

Identity Marks of Being an English Language Teacher

**Kelly Cristina Rodrigues Gularte da Silva^I
Sita Mara Lopes Sant'Anna^{II}**

^IUniversidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre/RS – Brazil

^{II}Universidade Estadual do Rio Grande do Sul (UERGS), Porto Alegre/RS – Brazil

ABSTRACT – Identity Marks of Being an English Language Teacher.

This study explores the identity marks that shape what it means to be an English language teacher. Based on interviews with five language teachers, the research sought to understand both the significance attributed to being an English teacher and the characteristics deemed essential for performing this professional role. The theoretical–methodological approach was grounded in Discourse Analysis. The findings reveal a discursive formation permeated by social, collective, historical, and institutional memory, reflected in the teachers' narratives, which articulate senses of absence—of opportunities to learn English, of resources, and of interaction with students. These results highlight the lack of formative educational policies directed toward English language teachers within the observed context.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis. Continuing Formation. English Teachers.

RESUMO – Marcas Identitárias de Ser Professora de Língua Inglesa.

Este artigo teve dois questionamentos realizados em entrevistas com cinco professoras de língua, com o objetivo de saber o que significa ser professora de inglês e que características são necessárias para o exercício desta profissão. A abordagem teórico-metodológica abrangeu a Análise de Discurso. Os resultados mostram que há uma formação discursiva marcada por uma memória social, coletiva, histórica e institucional presentes nos dizeres das professoras que deflagram sentidos de falta: de oportunidades de saber inglês, de recursos e de interação com os/as estudantes. Achados que direcionam para a ausência de políticas educacionais formativas para professoras de língua inglesa na realidade observada.

Palavras-chave: Análise de Discurso. Formação Continuada. Professoras de Língua Inglesa.

Introduction

This article presents an excerpt from a research project completed in 2022 as part of a professional master's degree in education at the Universidade Estadual do Rio Grande do Sul (UERGS). The study aimed to identify certain identity processes involved in being an English language teacher through seven guiding questions posed to teachers, analyzed using materialist Discourse Analysis (Pêcheux, 2007, 2008). The research involved five English teachers working in a municipal school system. It was a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory study whose main goal was to examine how these identity marks are manifested in the teachers' discourse, considering the methodologies they employ.

Because the professional master's program in education emphasizes applied, engaged, and practice-oriented research, this study resulted in the creation of a formative e-book as an educational product¹ intended for the training of English language teachers in Brazil. This e-book currently holds the highest number of monthly accesses in UERGS's academic repository, reflecting its applicability and relevance.

For this paper, we selected two of the questions addressed to the teachers, seeking to explore: What does being an English teacher mean to you? and What characteristics do you believe an English language teacher needs to teach effectively?

From a theoretical-conceptual standpoint, Ennes and Marcon (2014) consider identity processes as multiple, dynamic, and conflictual constructions that constitute the subject. In this perspective, the dissertation's findings showed that the identity processes involved in being an English teacher stem from multiple sources – “[...] from academic training, teaching practice, and individual experiences, and are expressed through meanings that reveal a social memory [...] marked by common sense” (Silva, 2022, p. 206).

We understand that these processes in the formation of teaching identities are historical, as the subject is interpellated by language and ideology (Pêcheux, 2008), leaving in their discourse traces of this process of constitution. Thus, we sought to identify and analyze some of these identity marks of being an English teacher from this perspective.

This article is organized into five sections: it begins with this introduction, followed by a discussion of theoretical conceptions of teacher identity and identity processes; the theoretical-methodological section outlining the principles of Discourse Analysis applied in this study; the analysis of teachers' discourses in response to the two selected questions; and the concluding remarks.

Historical Teaching Marks

Bahury (2017), Bauman (2001), and Hall (2006) observe that contemporary identities fragment the individual. In this text, the manifestation of these identities is examined through the teachers' discourses, in order to identify certain linguistic aspects – such as enunciative

marks and memories – that affect and interpellate them. Based on what is said, it is possible to problematize certain concepts from Discourse Analysis, through which we perceive the reconstitution of an event that takes place through language and memory (Pêcheux, 2008). These elements reinforce a regularity that allows for inferences to be questioned regarding the said and the unsaid in the teachers' discourses, in line with Mutti's (2007, p. 265) observation that "[...] the subject mobilizes implicit and pre-constructed meanings."

Thus, it becomes important to exercise the identification of meanings related to historical memory, social memory, and institutional memory, which help locate evident marks within the issues raised and which are present in the speech of English language teachers.

