

# Memory, Postmemory and Critical Language Teacher Education

Memoria, postmemoria y teoría crítica en formación de profesores de idiomas

Memória, pós-memória e teoria crítica na educação de professores de línguas

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## Abstract

Narratives and stories of teachers' experiences in pre-service and in-service education are commonly used to understand the identities of language teachers, as they tend to be influenced by their life experiences and are stored in their memories. However, the concept of post-memory has emerged more recently and seems not yet to have been used in language teacher education. In this paper, we discuss the possibilities of using the concept of post-memory in the education of language teachers, through narratives of their life experiences. We intend to explore more deeply the influences of traumatic historical events, such as the Brazilian Military Regime, on the identities of pre-service and in-service English teachers in Brazil, through narratives and stories of their experiences. Our main objective is to analyze the relationships and interrelationships among memory, post-memory and life experiences and identities of English teachers, especially in relation to the experiences related to the influences of the Brazilian military period.

### Keywords

Memory, post-memory, language, education, teaching.

## Resumen

Las narrativas e historias sobre las experiencias de los maestros en formación, antes y durante su ejercicio profesional, se utilizan comúnmente para entender las identidades de los profesores de idiomas, ya que suelen presentar influencias de vivencias guardadas en sus memorias. Sin embargo, el concepto de postmemoria emergió recientemente y pareciera que aún no se ha aplicado en la formación de los profesores de idiomas. En este artículo, se discuten las posibilidades de emplear el concepto de postmemoria



en la formación de profesores de idiomas, a través de las narrativas de sus vivencias. La intención es explorar más profundamente las influencias que eventos históricos traumáticos, como el régimen militar en Brasil, tienen sobre las identidades de los profesores de inglés antes y durante su ejercicio profesional en Brasil, a través de narrativas e historias sobre sus experiencias. El objetivo principal es analizar las relaciones e interrelaciones entre memoria, postmemoria, vivencias y las identidades de los profesores de inglés, especialmente en lo relativo a las experiencias influenciadas por el periodo militar en Brasil.

#### **Palabras clave**

Memoria, postmemoria, educación, idioma, enseñanza.

## Resumo

As narrativas e as histórias sobre as experiências dos professores em formação, antes e durante seu trabalho profissional, são comumente utilizadas para entender as identidades dos professores de línguas, por elas estar influenciadas pelas experiências gravadas nas memórias. Porém, o conceito de pós-memória emergiu recentemente e parece não ter sido ainda utilizado na educação dos professores de línguas. Neste artigo, se comentam as possibilidades de utilizar o conceito de pós-memória na educação de professores de línguas, através das narrativas sobre as suas experiências. O propósito é estudar com mais profundidade as influências de eventos históricos traumáticos, como O Regime Militar no Brasil, sobre as identidades dos professores de inglês no Brasil, antes e durante seu trabalho profissional, através das narrativas e histórias sobre as suas experiências. O principal objetivo é analisar as relações e inter-relações entre memória, pós-memória e experiências e as identidades dos professores de inglês, especialmente com relação às experiências influenciadas pelo período militar no Brasil.

#### **Palavras-chave**

Memória, pós-memória, educação, língua, ensinar.

## Introduction

One of the most striking episodes in recent Brazilian political history, the so-called Military Coup of 1964, which unleashed a period of more than 20 years of Military Dictatorship, still has repercussions in all instances of daily life in Brazil. In education, it is no different. Rodrigues (2014) states that “teacher training at scale, strengthening of private education, segmentation of curricula and even the prison-like architecture of the school buildings” are characteristics and practices of Brazilian education that derive from this dictatorship, still bringing consequences to the population.

Legacies of the Military Dictatorship in Brazil may also be present in English Language Teaching (ELT). In a book on how English teaching may help develop learners’ sense of citizenship, Mattos (2015) briefly discusses the potentialities of a classroom activity involving the writing of a letter of complaint by high school students in Brazil. In her discussion, the author concludes that

This type of activity proves to be important in our present society due to the long time of political domination faced by Brazil during the period of Military Dictatorship, in which the voices of the population were silenced in many contexts, including in contexts of complaint (p. 268).

The discussion of the possibilities posed by this activity – which we will return to at the end of this paper –, however brief, was the starting kick that made us turn to the fact that traumatic historical events might be very influential to teacher identity and, therefore, to education in general and language teaching, specifically.

