European concept of civilization and progress, foot printed profoundly the scholar system as we know it today.

Among Rivadavia’s main contributions to the Education system, we find the compulsion of primary school to every citizen in scholar age, applying very high penalties to those who did not send their children to school; the turn from an ecclesiastic education to a scientific education; the introduction of the Lancaster system to public schools as the teaching methodology; the creation of educational institutions; the incorporation of foreign teachers; and the acquisition of scientific instrumental for teaching and research.

As regards linguistic policies launched by Bernardino Rivadavia that promoted the teaching of English in formal education, the following can be highlighted:

- A decree in 1812 that established a new educational institution oriented towards public prosperity that incorporated the introduction of subjects such as: Political Law, Architecture, Exact Sciences, Geography, Mineralogy and languages: Spanish, French and **English**.

⁷Translation by the author, original in Spanish

- The creation of the *Colegio de la Unión del Sud*, that incorporated in its curricula the teaching of French, Italian and **English**.
- The creation of different institutions by hand of the teachers brought to Argentinean soil: *Academia clásica de idiomas*, and the *Academia para niñas*, both in which students were taught Spanish, French and **English**.
- The creation of educational institutions for children of the English collectivity: *Buenos Ayrean British School Society* and the *Academia Comercial Inglesa*. The latter had two different study programs, one for boys and one for girls; boys studied Mathematics, Geography, **Languages**, Calligraphy, Correspondence, Book keeping, and girls studied **English Grammar**, Writing, Arithmetic and Sowing.

All these actions carried out during this period had a strong political and ideological engine: the consolidation of a Nation in consonance with the European model of the time.

The following years, starred by Juan Manuel de Rosas as Governor of Buenos Aires, saw Education in Argentina take an abrupt turn. Rosas, conservative leader, kept a political posture of social restructuring that ordered obedience and loyalty to the *national federal cause*. Hence, Education now looked towards ecclesiastic instruction and ideological uniformity of educators and students. Teachers were replaced; private institutions were closed for being source of heresy; the oath under which students received their academic degree was changed for that of loyalty to *the cause*; Educational expenses were eliminated from the national budget and parents were asked to pay for the teachers' salary, infrastructure and maintenance services, leaving "aside" of the system those children whose parents could not afford paying [4].

With the arrival of the *Company of Jesusto* Argentinean soil and Rosas' disposition, the Jesuital school was authorized to open classes of Latin grammar, Greek language and Rhetoric. Schools for boys were inaugurated in which students were taught Theology, civil and ecclesiastic Law and Mathematics.

The airs of modernization were, during this period, interrupted and conservativeness was again permeated into Education. Teaching was once more intimately related to the teaching of the Catholic Faith and the teaching of languages distanced from the modern languages of French, English and Italian and turned back to Latin and Greek.

In 1862, with Bartolomé Mitre as the new head of the Nation, education was again within government's priorities. The first step that he took was to make a census of every school that laid on Argentinean soil. Out of the information that he collected from the census, Mitre created the *Colegios Nacionales*, schools that claimed themselves to be democratic houses of study accessible for every inhabitant of the country and not just for a privileged minority. The programs of study of these schools, elaborated with the assistance of experts in the field, included *Letters and Humanities* (Spanish, Literature, history of Literature, Latin, French, **English**, and German), *Moral Sciences* (Philosophy, History, Geography) and *Exact Sciences* (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Cosmography) [4].

Contemporarily, Juan Bautista Alberdi, inspirer of the Argentinean Constitution, political theorist and ambassador in Europe by those times, maintained that education should get divorced from ecclesiastic teaching and get closer to a professional preparation; preparation that would favor national modernization and hence, progress. He firmly believed that this change should come hand in hand with the teaching of studies related to Commerce, Engineering, Geology and mainly **English**. He stated that English was "*the language of liberty, industry and order*" and that it should take the place of Latin in Greek in every program of study.

In 1868, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento was elected President of all Argentines and what is considered to be the most important contribution in educational matter as an independent Nation began. With imported ideas from North America, Sarmiento triggered a battery of actions oriented towards the consolidation and growth of primary school, defined more precisely the purpose of secondary school, and founded more *Colegios Nacionales* in different provinces. He also created multiple schools such as the *Colegio Militar*, and the *Academia de Ciencias*. Sarmiento's labor in educational matter is also remembered by the invitation of American teachers to teach all along Argentinean territory.

The teaching of English in Argentinean schools was intimately associated to different ideals of progress (either European or Anglo-Saxon). The idea that the development of this language would result in the development of human, cultural and social capital was translated in the incorporation of this subject as obligatory in the programs of study of educational institution; thereby emancipating citizens and giving them the necessary tools to access to knowledge published not just in Spanish.

However, these were decisions taken by those in a position of power at different moments; there was no legal national regulation of what the teaching of second languages – or even teaching in general – in Argentina should be like. Provincial laws had been sanctioned – such as *Ley de Educación Primaria* in Corrientes, promulgated in 1853, *Ley de Educación Común* promulgated in 1871 in Catamarca, and *Ley de Educación Común* in Buenos Aires in 1875 – prior to the inaction of the first National Law of Education *Law n° 1.420 Ley de Educación Común*, in 1884.

