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# Mapping Conceptual Change: The Ideological Struggle for the Meaning of EFL in Uruguayan Education

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Neoliberal ideology attempts to make all spheres of social life play by the rules of the market (Gray, 2000), and foreign language teaching is not an exception. The hegemonic role of English in the neoliberal project breeds it as a commodity that can satisfy non-native speakers' need to access the globalized world. In the 1990s, neoliberalism dominated the sociopolitical landscape of most Latin American countries. At the time, language policies in Uruguay sought to make English the foreign language *par excellence*, to the detriment of other languages such as French and Italian. The discourse of neoliberal language policies related the expansion of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to a new global order that called for an instrumental language to help Uruguay become “a first world country,” and English was the key to open doors to globalization. During the first decade of the 21st century, however, the sociopolitical landscape of Uruguay shifted toward a left-wing ideology. Even though policies continued to promote EFL, they struggled to re-define its political meaning. As English was now seen as a symbol of imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) and colonialism (Pennycook, 1994, 1998, 2000), the only way for Uruguayan children to be critical of its hegemonic power was to learn the language through a pedagogy of empowerment. In this paper, I argue that the transition from neoliberal to left-wing ideology in central government brought about a political struggle (Koselleck, 1993, 2002) in which each ideology fought to (re)define EFL in its own terms. I will map this political struggle to define EFL in Uruguay by analyzing three official EFL-related documents written by policy makers and other stakeholders in the 1990s and 2000s, which represent the voices of neoliberal and left-wing policy makers, respectively.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>i</sup>

The neoliberal ideology has permeated many domains of the Western world, such as economic, political, academic and cultural activities. Unlike other social disciplines, it seems that applied linguistics has often times failed to problematize this ideology and to reflect on its theoretical and practical implications (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012). At a time when concepts such as the invisible hand of the market and free regulation are being contested, it is relevant to reflect on the role of the neoliberal ideology in the promotion of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and its complex relation with other contesting ideologies.

The hegemonic role of English in the neoliberal project breeds it as a commodity that can satisfy non-native speakers' need to access the globalized world. In the 1990s, the neoliberal ideology dominated the sociopolitical landscape of most Latin American countries, including Uruguay. At the time, local and regional language policies sought to make English the foreign language *par excellence*, to the detriment of other languages such as French and Italian. These policies related the expansion of EFL to a new global order that called for an instrumental language to help Uruguay become “a first world country,” and

English was the key to open doors to globalization. During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, the sociopolitical landscape of Uruguay shifted toward a left-wing ideology for the first time in the history of the country. The new left-wing government did not reverse or change EFL policies; instead, it continued to promote it, even though some left-wing radical sectors would see the language as a symbol of imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) and colonialism (Pennycook, 1994, 1998, 2000). However, the government did struggle to re-define the political meanings associated to EFL. As left-wing governments in Latin America are in general terms aligned with critical pedagogy in education, new discourses related EFL to a pedagogy of empowerment, for which the language should be learned so that children could be critical of hegemonic powers, at the same time that students would be given the chance to learn a language of global communication.

There may be various reasons behind this decision to keep promoting EFL in Uruguay despite previous links to neo-liberal policies: firstly, a need to comply with the increasing social demand to learn English, which has for a long time been perceived as an instrument for individual success; secondly, the alignment with other regional trends in education given that several left-wing governments in Latin America; thirdly, the fact that in the past decades left-wing ideologies in Uruguay have gained more popularity through a process of ideological modulation (shifting from more extreme left-wing views to center-left views). This ideological modulation may imply, among other things, resignifying the meanings of EFL (instead of rejecting the language) so that it fits a center-left agenda.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the transition from neoliberal to left-wing ideology in Uruguayan central government policy making and its impact on the political definition of EFL. Throughout this paper, I shall argue that this transition brought about a political struggle (Koselleck, 1993) in which each ideology fought to (re)define EFL in its own terms. I will map this struggle by analyzing some official Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)-related documents which were written by policy makers and other stakeholders in the 1990s and 2000s. The analysis sheds light on the strategies employed to define EFL under these two opposed ideologies, and also on the ways in which each of them appropriates similar arguments for different purposes.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Disciplines that draw on social and critical theories—such as discourse analysis, CDA, and conceptual history, among others—tend to share some common postulates. One of these postulates is of particular interest to the aim of this paper, namely that *the history of a concept cannot be reduced to a word, its linguistic meanings, or the formal analysis of the texts in which that word is contained*.