Other recent papers have also explored the historical effects of remarkable episodes in the Brazilian history on general education and teacher development, but also more specifically in the education of teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). Monte-Mór (2013), for example, lists three strong influences of Brazilian political history in education: Jesuit missionary perspectives; colonialism; and the

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1 *Je me souviens* is the official motto of Québec, a province of Canada. It means literally “I remember”.

authoritarian visions experienced and learned during the Military Dictatorship. The author then suggests that “the Brazilian teachers’ souls are inhabited by a Jesuit, a colonizer, and an authoritarian” (Monte-Mór, 2013, p. 27). She points out that perhaps not all teachers’ souls in a general way but “certainly the souls of those teachers who had their historical identities woven by those masters” (p. 127). Based on this premise, she builds on the supposition that these three influences (Jesuitical, colonial, and authoritarian) have affected the education of Brazilian teachers and may “have deeply forged [their] identities as well as impacting the educational philosophies that have oriented teacher education and school curricula” (Monte-Mór, 2013, p. 143) in Brazil. In the same vein, Jucá (2017) also relies on historical facts to discuss the education of English teachers in Brazil. She produces a historical overview of Brazilian education since the implementation of the Jesuit educational system during the time Brazil was a colony of Portugal, and discusses the way language education is practiced nowadays in Brazil. She concludes that identity construction is highly influenced by the historical nature of discourses and ideologies that permeate Brazilian society.

In this paper, we seek to explore more deeply the influences of such historical events on the identity of English teachers in Brazil through narratives and stories of their experiences. To this aim, we will first discuss the connections between life experiences and language teacher education (LTE). That is, we will explore the possibilities of using narratives of experiences to educate language teachers, especially in the Brazilian context. Then, we will discuss the concepts of identity and language teacher identity in order to better understand how these concepts intertwine with the attitudes and beliefs of language teachers. Finally, we will look into the concepts of memory and postmemory so as to describe how narratives have been used in the area of language teaching and teacher education, both in Brazil and abroad, to try to capture the full potential of narratives and stories for the development of a deeper understanding of how postmemory elements may influence their teaching practice.

Specifically, our purpose is to look at how narratives and stories may potentially reveal traces of the influences of historical events on the behavior, attitudes, beliefs and identities of language teachers. Since the concept of postmemory (Hirsch, 1992; 2008) has recently been used in the field of Education and Pedagogy (Simon & Armitage-Simon, 1995; Simon & Eppert, 1997), but not yet in LTE, we intend to observe and analyze the possibilities of using the concept of postmemory in the area of LTE, through narratives of teacher’s life experiences. We hope that this paper can contribute to the field of LTE both locally and globally, as well as to education in general.

In the next section, we will discuss more deeply the relationship between experiences and identities, in order to try to understand the role of postmemory in LT identity and education.

## Life Experiences and Identities in Language Teacher Education

As far as we know, narratives and stories of life experiences of teachers in pre-service and in-service education have been widely used to better understand the attitudes, beliefs and identities of language teachers. As we will discuss, such identities tend to be influenced, in their formation, by the life experiences of teachers, which are stored in their memory, and in turn influence their attitudes and beliefs.

The concept of experience can be understood in several ways. The Cambridge Dictionary *online*<sup>2</sup> describes experience as life practice – knowledge that you get from doing a job, or from doing, seeing or feeling something. Ferreira (1999), author of one of the best-known dictionaries of the Portuguese Language (*Novo Aurélio Século XXI: o dicionário da língua portuguesa*), brings, in the entry on “experience”, several definitions. For example, according to that dictionary, experience may mean “life practice” or may be linked to the exercise of a specific profession, but it may also mean “knowledge that is transmitted to us by the senses” or “the set of individual or specific knowledge that constitute advantageous acquisitions accumulated historically by mankind.” In this sense, we see that experience is understood predominantly individually, although it may be influenced by historical issues, when it refers to collective memory.

Miccoli (2010) studies “experience” from a variety of perspectives from ancient and modern philosophy to cognitive sciences, in order to reach her own conception of experience related to teaching and learning languages. For the author, experience is a process that, when narrated, can be re-lived and expanded, bringing transformations both to the meaning of the experience itself and to those who have lived it. The author states that

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2 Available from: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/pt/dicionario/ingles/experience?q=Experience>. Access on: Sept. 13, 2017.