The focus is to identify what it means to be an English teacher and what characteristics are necessary for this profession – identities that are shaped by a socio-historical past as well as the current moment in which both society and these teachers are situated.

From other perspectives, Freire (2003) argues that individuals are unfinished, limited, conditioned, and historical beings – just as Pêcheux (2008) views the subject as interpellated by historicity and traversed by language, elements that also constitute them. Hall's (2006) studies address these transitions in the conception of the subject – from the stable, centered individual of earlier centuries to the "[...] postmodern subject [who] has no fixed, essential, or permanent identity" (Hall, 2006, p. 12).

This contextualization helps to understand the notion of subjectification from the perspective of Discourse Analysis as developed by Pêcheux, which serves as the theoretical framework of this work. Orlandi (2020, p. 48) presents the subject as a theoretical construct that assumes a "[...] historical subject-form, being at once free and submissive through language." As an effect of these formulations, we note that if an individual teaches for years, it is not solely due to the act of work itself, but because the subject does something of themselves through this practice – their identities carry the marks of their own teaching activity, which are directly related to external contexts that regulate us.

According to Tardif (2002), there are multiple types of knowledge incorporated into this teacher-self, as the advancement of societies has brought different cultural experiences to the individual. The meanings attributed to these experiences stem from these diverse trajectories and constitute these professionals as historical subjects. Similarly:

We understand that no one can teach what they have not learned or experienced; therefore, it is essential that teachers have the opportunity to experience other formative spaces that allow them access not only to theoretical/academic knowledge, but also to cultural and material resources, as a fundamental social right for human development (Guesser; Hobold, 2024, p. 5).

In these affirmations, it is important to mark the positionality of these English language teachers – as women, as subjects of the feminine gender², who are interpellated by a socio-political-historical condition, and who embody a teaching dimension that is broad and unfinished, given that the knowledge conveyed through teaching is constantly shifting.

Reflecting on these issues through their voices and recording the cultural manifestations that emerge through memories and evident marks contributes epistemologically to expanding the understanding of the teaching dimension for professionals in this field. Teaching is understood here as a technical, political, ethical, and aesthetic dimension, constituted “[...] through solid training, involving the mastery and management of content and methodologies, diverse languages, technologies, and innovations, contributing to broaden the perspective and actions of this professional” (Brasil, 2015, p. 3).

Understanding these identity marks is highly significant in professional teaching contexts, as there are embedded discourses within the very conception of being a teacher. As stated by Garcia et al. (2005, p. 47), “[...] teaching identity is negotiated among these multiple representations, among which, and in a relevant way, identity policies are established by official educational discourse.” Identity processes “[...] must be analyzed, above all, as expressions of power relations that generate stratification, hierarchization, and positioning, but also, at times, social transgression” (Ennes; Marcon, 2014, p. 286). These processes lead individuals to differentiate themselves, and “[...] in this instability of defining or constituting what identity is, the meanings of modernity in the identity process are concentrated” (Bahury, 2017, p. 46).

Identity entails a paradoxical and incomplete relationship, and presenting these conceptions contributes to the understanding that the identity processes shaping these English language teachers are multiple. These contradictory relations coexist within and among us, and reflecting on them within the professional scope we propose becomes a challenge.

Theoretical–Methodological Framework: concepts from discourse analysis

Starting from the premise that there is no pre-defined methodological path – since methodology in Discourse Analysis is constructed through the relationship established between the theoretical framework and the analytical corpus – we present here some core concepts, based on the definitions by Pêcheux (2007, 2008) and Orlandi (2020).

Pêcheux understands the context of language as both a structure and an event. In this view, when speaking, the subject – as a historical subject-form – is affected by the conditions of production through which discourses circulate. In a play of tensions and conflicts, between paraphrase (recurring, repeated meanings) and polysemy (multiple, new meanings), subjects formulate their sayings.

Thus, an imaginary exchange of words (Orlandi, 2020) is established, considering that in this imaginary relationship there is also anticipation: the image the speaker constructs of their interlocutor and all the other images materialized by them in the discursive relationship. In this way, the conditions of production are realized through the act of saying.

In the analytical process, we follow the three stages proposed by Orlandi (2020). In the first, the analyst makes contact with the text and seeks its discursivities – that is, works with the linguistic surface. In the second stage, the focus is on the discursive object, in which discursive formations are related through the general meanings they reveal. Finally, in the third stage, the discursive process is analyzed in search of the ideological formations present in the subjects' identification processes within discourse. Identities result from these identification processes, where the imaginary plays a significant role. This is the path we follow in analyzing the teachers' discourses.