As stated by Vološinov (1930/1973), signs, which reflect and refract another reality outside of themselves, possess semiotic value and are therefore the object of struggle by different social groups. Drawing on the concept of intertextuality, it could also be stated that texts can either align in their semantic orientation or fight for the meaning of words that previous texts have employed (Lemke, 1992). Mapping the history of a concept requires the analyst to describe the dialectical relationship between text and context, and its connection with situated social practices and ideologies. The role of language and other semiotic resources is of paramount importance in the formation of discourses and in the construction and circulation of such concepts (Gadamer, 2002).

According to Skinner (1989), language and political change are closely linked, and in order to understand the latter, we need to understand the language we use to appraise it. As there are two sides to a coin, there is a political constitution of language and a linguistic constitution of politics (Farr, 1989). From this perspective, a concept can be defined as the set of political and social meanings associated to words or expressions, which become the object of political struggles by different groups who fight for the right to appropriate and define them in their own terms (Gadamer, 2002).

Political concepts cannot be understood as mere historical products of society; instead they should be viewed as constitutive elements of broader social processes and practices (Koselleck, 1993). Therefore, political concepts need to be treated as locally and contextually dependent (Kukkanen, 2008) and not as *a priori* categories. This led most conceptual historians to address political concepts from a dynamic and diachronic<sup>ii</sup> perspective, mainly focusing on concept instability and change. Following Kuukkanen (2008), concepts can undergo three different processes: stability, change, and replacement. Conceptual stability refers to the actual absence of change, in which the meanings associated to a concept remain constant through time. However, the intrinsic instability caused by political forces makes concepts more likely to undergo either a process of change or replacement. Conceptual change refers to the case in which a concept undergoes some type of significant variation in the meanings associated to it. For conceptual change to take place, however, it is important that at least some of the meanings previously associated to it are maintained. Conceptual replacement, on the other hand, is an extreme case of conceptual change in which all meanings associated to the concepts are changed and in which there is no continuity whatsoever between previous and new meanings. Conceptual change and replacement can take place at either local or global scales, affecting just one concept or a whole constellation of concepts, respectively (Farr, 1989).

The study of conceptual change sheds light on three main aspects: changing social beliefs, social awareness and perceptions, and social values and attitude (Skinner, 1989). However, the task of the analyst is not easy since mapping conceptual change requires working in a trans-disciplinary framework in which (local) political, economic, and discursive processes are considered as part of more complex historical processes. In drawing on the concept of conceptual change to analyze the ways in which neoliberal and left-wing ideologies struggle to define EFL in different historical moments of Uruguayan education, I am making a claim about the definition and origin of EFL. In particular, I am stating that EFL is, by definition, a political enterprise as is the teaching of any language (Lo Bianco, 2004; Kaplan & Baldauf, 2005). In the case of EFL, its political origin/nature has been critically outlined in connection to imperialism (Phillipson, 1992, 2003) and colonialism (Pennycook, 1994, 1998), just to name a few studies. Foreign language education in Uruguay is by no means an exception. The history—as well as the definition—of EFL has been shaped by the re-scaling of social, political, and ideological forces that struggle to appropriate its name and its social meanings. In this paper, the focus will be on the struggles by neoliberal and left-wing ideologies on a local scale, although regional and global scales will also be considered.

In a broad sense, neoliberal ideology attempts to make all spheres of social life play by the rules of the market (Gray, 2000), which brings about many political, economic, and cultural implications. As a political (and a social) ideology, neoliberalism can be considered as both a system and a discourse (Fairclough, 1995) closely linked to practices of a global order. The idea of markets that regulate themselves (Fairclough, 2006)—or practices that are not

produced by any particular agent but that ultimately implicate us all—has also brought about an increasing use of many neoliberal and global metaphors, such as: free trade, self-service, and citizens as clients, among others. Needless to say, the social and political meanings of these metaphors are heatedly debated (Hasan, 2003) as the struggle for social and political definition is always an on-going process (Williams, 1976/1983; Holborow, 2012).