Experience is a process that has to do with relationships, dynamics and circumstances lived in a particular environment of classroom interactions, which when narrated ceases to be an isolated event or chance. The reflective process of narrative offers the opportunity to broaden the meaning of this experience and to define actions to change and transform its original meaning as well as [transforming] the one who has experienced it (Miccoli, 2010, p. 29).

According to Miccoli (2010), experience, then, is “a process of a complex and organic nature” (p. 31) that actually brings together varied experiences which are related, “forming a web of dynamic relations among those who experience them” (p. 31). Thus, for the author, the experience is both individual and social. At the individual level, it is experienced cognitively, and on the social level, it is experienced affectively. The author also states that experience is the “starting point for reflection, with implications for its comprehension, for the transformation of its original sense, as well as of those who experience it” (Miccoli, 2010, pp. 31-32). It is, therefore, through reflection on their lived experiences that individuals understand them, transforming their original sense and, in that process, transforming themselves as well.

It is this reflective process on experiences that has been used by several researchers in the area of teacher education, including in LTE. The interest in the reflective development of foreign language teachers (FLT) in Brazil was intensified in the beginning of the 90s and was later extended to the contexts of pre-service language teacher education. Among the researchers who were interested in this area we can mention Almeida Filho (1993; 1997), Baghin and Alvarenga (1997), Gimenez (1994) and Moita Lopes (1996). These researchers and several others, both in Brazil and around the world, have suggested a process of reflection on teachers' own attitudes and behaviors to foster teacher development in the profession. Mattos (2000), for instance, used critical reflection on the classroom experiences of an in-service English teacher as a starting point for understanding these experiences and as a trigger for the participant's professional development. We see, then, that reflection on classroom experiences not only by teachers (in-service contexts) but also by student teachers (pre-service contexts) may have the potential to create fruitful spaces for understanding the formation of our identities, including our professional identities.

In order to understand the concept of identity used in this paper, we will briefly discuss some of the ideas underlying such concept. Coracini (2007) understands identity as formed by interdiscourses, which are, in fact, “fragments of multiple discourses that constitute the discursive memory” (p. 9) of the human being,

received as an inheritance and continually modified and transformed precisely in our relations with the other, in an imbricated network of interrelations, at the same time constituted and constitutive of our values, beliefs, ideologies and cultures. According to the author, these interdiscourses, or discursive memory, constitute innumerable voices that form our vision of the world, and dialectically they are also formed by it. This is what makes us, as human beings, at the same time similar and different from other human beings. Bruner (2002) also refers to our “multiple inner voices” (p. 85), highlighting that each of us is fragmented and complex, a set of characters, while being unique in our complexity. Nevertheless, as Coracini (2007) points out, “each of us has the illusion that we have a [unique] identity, invented by the other and assumed as our own” (p. 9). It is possible to perceive, thus, that the concept of identity is never simplistic, once it involves both common sociocultural and particularly subjective elements.

According to Nicholson and Seidman (1995), the modernist view of identity prevailed by “naturaliz[ing] or essentializ[ing] categories of identity” (p. 8). In other words, this view was based on the conception of identity as essence, as uniqueness. For the advocators of this conception, each person has their own identity, which is unique, individual and indivisible. However, in a postmodern conception of identity, the idea that human identity is formed socially and culturally prevails, and this social and cultural influence generates differences in individual experiences.

This non-essentialist conception of our identity as fragmented, multiple, fluid, heterogeneous, and hybrid is at the core of postmodern identity discussions, including discussions regarding the conceptions of the identity of the language teacher. Barkhuizen (2017) defines the identity of the language teacher as “cognitive, social, emotional, ideological and historical” (p. 4). In addition, the author also states that being a language teacher involves “being and doing, feeling and imagining, and counting” (p. 4). For him, the identities of language teachers are challenged and resisted, but they are also accepted and valued by both the teachers themselves and others. They are personal and professional, dynamic, multiple and hybrid, and they may change “over time - discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, teachers, administrators and the wider community, and in material interaction with spaces, places and objects in classrooms, institutions and online” (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 4). We may conclude, this way, that the identity of the language teacher is very much associated to the core idea of identity itself, involving notions of heterogeneity and multiplicity within its subjectivity.