The conditions of production encompass the image constructed of the other, in their positions, mobilizing a saying that refers to various pre-existing meanings – mobilized memories that affiliate the discourse to other discourses, which in the analysis begin to indicate the political and ideological positioning of a formulation. These images, which identify us, refer to stabilized meanings within a network of discursive and historical affiliations to which the subjects – including discourse analysts – are subjected.

In the analyses, such discursive tensions may emerge between identities and in collective identity processes. As such, they represent facts tied to a particular time, for each teacher, whether in their spheres of professional practice or in their personal life histories, as it is their distinct individual experiences that constitute them.

These discourses, which become presentified in the discursive-linguistic event, are constituted in this linguistic, intradiscursive materiality, which maintains a structure as an event, based on the assertion that “[...] the materiality of discourse is language, which works the relationship between language, discourse, and ideology [...], that is, there is no discourse without a subject and no subject without ideology: the individual is interpellated by ideology, and that is how language makes meaning” (Orlandi, 2020, p. 15).

In this way, within the conceptualization of the identity processes of English teachers, we infer the relevance of the concepts of *enunciative heterogeneity* (a term coined by Authier-Revuz, 1990), and social/historical and institutional memory, based on the studies of Achard (2007) and Pêcheux (2007).

To understand enunciative heterogeneity, we begin from the conception that the subject is not homogeneous, but rather decentered, divided, cleaved. This heterogeneity constitutes the material structure of language, allowing, within the linearity of a chain, the unintentional polyphony of all discourse to be heard – through which

analysis can attempt to retrieve traces of the punctuation of the unconscious (Authier-Revuz, 1990).

According to Authier-Revuz (1990), words constitute the marks of heterogeneities, present in all discourse. These are shown heterogeneities and constitutive heterogeneities that lead the analyst to “[...] study the forms by which a discourse places an exterior to itself, and consequently, delimits an interior; it is to access the image that a discourse constructs of itself” (Authier-Revuz, 2015, p. 11), based on the understanding that words are loaded with other meanings, from discourses that have already been uttered, considering that discourse is produced in/by interdiscourse.

Regarding shown heterogeneity, the author defines it as “[...] inscribing the other within the sequence of discourse: [through] direct discourse, quotation marks, glossing or commentary forms, free indirect discourse, irony” as examples (Authier-Revuz, 1990, p. 25), always pointing to the exterior of the subject’s relationship with language. Thus, it is understood that when the subject inscribes the other – with whom they relate – within the discursive sequence, they do so by representing different modes of negotiation by the speaking subject. This may occur through highlighted words in italics, quotation “marks”, UPPERCASE, bold, (parentheses), and so on, based on the notion that there is something exterior to the subject.

Concerning the subject’s act of saying, Pêcheux (2008) reflects on the functioning of representations and thought in discursive processes, in the subject’s relationship with what represents them. This heterogeneity –where the other is incorporated as constitutive of the subject, with whom the subject shares discursive space –suggests that the subject organizes and “[...] negotiates the presence of this other, within themselves” (Sant’Anna, 2009, p. 48). Thus, we understand this “[...] other-discourse, as a virtual presence in the describable materiality of the sequence, marks, from within this materiality, the insistence of the other as the very principle of the socio-historical real” (Pêcheux, 2008, p. 55).

The constitutive heterogeneity of the subject and their discourse “[...] is grounded in works that view discourse as a product of interdiscourses” (Authier-Revuz, 1990, p. 25). That is, constitutive heterogeneities are not easily localized, but may be identified by discourse analysts in response to the question of *how the other speaks*. Sant’Anna (2009, p. 48) states that discourse analysts will also find constitutive heterogeneities manifested as “[...] the marks of shown heterogeneity that are constituted through elements that provide possible access to ‘that’ other in discourse.”

The shown and constitutive heterogeneity present in the sayings of the English language teachers will indicate important aspects concerning the constitution of their identity processes. In the analytical process, these heterogeneity marks will highlight the presence of the other in the saying – that is, the words of others: which may refer to institutional, ideological, or pedagogical discourses in circulation, to current legislation, and to many other possibilities.

Regarding memory, Pêcheux (2007) defines it as the place of interdiscourse or interdiscursive memory. Within this understanding, memory is not a repository of records or a container for stored recollections, since the unconscious also speaks in memory –piercing it, producing distortions, erasures, silencing, interdictions, omissions, and so on.