As far as language education is concerned, Block et al. (2012) state that one of the effects of neoliberal ideology has been “the abandonment of social and cooperative ethic, towards an individualistic and competitive business model”(p. 6), which of course has implications in the domains of language teaching, language curriculum design, language assessment and evaluation, and language policy making. Therefore, it is perhaps symptomatic of the fact that applied linguistics has often times avoided the use of the term “neoliberalism” (p. 7). Often perceived as a symbol of neoliberal ideology and global success, the English language has played a pivotal role in the circulation of neoliberal language ideologies and discourses. As discussed by Piller and Cho (2013, p. 24), “the global spread of neoliberal free market doctrines naturalizes the use of English as the language of global competitiveness,” which in turn makes English a perfect object of desire (and dispute).

In general terms, disputes over political, social, and economic ideologies in Uruguay—as well as in other Latin American countries—are substantiated within the logic of the left/right wing semantics; this logic—at least nowadays—has to be understood as a continuum of ideological views in which economic, social, religious, and other affairs are at stake (Kitschelt, Hawkins, Luna, Rosas, & Zechmeister, 2010). The left-wing party (Frente Amplio), which represents a coalition of several political views, has been associated with egalitarianism and statism; the right-wing parties (Partido Colorado and Partido Nacional) have been associated with individual initiative and more limited government control, among others (Tartakoff, 2012). Originally motivated by Marxist-Leninist principles, some sectors of Frente Amplio have abandoned these principles to favor a more center-left view in the last decades (Tartakoff, 2012); at the same time some extreme right views have shifted toward a more right-center view. In 2005, Frente Amplio took office for the first time in the history of Uruguay, following the same political trend of the region and changing Latin America’s sociopolitical landscape. Frente Amplio was re-elected in 2009 and is still in office to date. Various theses have attempted to explain why and how Frente Amplio got to overcome the traditional success of right-wing parties in general elections. Some have suggested that the main reason is demographic (new young voters felt more aligned with left ideologies than with right ideologies), while others believe there has been a migration of older voters from the right-wing parties to Frente Amplio. In the same line, it has also been suggested that the process of ideological modulation (representing itself as more of a left-center party) has helped Frente Amplio’s triumph (for a more detailed description, see Lorenzoni & Pérez, 2013). Whatever the reasons may be, it is clear that political affiliation in Uruguay seems to be a dynamic and complex system that is governed by many correlated factors.

For a long time, right-wing ideologies have been aligned with neoliberal discourses in Uruguay, permeating language policy making processes (Canale, 2011), social attitudes toward English as the language of international success (López, 2013), and also political discourses in the public sphere (Canale, 2009). This trend started after WWII and gained momentum in the 1990s when English transitioned from being an optional foreign language to being the only mandatory language in secondary education. The language was seen as a window to a fast-growing global economy and to the global market; therefore, students

needed to learn it in order to become citizens of this new order in which local economic and cultural practices were not enough for Uruguayans to become competitive. By the turn of the century, however, left-wing ideologies struggled to redefine the concept of EFL as a political enterprise and its goals in the country. Leaning towards a political integration of left-wing Latin American countries, the government considered that Uruguay should continue to teach—and even expand the teaching of—EFL. The reasons for this, however, were to some extent different from those delivered by neoliberalist policy makers. Teaching the language would empower citizens, which should be the main goal of any left-wing government.

Even though by the turn of the new century the political landscape of the country had shifted, left-wing and neoliberal ideologies in foreign language education still co-exist today. The local struggles for the definition and the social meanings associated to EFL in Uruguay are, of course, only part of the global struggle neoliberalism has engaged in. As Hasan (2003) points out, it is part of a bigger “semiotic struggle to control the very definition of reality” (p. 437).

## **A BRIEF POLITICAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, AND LINGUISTIC PROFILE OF URUGUAY**

With a population of around 3,400,000 inhabitants (World Bank Group, 2014), Uruguay is the second smallest country in Latin America. Despite this, the country shows a quite diverse linguistic profile, which is in part the result of colonization processes, migration waves, and political struggles for local and regional integration, just to name a few. Half of the population is concentrated in the capital city—Montevideo— while the rest lives in urbanizing and rural areas. This demographic profile has certainly had an effect on language education, providing—in practice—more and better opportunities for second and foreign language learning to those children who live either in the capital or in any of the urbanizing areas. Despite this, in general Uruguay seems to have a privileged position among Latin American countries, with one of the highest literacy rates—around 98% according to the Index Mundi (2014).