It is this postmodern conception about the identities of language teachers that brings new proposals for teaching for social justice (Mattos, 2014) and allows us to visualize a more promising future for the role of education in the world today. Barkhuizen (2017) suggests several avenues for the future of research on language teacher identities, including “transformative research [...] that brings about change – to teaching practice, language learning, and broader social structures” (p. 10).

As Mattos (2014) states, “Brazil has a long history of disrespect for human rights – from being one of the last countries to abolish slavery to the horrors of dictatorship in the second half of the 20th Century” (p. 143). In relation to the first point specifically, Mattos (2014) informs that

in Brazil, slavery was abolished slowly. First, in 1871, there was the ‘Free Womb’ Law, which set free all children born to slave mothers. Then, in 1885, there was the “Sexagenarian” Law, which freed all the slaves over 60 years old (p. 145).

The author contends that “these laws, obviously, also had negative consequences as the freed babies and 60-year-old slaves had no money, no pension and nowhere to go, to start with” (Mattos, 2014, p. 145). After these laws, in 1888, “finally, the “Lei Áurea” put an end to slavery in Brazil” (p. 145).

Thus, according to Mattos (2014), education, including what is now being called Critical Education in Foreign Language (Barros & Assis-Peterson, 2010; Ferraz, 2010; 2015; Mattos et al, 2015; Mattos, 2014; Monte Mór, 2009), “certainly has a role in promoting more critical perspectives” (Mattos, 2014, p. 143) that can lead to the reduction of injustices. To achieve this, however, we need English teachers to be prepared for such a reality. In our opinion, understanding the possible meanings and influences of the concepts of identity and postmemory may contribute to this goal.

## **Narratives in Language Teaching and Teacher Education**

Narratives have been described as stories, myths, dramas and historical accounts that emphasize human intention and action, and which are “composed of a unique sequence of events, mental states, happenings involving human beings as characters or actors” (Bruner, 1986, p. 43). Studies in Human Psychology show

that humans may have two modes of thought – a paradigmatic one and a narrative one. According to Bruner (2002), we listen to narratives and stories “endlessly, [...] and they seem almost as natural as language itself” (p. 3). For him, narratives and stories are part of our lives since a very early age and our relationship with them goes on forever, to the point that narratives and stories become a way of thinking, a way of organizing and understanding our own experiences and that of others. Bruner (2002) states that humans have an extraordinary “capacity to organize and communicate experience in a narrative form” (p. 16) and that is what has made our collective life in culture possible. The author also believes that, through telling and listening to narratives and stories, including our own, we construct an image of ourselves and gradually become who we are. In Bruner’s view, narratives and stories not only report on facts and reality, but also construct reality as “narrative meanings impose themselves on the referents of presumably true stories” (p. 9). In so doing, narratives and stories “shape our experience” and create Selves. As the author puts it, “we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future” (Bruner, 2002, p. 64).

We believe that this constant construction and reconstruction of selves through telling and listening to stories also happens in professional life, that is, in the construction of the professional self. Besides, in the same way that the stories in our memories play an important role in the construction of ourselves, these stories also have a relevant role in the construction and reconstruction of our professional selves. In fact, in a narrative study conducted with pre-service teachers in an undergraduate setting, Mattos (2009a) discusses the participants’ stories of hope and hopelessness in becoming English teachers. The results of this study show that many of the participants’ stories refer to their previous experiences as learners of English. In many cases, as the study reports, participants had their hopes of becoming English teachers enhanced – or sometimes dismayed – because of their good or bad previous experiences while learning the language.

Barcelos (2008) agrees that “narratives are an excellent method to capture the essence of human experience, and of human learning and change” and adds that “narratives show the unique ways that each person deals with his/her dilemmas and challenges” (p. 37). She defines experience as “the human mode of being in the world” (p. 37). For the author, “everything that we experience takes up something from the past and modifies the quality of future experiences” (Barcelos, 2008, p. 37). This view points to the possibility that English learners’ past experiences may influence their future desires or decisions to become English teachers, which is the focus of this chapter.