In this perspective:

[...] memory could not be conceived as a full sphere, whose borders are historical transcendents and whose content would be a homogeneous meaning, accumulated like a reservoir: it is necessarily a mobile space of divisions, disjunctions, displacements and retrievals, of conflicts of regularization... A space of unfoldings, rejoinders, polemics, and counter-discourses (Pêcheux, 2007, p. 56).

This is a memory constructed in enunciation, as it materializes in the linguistic-discursive event, according to Achard's (2007) perspective. Mutti (2007, p. 265) observes that, in reconstituting an event through memory, "[...] the subject mobilizes implicits, pre-constructed meanings that tend to reinforce regularization." Thus, it becomes crucial to delineate the meanings of historical memory, social memory, and institutional memory, which assist in better locating evident – or not so evident – marks of identity processes, but which are present in the speech of English teachers.

We reiterate that interdiscourse is presented as the place where knowledge resides, the pre-constructed at the level of memory – in other words, that which speaks before us: "[...] it is the entire set of past utterances, already forgotten, that determine what we say" (Orlandi, 2020, p. 31).

Socio-historical memory is constituted as an effect of the individual and collective work of humans with language – that is, among subjects and the discourses they articulate in their multiple forms of saying. Achard (2007) highlights that memory becomes possible through an oscillation between the historical and the linguistic. Pêcheux (2007) notes that a historical event may inscribe itself within an internal continuity, through meanings that intersect.

Regarding social memory, Davallon, (2007, p. 26) affirms:

Thus, the event, as a 'memorized' event, may enter into history (the memory of the group may endure and extend beyond the physical limits of the social group that experienced the event); but as a 'historical' event, it may, in turn, become a living element of a collective memory.

Sant'Anna (2009, p. 46) adds that, "[...] the idea of collective memory is constituted by significant events of social coexistence, in an intersubjective and group dimension in the field of the self and the others". For Davallon (2007, p. 25), memory "[...] retains from the past only what is still alive or capable of living in the consciousness of the group that maintains it". Therefore, for the collective linguistic event to coexist, data or common notions constituted by different members of the social community must be activated in the field of collective memory.

This is not about repetition, but rather about “[...] judgments of plausibility concerning what is reconstituted through operations of paraphrase” (Achard, 2007, p. 16) which are uttered. The linguistic event, in its operational mode, becomes evident through the circulation of discourses it revives – this is the work of the subject within discursive memory (Sant’Anna, 2009). Thus, “[...] the constitution of the materiality of a social memory is always reformulated through new concrete enunciations, by which the subject temporalizes the world, based on remembrance or forgetfulness” (Mutti, 2007, p. 266). In this way, socio-historical memory is constituted as an effect of human work with.

In the case of institutional memory, there is a play of forces aimed at the regularization of discourse and against deregulation, since within institutions, we find stabilized discursive spaces. However, such utterances are not fixed in structure; they remain subject to misinterpretation under varying conditions, although still influenced by law, rigor, order, sensitivities, and principles (Pêcheux, 2007; 2008).

Within institutions, there are institutionalized discourses, reaffirmed through a network of affiliations that make up the institutional memory of a place. These discourses simultaneously ensure both the recognition of the institutionality and the continuity of its institutional existence. The subjects who inhabit and work in these spaces – as instituting agents – mobilize discourses and shift these networks of discursive affiliations. Nevertheless, in the discursive play that tends toward regularization, there exists a memory of *things to be known* (Pêcheux, 2008, p. 33) that perpetuates them.

We understand that the school, as a state institution, is represented through institutional memory, which manifests in discourses that tend toward crystallization and the maintenance of state power. Sant’Anna (2009, p. 30) explains that the school is the place of pedagogical discourse, and as an institutionalized discourse, it legitimizes the institution. Moreover, she points out that such discourse is “[...] “eminently authoritarian, constituted by a structure of control and its mechanisms,” where the subjects operating within are discursively interpellated by an institutional memory that speaks, ritualizes, bureaucratizes, and establishes routines with which all must coexist.

On the Teachers' Statements

The selection of the five participants consisted of tenured women teachers who had completed their undergraduate degrees in Language and Literature – English or Portuguese–English programs and who taught the English language curricular component in basic education within a municipality in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Teachers from other disciplines who happened to teach English and/or teachers who were on leave for any reason were not included in this master’s research.