Spanish, the *de facto* language, has been the official language of instruction since the first Educational Decree Law was passed in 1877, even though a considerable part of the population at the Northern border with Brazil speaks a dialect that is the result of local Spanish-Portuguese contact (Elizaincín, 1992). Hegemonic ideologies favored the spread of Spanish and legitimized its use, causing literacy rates to go down in the Northern border region and also (re)producing linguisticism (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1990) and purist ideologies (Milroy & Milroy, 1987) that deemed the use of languages other than Spanish as abnormal.

This situation remained the same until not long ago, after the official recognition of Portuguese as a legitimate language in the country; this shift was supported by substantial local research in the fields of dialectology and historical linguistics (Elizaincín, Behares, & Barrios, 1987; Elizaincín, 1992; Bertolotti, Caviglia, Coll, & Fernández, 2005), bilingual education (Behares, 1984; Brovotto, Geymonat, & Brian, 2007; Brovotto, 2010), and language policies (Barrios, Gabbiani, Behares, Elizaincín, & Mazzolini, 1993; Barrios, 1996). In addition, the linguistic profile of Uruguay has also been shaped by migrant languages (such as Italian, French, Russian, German, English, and also the African languages of slaves, among others) and indigenous languages, which were wiped out during local genocides (Coll,

2010). In spite of the fact that hegemonic ideologies delegitimized the use of other regional and local languages, foreign language learning in the so-called formal settings has always been considered as an educated—and therefore highly valued—practice.

In political terms, Uruguay has been an independent country since 1830. Since the 1990s, it has been a member of a larger economic association of Latin American countries or MERCOSUR [Common Southern Market], which originally included Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. Nowadays, Venezuela is also a state member, and Bolivia has recently been accepted as an acceding member. For this reason, some of the social and political actions are now embedded in a regional—rather than a domestic—space. In spite of the fact that this regional institution was founded upon economic agreements, foreign language teaching has always been one of the topics in the agenda of MERCOSUR. In fact, in 1997 the Policy Language Group was created by MERCOSUR to gather a group of specialists who would work on several aspects of language policies in the region: teaching of mother and foreign languages, language censuses, improvements in teacher education, language testing and assessments, among others. The very first document produced by this Group in 1997 makes the privileged role of English in the region explicit. While in some countries the language was the only mandatory foreign language (Argentina and Uruguay), it was the most popular optional foreign language in other countries (Brazil and Paraguay). Although the document discusses the need to expand the teaching of MERCOSUR's official languages (i.e., the teaching of Spanish in Brazil and the teaching of Portuguese in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay), the hegemonic role of English is not contested or problematized in the document, a pattern that is also present in prospective documents as well. Actually, some have suggested that even though official discourses underscored the teaching of other languages, as far as foreign language education was concerned, the region was shifting toward “English monolingualism” (Bertolotti, García, & Pugliese, 2003).

## **AN HISTORICAL LOOK AT SECOND AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN URUGUAYAN EDUCATION, WITH A FOCUS ON ENGLISH**

Private schools have not traditionally been a space of strict state regulation. Even though they are required to comply with some basic guidelines provided by the central government, they may, for instance, decide to include the teaching of other foreign languages or to change the content of official syllabuses to make them fit their own purposes.

The origins of private foreign language teaching in Uruguay can be traced back to middle and upper classes of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it was carried out by both private tutors (mostly British immigrants) and private institutions of ethnic origins (Monreal, 2010). As to EFL, the main institutions belong to the upper classes: the British College (founded in 1856), the English College (founded in 1865), and the English High-School (founded in 1870). Between 1890 and 1908, other institutions such as the English and French School, the International College, and the Flores Collegiate School were also founded. However, other languages such as Italian, French and German were also popular in the private domain.

In 1934—the same year the British Council for Foreign Relations was founded in Great Britain (Phillipson, 1992)—the private institute *Instituto Cultural Anglo-Uruguayo* was founded with the cooperation of the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to counter the effect of Nazi propaganda in the region and to teach the British culture and language (Viera, 2010). Around 1940, the British Council started to work in many Latin American countries in an attempt to expand political and cultural ideologies. Regarding the promotion of American

English, in 1939 the private institute *Alianza Cultural Uruguay-Estados Unidos* was founded and the Uruguayan-American private bilingual school was founded in 1958. The popularity of English as a foreign language in private education reached its peak during the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: many language institutes and Spanish-English bilingual schools were founded in order to deal with an increasing social demand, which still seems to exist nowadays. However, private teaching is to date associated with middle and upper classes.