As we see, narrative research and narrative views (Casanave & Schecter, 1997; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) on teaching and teacher education have opened up space for studying teachers' choice and voice, helping both researchers and teachers better understand the context-bound nature of teacher activity (Freeman, 1996). Blake and Haines (2009) advocate in favor of "the use of narratives as a means of understanding the teaching process" (p. 47). Besides, when it comes to teacher activity, it is important to point out that narratives have provided researchers not only with a broad scope concerning teacher practice *per se*, but also with relevant information on students' views, needs and specificities.

Kalaja, Menezes and Barcelos (2008) bring together, in an edited collection, several narrative studies of learning and teaching EFL, which emphasize the power of narratives in research into teaching and learning and highlight "the numerous ways in which narratives can shed light onto different issues in language learning and teaching and professional development" (p. 224). These authors describe narrative "as a tool that allows an understanding of the impact of our experiences, the emergence of deeply hidden assumptions, and an opportunity to understand change in people and events" (p. 224).

Although it might appear difficult to "think narratively" due to the fact that "the focus on goals, outcomes, and resources inform institutional policies and practices that shape [the researcher's] knowledge landscapes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 25), narrative studies have proven to offer inspiring insights on language teaching practice from the teacher's own perspective. Mattos (2009b) shows how a narrative study conducted with a language teacher in her own professional environment can portray crucial aspects to the understanding of a language classroom as a complex system of factors, which range from learning context to internal and external pressures. Such factors, as well as the understanding of their specificity, were only identifiable due to the subjective and context-sensitive approach of the narrative inquiry. According to Paiva (2005), "learning narratives reveal that stories do not repeat, because although several of them report similar wishes and complaints, their authors react differently and other factors also interfere in their experiences" (p. 141), which highlights the complexity of the language learning processes.

Thus, it is possible to infer that narrative studies provide teachers with opportunities not only to understand their own practice and environment, but also to identify intersections within the field, as a whole. Once they are given the chance to compare and contrast their own experiences to the work of other practitioners, it is possible for them to address issues not previously accounted for and construct knowledge collaboratively.

Through the work developed in this field, it is possible to observe issues concerning language teaching practice as a whole, and to perceive important and interesting points related to the teachers' language learning background, which may, to a certain extent, explain some aspects concerning their teaching practice. Paiva (2006), for instance, focuses on teachers' narratives concerning their language learning experiences and their recent memories as teachers. Throughout her work, it is possible to notice that the participants tend to compare their lives as students to their current students' experiences at school. By using their own language learning process as a tool, respondents in Paiva's research either felt motivated to develop students' skills and engagement towards the discipline or chose to reproduce a model of hopelessness and dissatisfaction in their classrooms.

Considering that the language teachers' background as learners can be associated with their current life as teachers (Bailey et al, 1996; Mattos, 2014), one can assume that these teachers' learning experiences could eventually influence their beliefs and identities, as well as their behavior and attitudes in the language classroom. For this reason, let us below analyze the possible contributions of such experiences for LTE – more specifically, to Critical LTE.

## Memory, Postmemory and Possibilities for Critical Language Teacher Education

Hirsch (2008) says “we are in the era of ‘posts’, which continue to proliferate: ‘post-secular’, ‘post-human’, ‘postcolony’, ‘post-white’” (p. 106). We would add: postmodern, post-critic, post-truth and also postmemory. This last term was first used by Marianne Hirsch during the 1990's to “describe the relationship of the second generation with powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch, 2008, p. 103). The author lists other terms that have been used to refer to the same phenomenon: “‘inherited memory’, ‘belated memory’, ‘prosthetic memory’, ‘received history’” (p. 105), among others, and states that such terms reveal several controversies. For her, there is the possibility that “the descendants of survivors (of victims as well as perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection *memory*” (Hirsch, 2008, pp. 105-106). Thus, as Hirsch points out, “in certain extreme circumstances, memory *can* be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event” (p. 106). The

term has now been appropriated by several researchers around the globe and is currently being used in various disciplines in order to understand the influences of memory on our identity and how it may shape our life and our ways of seeing and being in the world, as well as how we position and articulate ourselves or make sense of our place and role in society.