All participants held permanent public teaching positions, were between 40 and 56 years of age, had more than 15 years of classroom

experience, and taught English as a foreign language for 20 hours per week within the municipal school system. None had any experience living or studying abroad.

One teacher lived in the municipality where she worked, while the remaining four resided in neighboring towns. All five held a full licentiate degree in both Portuguese and English. Four of the teachers self-identified as white, and one as mixed-race (*parda*). The teachers worked at both upper elementary (final years of primary education) and secondary school levels. One held only an undergraduate degree, while the remaining four had completed postgraduate specialization programs, although in fields unrelated to English language teaching.

In what follows, we will refer to the five teachers as T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5, and we will analyze selected excerpts from their responses, drawn from the analytical corpus of the dissertation.

In response to the first guiding question – What does being an English teacher mean to you? – the teachers offered the following statements:

Table 1 – Being an English Teacher Means

Teacher	Statement
T1	For me, at first, being an English teacher was a challenge because I missed many professional opportunities due to my lack of knowledge of the English language [...] being an English teacher means trying to help students live in an increasingly globalized world.
T2	Opening horizons, broadening perspectives, giving people the conditions to become aware that they will gain a new worldview. [...] the student will be better able to interpret, better understand things, instructions, commands — everything becomes easier because they'll have that support, right, in another language.
T3	It's about showing them the outside world, right? [...] new horizons [...] so they can have [...] get to know other countries, show, right, other cultures.
T4	It's something very important, because we're able to bring students into contact with another culture, to show them, right, how people live in other parts of the world; that other places exist.
T5	It's something that is already part of their daily lives, though they often don't realize it, right? So I think it's fundamental—especially for those seeking better job opportunities in the future. I believe English is a key differentiator nowadays, and I want to pass that on to my students.

Source: Adapted from Silva (2022).

It can be stated that T1 reports having lost professional opportunities due to not knowing English, and concludes that being a teacher means helping students to live and engage with a globalized world. T2 considers that being a teacher means creating conditions for students to develop a new worldview. T3, like T2, expresses a desire to broaden horizons by showing students the external world. T4 understands being

an English teacher as leading students into contact with another culture. T5 asserts that being an English teacher is fundamental and expresses a desire to show students that English is a key differentiator.

In the teachers' statements, there is a discursive memory that activates shared notions grounded in their lived experiences. Although this memory may appear to be individual, from a discourse analysis perspective, it is structured by a memory that lives within the collective consciousness of the group that sustains it (Davallon, 2007).

The mention of lost opportunities reveals the absence of adequate social and educational policies to provide access to English language teacher education programs that properly prepare undergraduate students. While it may appear to be an individual deficiency, it actually reflects a collective condition that exposes the inequities to which these subjects are subjected — where some have access to English courses and others do not. T1's statement also indirectly points to gaps within undergraduate curricula in English Language and Literature programs. The interdiscourse, as discursive memory, is marked here by the fact that English was not initially made available to the teacher — her historical memory is shaped by these absences.

In identifying the lack of public policy, the British Council (2015, p. 24) already observed that "[...] teachers wish to improve themselves and offer better learning conditions for their students, but they encounter few incentives to do so". Zawaski (2019) also points to the lack of long-term educational policies for teachers across Latin America. More recently, data from the 2022 Basic Education Census (Brasil, 2023) indicates that fewer than 50% of foreign language teachers hold the required initial degree for teaching, and that specific continuing education opportunities for English language teachers remain scarce³.

The interdiscourse — as discursive memory — appears again in the way T1 recalls that English was not initially available to her. Her historical memory is shaped by absences that later motivated her to learn and teach the language.

T2, in her statement, employs infinitive verbs — *to open*, *to broaden*, *to have* — as a way to articulate her conception of what it means to be a teacher. These verbs are accompanied by causative participants (Neves, 2011), which underscore the idea that being an English teacher involves promoting such actions so that the individual becomes aware, acquires a new worldview. In this sense, she draws upon her students as the ones through whom this goal is realized, and the use of "the person" (i.e., the student) reflects a collective voice that speaks through her.

When T2 states that her actions will help students better interpret and comprehend, she appears to evoke the use of textbooks, particularly regarding "instructions" or "commands." This may suggest that T2 makes use of such didactic resources in her teaching practice. Historically, English textbooks used in Brazil were imported, but currently, a wide variety of mass-produced national editions are available (Lima; Quevedo, 2008), and these are distributed to schools via public policy

mechanisms such as the National Textbook Program (*Programa Nacional do Livro Didático* – PNLD).