In public education, language policies in Uruguay have traditionally been regulated by the central government through educational authorities. The inclusion or exclusion of foreign languages has been subjected to the authorities of primary, secondary, tertiary, and university-level education. This has resulted in a complex situation in which each level (or *sub-system*, as is called in the country) has promoted different foreign languages. These policies affect a vast majority of the population given that statistics show that around 85% of students are schooled in the public system (Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, 2011).

It is interesting to point out that English is the foreign language that has achieved the greatest continuity in the public language curriculum. Its introduction in secondary public schools was made official firstly in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, together with a classical language (Latin) and another modern foreign language (French). Students were able to choose one of these languages, according to their own interests. Even though the presence of English was at first rather weak, it is quite significant that it appeared in the original selection of foreign languages considered worthy of inclusion in the national curriculum. Given the historical and political landscape, it is not surprising to learn that, as official statistics show, towards 1854 25% of the students took Latin classes, 21% of the students took English classes, and 54% of the students took French classes (Ranguis, 1992). Towards the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Latin was excluded from the curriculum, and students were allowed to choose between English, German, and French, the latter being the language of preference. The international dominance of France in political, economic, and cultural affairs at that time explains the privileged role of French as a foreign language, even though the language would decrease in popularity after WWII.

Towards the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, extensive promotion of the English language led to a considerable growth on an international level, resulting in a greater interest in English language learning worldwide. Shin & Kubota (2008) discuss how this phenomenon impacted foreign language curricula internationally, with English achieving a greater status than ever before. In this way, the cultural and linguistic hegemony that had once favored France and the French language would now turn to Great Britain (and eventually to the US) and to the English language, a pattern of dominance that characterized the international linguistic landscape in education and in transnational organizations (Maurel, 2008). The situation in Uruguay certainly followed this trend. During the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, English language teaching in the public system became more hegemonic than ever. As reported by La Paz Barbarich (2012), the teaching of foreign languages in secondary education and the distribution of class hours to each foreign language changed dramatically during this period. If we consider the number of hours devoted to foreign languages from grades 1 through 4 (secondary education) altogether, the increasing hegemony of English becomes apparent. For instance, while in 1941, eleven hours were devoted to French and six hours were devoted to English; by 1993, nine hours were devoted to English, and three were devoted to either French or Italian. However, by 1996, all 14 hours of foreign language instruction were devoted to English (and French was no longer in the curriculum while Italian would remain in grades 5 and 6 until the 2008 Educational Reform).

The dethronement of French from public secondary education officially took place towards 1996, when the study of English became mandatory throughout secondary school. Official discourses justified this measure with arguments that underscored the role of the English language in international business, technology, and scientific-cultural production. In this period, the prosperity of 21<sup>st</sup> century nations appeared directly linked to the English language. As a way to make up for the increasing supremacy of English, a few *Centros de Lenguas Extranjeras* [Foreign Language Centers] were established in the same year (1996). These are public institutions which to this day offer optional courses in other foreign languages—including French, German, among others—for public school students at secondary level. However, these Centers have a very narrow reach: according to official statistics, the student population of the Centers in 2011 did not exceed 8,000 students (only around 4% of the total public secondary school population). Despite the decline of French in Uruguayan education, it is worth noting that the situation of the language may change in the near future given the recent agreement Uruguay signed to become an official member of the *Francophonie*, which will result in new attempts to promote the language.

Thanks to its expansion in the foreign language curriculum, English was consolidated as the only language taught throughout the six years of secondary education. This expansion was not exclusive to the Uruguayan educational reality but instead responded to the MERCOSUR context of the 90s since in 1991 it had already been announced that English would become the official foreign language in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Paraguay.

To date, EFL expansion and promotion does not necessarily seem to have resulted in a positive impact on learning standards (EF EPI, 2014). The need to improve learning standards is also connected to the massification of EFL access, as often times the reasons attributed to this problem are: the number of vacant TEFL positions, the lack of certified teachers to apply to these positions, and the low—albeit gradually increasing—graduation rates in teacher education, among others (Canale, 2013).