Being the first national regulation in educational matters [7], this law established a minimum of compulsory instruction that included: Reading and Writing, Arithmetic, Argentinean Geography and notions of

Universal Geography, Argentinean History and notions of Universal History, National Language, Moral and Urbanity, notions of Hygiene, notions of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences, notions of Drawing and vocal Music, Gymnastics and knowledge of the National Constitution. Second languages, either English or any other, were left aside from this normative, and hence, the teaching of English was left in hands of private institutions. Nonetheless, the importance of developing competence in this language was a genuine concern of many educators. The beginning of a new century brought the inauguration of two Institutions for the preparation of teachers of modern languages: *Instituto Joaquín V. González* and the *Instituto Juan Ramón Fernández*.

The National Law 1420 was replaced in 1993 by the *Ley Federal de Educación 24.195*[8] that extended to 10 the years of compulsory education. This law was sanctioned after only 9 years of the reestablishment of democracy in Argentina and divided scholar instruction in two: *Educación General Básica – EGB* (Basic General Education) first 9 years of instruction and *Educación Polimodal* (Multimodal Education) last 3 years of secondary school.

In 1996, the *Acuerdo Marco para la Enseñanza de Lenguas* (Referential Frame for the teaching of Languages) [9] was approved by the *Consejo Federal de Cultura y Educación*. This EGB decree stated that every school should guarantee at least two levels of second languages, one of which had to be **English**. In 1997 the *Contenidos Básicos para la Educación Polimodal*⁸ (Basic contents for Multimodal Education) were determined. In this ordinance it was stipulated that by the end of formal education three levels of second language will be achieved by every citizen, one of which was **English**. Within the spirit of this decision, the mastery of communicative competence in a second language, specially English was believed to *favor intellectual autonomy and the development of the necessary abilities to get inserted both in the world of work and that of Higher Studies*⁹[10], and to be *essential for a full participation and interaction of citizens in a world in which physical presence is no longer a requisite, specially due to globalization of communications*¹⁰ [10].

In 1995, the *Ley de Educación Superior n°24521* (Law for Higher Studies) was promulgated, law that is still in force nowadays. Even though this law does not make reference to the teaching of second languages or English in particular – as one could expect – it does refer to a solid preparation of scientists, to the development of scientific, technological and cultural research, and to the generation and communication of knowledge of the highest quality.

During the first decade of the millennium, after having overcome a destructive economic and social crisis at the beginning of the century that left behind thousands of unemployed, massive emigration mainly to Europe of young people, many of them scientists, the sold out of national natural resources, airlines and trains, among many other things, Argentina started to experience a takeoff in scientific and educational matters. Among the many actions it can be highlighted the creation of the ANPCyT (National Agency for the Promotion of Science and Technology), the creation of two separate Ministries: the *Ministerio de Educación – ME* (Ministry of Education) and the *Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología - MCyE* (Ministry of Science and Technology), the program to repatriate scientists in Argentinean universities and scientific centers, the creation of ARSAT (Argentinean Satellites), the increase by law of the budget for Education, the determination of scientific studies as being of priority and interest for the Nation, the signing of contracts with universities to strengthen laboratories, human resources, infrastructure and of different agreements to reinforce scientific studies.

In this context, in 2006, the *Ley Federal de Educación* was replaced by *Ley de Educación Nacional n° 26206*[11] that extended to 14 the years of compulsory education. In its 27th and 30th article, it establishes that every primary and secondary school must at least guarantee the development of oral and written linguistic competences of one foreign language. In 2015, the Law 24521 was modified to guarantee gratuity of grade higher studies, free access to every citizen who complies with the requisites established and the compulsion of universities to offer levelling courses. Yet, there has not been a real upgrade of this law, sanctioned more than 20 years ago.

As it was referred to at the beginning of this study, the **ability to communicate in a second language** is of much importance both as a generic competence and as a specific competence in scientific studies. National legislation in primary and secondary school focuses on the teaching of a second language. However, declarative intentions seem to be more ambitious than what really happens in schools and students finish their secondary school with little knowledge of the English language. National legislation in Universities does not refer to the teaching of a second language.

A further research explores the programs of National Universities in Argentina that teach scientific studies in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology in order to identify how do, if so, the different faculties tackle the issue of teaching English; what role does this subject play within the curricula and what complementary programs do they have to promote the development of this communicative competence.

⁸ <http://www.me.gov.ar/consejo/documentos/cbc/polimodal/cbcep/lenext.pdf>

⁹ Translation by the author, original in Spanish

¹⁰ Ibid

III. CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of colonization, the banning of all languages other than Spanish had a marked political and religious purpose of imposition: respect and obedience should be rendered to the Crown and to the Catholic Church. Linguistic policies in this respect clearly accompanied this intention. Later on, with the building of a new Nation, freedom from Spanish dominance had to be gained. The teaching of modern languages, such as English, French and Italian, gave citizens independence from Spanish printed and orally communicated knowledge. The incorporation of these subjects in school curricula went along with this desire of cutting those ties. By the end of the XX century and the beginning of the XXI, the teaching of English and other second languages has split apart from that need of independence from Spain. However, it is highly needed to reach independence of knowledge. Being immerse in a modern and globalized world that has adopted English (crystal, swales) as the international language, that sees in scientific growth the doors to progress, Argentinean linguistic policies need to be revised so as to be sure that they guarantee the development of the *ability to communicate in a second language* in higher scientific studies.

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