Silva (2022, p. 127) observes that:

There is a memory that speaks through the teacher's utterances, understood as institutional memory, which refers to discourses shaped by the influence of law, rules, strictness, and order. One can perceive the maintenance of State power in the "orders and commands" that impact the meaning of being a teacher, in all its subjectivity, as individuals are interpellated by political actions and institutions.

The bureaucratic descriptions are part of and help constitute T2's understanding of being an English teacher. In the teacher's discourse, an institutional memory emerges that speaks through her, establishing routines and patterns.

T3 wants her students to learn about other countries and cultures, and demonstrates a sense of responsibility to expose them to *this external world* – statements that echo the "[...] conventional knowledge people hold about the world around them" (Brasil, 1998, p. 29). Her utterance also reflects this other discourse, in which an institutional memory once again manifests itself, presenting expectations and guidelines regarding the competencies and behaviors deemed necessary to be an English teacher – a position that also surfaces in T2's statement.

Thus, a particular meaning of being an English teacher is presented, expressed through ideas like *new horizons*, *the external world*, *knowing other countries*, which position the teacher as someone who guides students to expand their knowledge. These utterances reflect a common-sense discourse about what it means to be an English teacher: someone with awareness and knowledge of the world's plurality. T4's statement reflects the same commitment – *to expose students to other cultures*. Even though none of the teachers have traveled abroad, they understand it as part of their professional responsibility as English teachers

This idea of *showing how people live elsewhere* may be tied to the use of the internet, which allows teachers to take students to other places virtually and expose them to different cultures. Dino and Costa (2021, p. 26) assert that "[...] children and adolescents are among the groups with the highest proportion of internet users." Bahury (2017, p. 105) emphasizes that teachers' contact with the internet opens up possibilities for knowledge-building, such that the "[...] teacher-subject cannot ignore this trend, as [...] in the job market, they must adopt a stance aligned with the internet in terms of connecting with the other (students, teaching practice, the world)."

The presence of globalization is directly stated in T1's discourse, when she says her role is to help students navigate a globalized world. This notion is also implicitly present in T4's statement. However, while T4 mentions taking students to other cultures, it is not clear whether this is grounded in contemporary global dynamics, or whether she simply projects such aspirations onto her students.

T5 argues that English is already part of the students' everyday lives, even if they are not fully aware of it. She asserts that knowing the language is a key differentiator, especially for accessing better job opportunities. In her discursive movement of shifting focus from herself to the other, she incorporates concrete examples by directly inserting this "other" (the student) into her speech. This discursive displacement is a feature observed in the statements of all five teachers: they do not speak solely about themselves, but rather reflect on the students when asked what it means to be a teacher. In doing so, they shift the enunciativative focus away from themselves to speak about the other.

Pêcheux (2007) notes that a historical event may become inscribed in an internal continuity, inherent to memory, through intersecting meanings. Memory, as a discursive construction within the social realm, oscillates between the historical and the linguistic (Achard, 2007), suggesting that historically shaped teaching practices, while seemingly internalized by the teachers, merely echo in their speech as responses to the question posed.

The teachers' utterances unconsciously reveal traces of current pedagogical norms imposed on teaching practice in Rio Grande do Sul, such as the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC), 2017, the Referencial Curricular Gaúcho (2021), and the Municipal Guiding Document. These guidelines show that the teachers are aware of their responsibilities in occupying the teaching position, for they "[...] legitimize their social standing" (Bahury, 2017, p. 93). These factors confirm the presence of institutional memory in the discourses analyzed.

In summary, English is perceived as important, and the teachers understand it as a tool for accessing knowledge about other cultures. This confirms the presence of interdiscourses in their speech (Authier-Revuz, 1990). There are repetitions, through paraphrase, that persist in the teachers' responses: that being an English teacher means expanding, opening, showing new horizons/cultures/the external world. These notions reflect the understanding of English as "[...] a language of global use" (Brasil, 2017, p. 476) in the context of globalization, and that the role of the English teacher is to show, assist, and enable students in this process.

In response to the second question regarding the characteristics a teacher of English needs to have in order to teach, T1 states:

I think the first thing is to be communicative because we work with languages, and communication is very important. I also think it's important to be proactive because of the methods. We need to have an open mind to keep up with the many changes. I had many teachers throughout my life who motivated me and also some who demotivated me. So, I believe that traditional teaching doesn't motivate me, and what motivates me as a teacher is doing things differently. So, I strongly identify with this characteristic as a teacher.