Traditionally, public primary education did not include any foreign languages in the curriculum, with the exception of a few schools that had specific temporary agreements with Embassies (and so offered German, Italian, French, Greek or Russian only in some schools). During the late 80s and 90s, several trial programs were implemented to progressively include EFL in primary education, such as the English for Public Primary Schools program (1993), the Partial Immersion in English program (2001), and the Teaching English Through Content program (2006). These programs generally underscored the increasing presence of English in the world and used instrumental and scientific arguments to support this. As for the instrumental arguments, programs generally underscored students' need to speak the language to become competitive in the world market and the role of English in technology and science. Scientific arguments, however, were usually presented to justify the introduction of EFL in the early years of instruction, drawing on the “earlier is better” argument (Tucker, 2001, p. 597). However, most of these programs did not last for a long time.

In 2006, the government created the first educational entity to regulate all language policies for all systems of public education: the Commission of Language Policies for Public Education. It was the first time the government had decided to implement a national policy that would consider pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary, and university education at the same time. The Commission worked for two years (2007-2009) and published a final document entitled *Documentos de la Comisión de Políticas Lingüísticas para la Educación Pública* (ANEP, 2009). In this document, EFL has a privileged place among the foreign languages to be taught in all systems of Uruguayan public education. It states the need to extend the

teaching of English to all Uruguayan children for democratization purposes. However, the hegemonic role of English is somehow relativized by the decision to eventually include Portuguese as another mandatory foreign language in the whole country (and not only in the Northern border area).

## **CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY**

To study the political tensions and conflicts between the neoliberal and the left-wing ideologies in the discursive formation(s) of EFL in Uruguayan education, I will analyze three documents from Uruguayan Public Education. To my mind, these three documents are representative of local educational changes in the past 25 years: the EFL syllabus for public secondary school (ANEP, 1993), the official resolution to make EFL the only mandatory language for secondary students (ANEP, 1995) which resulted in the dethronement of French and eventually Italian, and the syllabus for the inclusion of EFL in primary school (ANEP, 2008). While the first two texts were produced at a time of governing neoliberal ideologies, the third text was produced during the first left-wing office in the history of the country.

These documents circulated in educational contexts in the period 1993-2008, in which Uruguay changed its political orientation from neoliberalism to a left-wing ideology. All three are official documents that were produced by policy makers and other stakeholders in local education and can be considered as curriculum artifacts (Apple, 1982) that—to some extent—attempt to guide or shape teaching practices. However, there is some variation in the nature of these texts with regards to two aspects. The first aspect is their (im)mediate coercive power: while the 1995 resolution is of legislative nature (and was executed right away), the two syllabi are less coercive, as—in practice—they are read as “guidelines” or recommendations for teachers who can to some extent resist or contest them in their classroom practices. The second aspect refers to the political spheres in which these documents were produced: while the 1995 resolution belongs to the macro-level of policy making, the two syllabi can be considered to be part of the meso-level of language policy making (Johnson, 2013). One of the difficulties in using these types of documents as our primary data is that the analyst has to bear in mind that the context of production of these texts is always shaped by many voices and conflicting interests, the result of which is a text permeated by political compromise (Johnson, 2013). The analyst must also bear in mind that this type of text analysis does not capture all of the spaces in which the meanings of these texts circulate, as will be discussed in the limitations and future directions section.

Given that the aim of the analysis is interpretive, using this very small collection of documents allows me to provide a more detailed and exhaustive description, contextualization, and analysis of these texts, as these are the guiding principles of my analysis, following Fairclough (1989, 2003) and Wodak (2001), among others. The guiding concept is that of conceptual change, as defined in the theoretical framework section. Applying the concept of conceptual change to the development of EFL in Uruguay allows me to look closely at the particular discourses and strategies neoliberalism and left-wing ideologies employ in their discourse formations in order to appropriate and impose social / political meanings to EFL.

Conceptual change will be mapped with the aid of several discourse analysis concepts and tools. I will analyze formal features of the texts and lexico-grammatical choices to discuss how these contribute to representing experience in specific ways (Fairclough, 1989).