Postmemory, thus, as Hirsch (1997) puts it, “characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (p. 22). These stories from the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that cannot be recreated, but which are transmitted to the second generation by their ancestors – usually family survivors of such events –, inhabit their minds as well as their identities. Hirsch explains that the transmission of a memory passed on to those who did not experience the facts, but have absorbed them by the account of those who experienced them, it is also a form of experience. Postmemory, for Hirsch (2008), “reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture. [...] a *structure* of inter- and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience” (p. 106).

In her first book on postmemory, *Family Frames* (Hirsch, 1997), the author says that “postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (p. 22). In the author’s conception, the so-called “second generation” has a deep relationship with the experiences of those who preceded them and suffered collective traumas, “experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images and behaviors among which they grew” (Hirsch, 2008, p. 106). Postmemory, thus, is formed indirectly by traumatic historical events that have happened in the past, but which still produce effects in the present. According to Araújo and Gonçalves (2012):

It is common for the victims of traumatic events, such as the dictatorship regime in Latin America, to carry in their memories unforgettable experiences of those who lived under the symbol of pain, to bear on their faces the suffering, consequence of the experience of those who were on the verge of death (p. 52).

These victims, then, through narratives and stories, share their memories with subsequent generations. This means, according to Araújo and Gonçalves (2012), “to recall/connect the rememberings of previous generations in a process of memory connection” (p. 53). In Brazil, one of the countries in Latin America where, as already mentioned, the dictatorship regime lasted more than 20 years,

the memory of this time has certainly helped shape several individual attitudes and cultural behaviors, and mores. It stands to reason that there is room for research in this area here.

Indeed, it seems the interest in the concept of postmemory, based on similar concepts, is rising, not only around the world, but also in Brazil. As we have seen in the beginning of this paper, Coracini (2007) refers to the concept of discursive memory to talk about “archive, memory and identity” and several other researchers have used the term “collective memory”. Almeida (2017) uses the concept of cultural memory to refer to Hirsch’s concept of postmemory. Interested in discussing the attitudes taken by Truth Commissions in Brazilian universities after the end of the Dictatorship, he says that “memory is situated in a true conflict between remembering and forgetting” (Almeida, 2017, p. 10). He questions the importance of the history of the Brazilian universities during the contexts of repression during the Dictatorship, especially the invasion of several university campi as representative of a whole period of oppression, to students, professors and researchers nowadays. He concludes that the recommendations made by the Truth Commissions and their “recurrent forms of museification of significant urban spaces, with the creation of monuments, memorials, naming of streets, or the use of images, texts, objects, constructions and rituals as mediators of cultural memory” (p. 12), may lead us to think “to what extent these materialities serve as manifestations of a traumatic memory” (Almeida, 2017, p. 12).

In a special issue of the journal *April* on memory and postmemory, published by the African and Portuguese Literature Study Group at the Fluminense Federal University, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the two editors of the journal justify the interest in memory and postmemory. Jorge and Ribeiro (2013) say that “it is fundamental to resort to memory as a form of confrontation and problematization of the political and historical path” (p. 10) of countries which have gone through traumatic historical events, such as the Colonial War in African Countries colonized by Portugal. We believe that the same may be said in relation to the traumatic events which happened during the Dictatorship in Brazil.

As we have suggested, postmemory has already been used in the field of Education and Pedagogy, but not yet in LTE. Simon and Eppert (1997), for example, discuss the pedagogical use of testimonial accounts of trauma experiences, “either by those who have lived through such events or by those who have been told or shown such lived realities” (p. 176). However, they highlight that “testimony of historical trauma is not intended to foster either repression or immobilization in the face of history” (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 177). The authors say that “an ethical practice

of witnessing includes the obligation to bear witness – to-retestify, to somehow convey what one has heard and thinks important to remember” (p. 187). They describe classrooms as “communities of memory” – “locations in which such obligations can be worked out” (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 187).

Jorge and Ribeiro (2013) consider the concept of postmemory mainly as a tool for the analysis of transgenerational transmission of memory. These authors mention the “silencing generated by the experience of the colonial war in Portuguese society” (p. 10) – the focus of the special edition of the journal *April* – produced “not only in those men who returned defeated, but also in those women who, mothers or wives, experienced the anguish of loss and distance in their personal and private dimension” (Jorge & Ribeiro, 2013, p. 10). According to these authors, the second generation also suffers the consequences of the trauma and loss through “a memory that, being alien, invades theirs, through family life, in order to crease its presence” (p. 10).