T1 expresses that it is necessary to be communicative and proactive, particularly due to the methods used, and to have an open mind to keep pace with ongoing changes, which are numerous. She highlights positive qualities that characterize an English teacher, referring

to adjectives that generally “[...] are used to attribute a singular property to a category” (Neves, 2011, p. 173). She adds that it is expected of a teacher to be updated with the educational demands of contemporary times. When T1 identifies herself as proactive in relation to methods, it can be inferred that she aligns with a communicative or socio-interactionist approach, although she does not explicitly specify this.

The teacher presents knowledge (Tardif, 2002) constructed throughout her individual teaching career and, simultaneously, recalls past experiences related to her trajectory. She mentions demotivating teachers, possibly referring to the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, when some teachers lacked the “[...] necessary academic and pedagogical skills” (Nóvoa, 1991, p. 8), as well as the traditional and technicist teaching approaches. These linguistic marks emerge in the discourse analysis, reflecting a traditional form of teaching that does not motivate the teacher.

The statements of T2, T3, and T4 present similar positions:

T2 – She has to have knowledge, also seek new courses, right, improve herself, and have modern ideas too, [laughs] for this youth. They want everything ready. So, you have to provide a lot of visual things, more use of the phone. I’m running low on ideas, you know? Even because, well, I’m not really that into it anymore, you know? I have other ideas, I’m even doing another degree, you know? I’m studying veterinary medicine. I can’t wait to do something else, you know. We have to keep going, right?

The knowledge from college, I didn’t have much, right, but I think it was more practical. How can I say, improving oneself, watching more YouTube, which also has a lot of content, explains things.

T3 – Basically, you have to be prepared, especially regarding content. I believe it starts there, right? And then, you have to have knowledge, not only of English, but I believe you have to know Portuguese as well; not to compare, but to bring it in, to facilitate understanding of what you’re working on. Those would be some of the characteristics. Knowledge of content itself, vocabulary, right?

T4 – I think one needs to have didactic knowledge, right? The use of resources, right? Empathy with the students, right? Study, deepen oneself, have knowledge of what will be passed on to the students.

T2 expresses the need to be prepared in terms of content. T3 states the necessity of knowledge, someone who seeks *new courses*, self-improvement, and modern ideas. Both attribute knowledge as a key characteristic of teaching, these being knowledges acquired throughout initial teacher education, as does T4, who emphasizes *didactic knowledge*.

When T3 mentions *new courses* and *self-improvement*, and T4 talks about *deepening one’s knowledge*, both activate the discursive memory of continuing education. This statement reflects the reality of the English language teaching field in schools. According to data published by the monitoring panel of the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) (Brasil, 2024), of the total number of basic education teachers in Brazil, 41.7% have completed at least one continuing education course with a minimum of 80 hours, as required by the National Education Plan (2014-2025).

Data from the 2020 Higher Education Census (Brasil, 2021) show a high annual dropout rate in undergraduate programs, with dropout percentages throughout the second and third years of the course during 2012-2021. The cumulative dropout rate in foreign language undergraduate courses is 63%; the cumulative completion rate is 36%, and the retention rate is 1%. The Census points out that “[...] all listed courses have a cumulative dropout rate in 2021 equal to or greater than 50%, which must be analyzed considering the teacher education scenario for basic education in the country” (Brasil, 2021, p. 38). These figures reveal deficiencies in policies aimed at student retention in universities.

Possibly as a consequence of the pandemic, T2 turns to YouTube videos to qualify herself for classroom teaching. However, her statement that she is pursuing a second degree, unrelated to the field of Letters/English, reveals her desire to pursue a different path, while continuing to “keep going” in education and teaching English. This exposes a teacher’s dissatisfaction. This discomfort can be considered a trait of contemporary teachers, which becomes evident in their daily actions and interactions, reflecting that something is amiss (Aranda, 2007).

Schools present practical knowledge (techniques, knowledge, rules) and, at the same time, are places that regulate and impose norms on everyone involved, including teachers, who represent authority in the school institution but are also subordinated to it. Managing these issues is complex, as teachers may abandon the profession due to lack of motivation, feelings of irrelevance, low wages, health issues, and lack of future prospects (Pereira, 2018).

The discourses of T2, T3, and T4 reflect the perception that institutional duties are echoed in their speech, as administrative demands may require teachers to emphasize content, perform online postings, fill out bureaucratic pedagogical forms, and comply with BNCC codes to demonstrate compliance with something that has become unclear, a factor that constrains both individual teachers and the entire profession.