Lexico-grammatical choices are of interest in so far as they represent an instantiation of the potential meanings of the text. In analyzing lexico-grammatical choices, then, attention is paid to what is actually said or written in relation to what could have potentially been said or written, given the formal and functional resources provided by the system (Halliday, 2001). I will also analyze the use of sentence mode (declarative, grammatical question, and imperative) to explore how it makes the texts position writers and readers, and also to explore how the interaction between both is represented as (not) sharing knowledge and as having (un)equal statuses, among others (Fairclough, 1989). Thirdly, I will explore the ways in which writer authority is constructed by analyzing (verb) modality, which can be represented through both expressive modality (the writer's authority with respect to the representation of reality) and relational modality (a participant's authority in relation with other participants) (Fairclough, 1989).

The analysis will also consider how the three focal texts interact with each other and with other previous texts and discourses. I will draw on Fairclough's (1992) definition of intertextuality, which refers to the mechanisms through which "texts are constructed through other texts being articulated in particular ways" (p. 9). This concept will not only allow me to seek explicit and implicit connections between texts in different time and space frames but also to understand potential heterogeneity and tensions among them. I use the concept of heteroglossia to refer to the—more or less—explicit inclusion of other voices in the text. As stated by Martin and White (2005), writers can make use of heteroglossic mechanisms to "acknowledge alternative positions to their own" (p. 37), either to accept or reject these positions. On the contrary, monoglossic mechanisms present the writer's voice as the only existing position excluding any alternatives. In this sense, the study of the heteroglossic dimension of texts is important given that it is constitutive of wider "social and political relations" (Lemke, 1995, p. 33) and helps up understand how these relations are represented in texts.

As for my own positionality, it should be noted that I am a former local EFL student, EFL teacher, and teacher education instructor in both private and public institutions. The fact that I have performed—and still perform—many EFL identities certainly informs—and at the same time guides—my analysis. While I did not participate in the making of any of the documents I will analyze, I have indeed participated actively in a number of other professional TEFL activities and other non-professional activities in which the meanings of these—and many other—local documents and EFL practices were discussed, debated, contested, or even rejected. Also, the fact that my own political views are aligned with the left-wing party in Uruguay should be made explicit so that readers are informed about my own meaning-making process and my understanding of social reality in order for them to relate these to their own.

## **A NEOLIBERAL DEFINITION OF EFL: THE 1993 SYLLABUS FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION AND THE 1995 OFFICIAL RESOLUTION**

The first two documents I will analyze are representative of neoliberal decisions and policy-making processes. The foreign language syllabus for secondary education (ANEP, 1993) is a normative document that provides English teachers with some basic guidelines with regards to language content and methodology. By the time this text was produced, English was an optional language in the foreign language curriculum in secondary education and was not taught in primary schools (except for a reduced number of schools). Policy makers and

curriculum designers gathered to come to an agreement on what the main objectives of EFL would be for those students who signed up for this class.

The regional context—and the creation of MERCOSUR some years before the syllabus was designed—already called for an expansion of TEFL in Latin America given that—at a local and international scale—French as a foreign language had become less and less popular after WWII. Even though French as a foreign language was still a mandatory class for secondary education students, English was gradually taking over the foreign language curriculum (La Paz Barbarich, 2012) At that time, neoliberal ideologies had permeated Uruguayan education and the teaching of the language was conceived of as a key factor to make Uruguay enter the new global order and market.

The document is nine pages long and was written by around ten stakeholders. It consists of three parts. The first part, *Características del curso* [“Characteristics of the course”], delineates the objectives of EFL in secondary education, the theoretical and practical aspects the EFL classroom should contemplate, and some pedagogical recommendations. The second part is the actual syllabus, which describes the linguistic points and the content areas teachers are expected to teach. The third part is the bibliography list for teachers. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on an extract from the first part, in which an underlying political definition of EFL can be read:

La enseñanza del idioma inglés en el Ciclo Básico Único debe encararse con un criterio que, sin perder de vista los valores humanísticos y el desarrollo integral del educando, sea eminentemente práctico. En los tres años del CBU el alumno aprenderá las estructuras básicas del idioma, un vocabulario prioritariamente práctico y adquirirá las destrezas necesarias como para hacer uso del idioma en situaciones cotidianas, leer textos variados sencillos y comunicarse en forma escrita en un nivel elemental.