As we pointed out briefly in the beginning of this paper, one of the most lasting effects of the Dictatorship on the Brazilian society might also have been silencing. The analysis of a classroom activity on the writing of a letter of complaint (Mattos, 2012; 2015) shows how the long period of Military Dictatorship in Brazil still produces effects on current and future generations. As discussed by Mattos (2012)

The portion of the Brazilian population who were young and / or adults at the time of military repression has not learned to complain - instead, these Brazilians have learned to comply with the various types of situations and rules imposed by the military government (p. 200).

According to Mattos (2012), “many of these Brazilians have become teachers and have passed on to their students their conformist culture and practices” (p. 200). This way, the new generation of Brazilians who were pupils at school has, therefore, reproduced the social practices of the previous generation – those who have lived the military domination after the 1964 Coup. The author goes on and claims that “the current generation of school-aged young people and children often meet, in their family and community contexts, with members of the previous generations that still reproduce the conformist culture. They, therefore, lack opportunities to develop less conformist practices” (Mattos, 2012, p. 200).

In this scenario, some teaching activities may, thus, be examples of how these less conformist practices may be developed at school in a safe environment, allowing students to acquire critical skills that will later be put to use in adult

life outside school. An approach based on the perspective of Critical Language Education and Critical Language Teacher Education may create possibilities for the development of these activities, by means of a greater understanding of the concept of postmemory and how postmemory may influence and shape the identities and attitudes of language teachers in the Brazilian context.

## Final Thoughts

The understanding of the concept of postmemory, as we have discussed, and its use in Language Teacher Education may, in our view, bring new possibilities for Critical Language Education and Critical Language Teacher Education, both of which aim at fostering a critical approach to the language teaching curriculum, especially in public school contexts, focusing on citizenship education and on teaching English for social justice (Hawkins, 2011; Zeichner, 2011; Mattos, 2014).

In a text that intends to establish a relation between education and morality in light of the horrors of Auschwitz, based on an earlier text by Theodor Adorno (1967) – *Education after Auschwitz* –, Giroux (2005) tries to draw a parallel with the images, released in 2004, showing the torture of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers in the prison of Abu Ghraib. According to Giroux, “Adorno recognized that education had to be an important part of any politics that took seriously the premise that Auschwitz should never happen again” (2005, p. 235). The author uses Adorno’s argument to state that

Education as a critical practice [may] provide the means for disconnecting common sense learning from the narrowly ideological impact of mass media, the regressive tendencies associated with hypermasculinity, the rituals of everyday violence, the inability to identify with others, as well as from the pervasive ideologies of state repression and its illusions of empire (Giroux, 2005, 235).

Giroux (2005) concludes by saying that “self-reflection and the willingness to resist the material and symbolic forces of domination [are] central to an education that refuses to repeat the horrors of the past and engages in the possibilities of the future” (p. 235). This, in our view, corroborates our arguments in this paper, highlighting the role and importance of teachers in creating forms of pedagogies, which are capable of producing identities, social relations and moral

values that may lead to less injustice and may pave the way to prevent historical traumatic episodes, such as Auschwitz, Abu Ghraib, and Military Dictatorships, to happen again.

Jorge and Ribeiro (2013) state that it “is fundamental to perceive the importance of the act of remembering to the various cultures and to the constitution of identification traces that give to the group the sense of belonging” (p. 12). They add that

Remembering is an act of recovery and reassessment, which presupposes the possibility of critical interlocution with the past. We remember in order not to forget; as individuals and as society, although forgetfulness is the other side of the coin we call memory. We remember in order not to make the same mistake again, to prevent oppression and violence from manifesting again in an overwhelming and insidious way (Jorge & Ribeiro, 2013, p. 12).

We would like to conclude this paper with this in mind. In our view, it is possible to infer that narratives can set a bridge between present and past, which can contribute to the identification of conducts deeply embedded in the language teacher’s practice. Acknowledging the connection between such conducts and the concept of postmemory may lead to new perspectives in language teacher education and the role of teacher identity in Critical Language Education – perspectives that may help us, in education and in language teaching, never forget the atrocities committed during the Military Dictatorship, never silence again, and never repeat.

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