There is a historically constituted memory through institutional discourse that reaffirms the presence of state control in schools. This is updated in these statements under new conditions, where submission to the dominant ideology (Althusser, 1975) is part of this conjuncture.

Perhaps these conditions explain why traditional teaching is legitimized by teachers, as it is an institutional memory that ritualizes the idea of the teacher who “keeps going,” who facilitates, and who must be grounded in the content and knowledge they teach.

T5’s statement presents a more reflective perspective:

I think you need to have creativity, and a certain dynamism, because I believe, and even though this might not be the exact word, I think we need to captivate the student, bring the student closer to us, so we can convey what we want, because I see a lot of disinterest, not only regarding the English language itself, but regarding school and learning as a whole, right? So, I think when we work with dynamics, with something different, with exposure, I believe it facilitates, it brings the student closer to our class

T5 uses adjectives that promote movement: having creativity, dynamism, and emphasizes ease in fostering interpersonal relationships with students.

The teacher expresses Freirean precepts when she talks about wanting to captivate students from a more dialogical perspective in the teacher-student relationship, aiming to increase closeness with the student body. Another concern raised by T5 is the general student disinterest. Dialogue is the essence of education (Freire, 2003), and when authoritarianism is present, disinterest in learning becomes inevitable. However, this statement also opens a space for reflection on what might be lacking for students to engage more fully in English classes.

Final Considerations

This article sought to reflect on two questions: what it means to be an English teacher and what characteristics such an English teacher needs to have in order to teach their classes. We started from the discourse analysis approach proposed by Pêcheux (2007; 2008) to analyze the teachers' statements, with an explicit focus on the concepts of social, collective, historical, and institutional memory.

From the perspective of Discourse Analysis (DA), we observed a predominance of a pattern of paraphrasing, which causes a dominant meaning to recur due to the very repetition occurring in the discursive materiality represented by the teachers' statements. During the analytical process, we realized there is a discourse formation in flux, marked by a strong social, collective, historical, and institutional memory evident in the teachers' words, revealing diverse concerns through the production of silences that delineate what has been, according to them, left unspoken (Silva, 2022).

What is clear from the teachers' statements is that the ideal English teacher is a professional graduated in English (to handle the content), someone who participates in continuing education—courses, exchanges, postgraduate studies in the field (to be dynamic, updated, with new teaching techniques)—and, in this composition, has participative and interested students. However, the analytical process showed that the respondents do not fully meet these characteristics.

In some teachers' statements, there is an understanding that it is important to improve oneself and study; however, there are also feelings of teacher dissatisfaction (with demotivating teachers, uninterested students, lack of resources, and teacher fatigue), which likely stem from discontentment with the institutional apparatus that interpellates them.

In this text, we aimed to expand knowledge about this specificity of being an English teacher, from the teachers' own perspectives, based on the premise that it is essential to listen to teachers and learn more about their teaching identities. The results show there are lacks: of opportunities, of English proficiency, of resources, and of interaction with students. There are memories that highlight a common sense about being an English teacher and bureaucracies that constitute teaching practice.

Notes

- ¹ Dissertation available at: <https://repositorio.uergs.edu.br/xmlui/handle/123456789/2291> and technical-technological product available at: Caminhos que se ampliam: e-book formativo para professoras de inglês da educação básica.
- ² According to the 2022 Census (Brasil, 2023), of the 178.77 thousand English language teachers in Brazilian basic education, 141 thousand are women (INEP, 2023).
- ³ This statement is based on doctoral research currently in progress in the Graduate Program in Education at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

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Kelly Cristina Rodrigues Gulate da Silva is a PhD candidate in Education (UFRGS) and holds a Master's degree in Education (Uergs). She has a Licenciature degree in Letters (FAPA). She works as a Basic and Professional Education teacher in the municipal network of Rio Grande do Sul. She is also a tutor for the Undergraduate Letters program at UFRGS/UAB. Her research focuses on public policies for continuing education for English teachers in Brazil.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4168-7382>

E-mail: kelly.gulate@ufrgs.br

Sita Mara Lopes Sant'Anna holds a Master's and a PhD in Education from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. She is an Adjunct Professor of Pedagogy at the State University of Rio Grande do Sul (Uergs), Osório campus, and a permanent faculty member of the Graduate Program in Education (PPGED). She coordinates the Working Group "Youth and Adult Education: Teaching, Teacher Training, and Pedagogical Processes in EJA" (CNPq).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1578-9580>

E-mail: sita-santanna@uergs.edu.br

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