El alumno será estimulado a perder el miedo a expresarse en una lengua extranjera y a descubrir por experiencia propia el alto valor formativo y utilitario de la asignatura. Se sentarán asimismo las bases para una eventual profundización en el estudio de la misma. (p. 1)

[The teaching of English as a foreign language in the first years of secondary education must be addressed in such a way that –without losing sight of humanistic values and the integral development of the student [sic]- it will be eminently practical. In the first year of secondary education the student will learn the basic structures of the language and primordially practical vocabulary, and will acquire the necessary skills to use of the language in everyday situations, read simple texts of varied topics and have a basic ability in written communication. The student will be encouraged to let go of all fears to express themselves in a foreign language and to discover –through their own experience- the highly formative and practical value of the course. At the same time, a baseline will be set for future -and more advanced- study of the language.] (p. 1)

With regards to the formal aspects of the text, the normative nature of the document is made explicit by verb selection. The use of strong modals of obligation (“The teaching of English as a foreign language in the first years of secondary education must be addressed in such a way...” ) and the high modalization (“students will learn the basic structures of the language and primordially practical vocabulary, and will acquire the necessary skills to use of the language in everyday situation;” “The student will be encouraged;” “a baseline will be

set”) are clear examples of this normative attempt. Even though—in practice—teachers could decide not to follow all of these guidelines, the possibility of negotiation of teacher agency is discursively erased by this type of lexico-grammatical choices. But, at the same time, negotiation with other positions and alternatives are also erased, as monoglossic declarative sentences predominate and no other agents or voices are mentioned.

As for text interaction (Fairclough, 1989), the fact that the target readers of this syllabus are (implicitly) EFL teachers, and the fact that its main aim is to standardize EFL teaching practices all over the country contribute to this normative function. This normative nature can also be found in other sections of the syllabus; for instance, the textbook selection that has already been made for EFL teachers. In this respect, the construction of expressive modality is assisted by verb selection (such as the strong modals and the future forms mentioned earlier), creating a textual atmosphere in which normativity dictates what the (ideal) classroom will be like. On the other hand, relational modality is less explicit since teachers are not mentioned in the extract, and there is no explicit mention of institutional authority either. However, the very nature of the genre (an educational syllabus) explains why teachers are not represented linguistically; they are, by definition, the apparent readers of the text.

It is worth noting that verb selection denoting normativity (see underlined extracts) seems to be at the service of the same adjective: “practical,” which is the word most frequently repeated throughout the two paragraphs and throughout the whole document. The meanings associated to the term “practical” in the 1993 syllabus become apparent by looking at the whole lexical chain arranged throughout the extract (“eminently practical;” “learn the basic structures;” “primordially practical vocabulary;” “acquire the necessary skills;” “basic ability;” “the practical value of the course”). The use of these terms is probably not random given that other educational documents of the same period also use them frequently when discussing the ways in which EFL should be taught (Canale, 2011); this points to intertextual connections with other educational documents of the period at the local and regional level (for instance, MERCOSUR documents).

“Practicality” (and other terms such as “instrumentality”) could be considered another keyword in the neo-liberal approach in applied linguistics; more specifically, in foreign language teaching (Holborow, 2012), practical aims (pragmatic or practice-oriented) are favored—in so far as they help in the process of global insertion—over other possible reasons for learning and using a foreign language. This has raised awareness of differences in the motivations for including or excluding languages in the foreign language curriculum, such as the instrumental vs. the sentimental role of languages in education (Davies, 2009), even though in some settings both roles may not be opposed as such. In two of the occurrences of the word “practical” in the 1993 syllabus, it can be argued that “practicality” is presented as a concept which is in a pseudo-opposition with values that are not instrument-oriented: “The teaching of English as a foreign language in the first years of secondary education must be addressed in such a way that –without losing sight of humanistic values and the integral development of the student [sic]- it will be eminently practical” and “The student will be encouraged to let go of all fears to express themselves in a foreign language and to discover –through their own experience- the highly formative and practical value of the course”.

This pseudo-opposition between “humanistic values” and “practical values” in EFL gives way to intertextuality. By the time the document was written, a counter-argument was generally made by some stakeholders against the expansion of EFL in secondary education.

These stakeholders considered that other foreign languages such as Italian and French should be promoted instead of English. This counter-argument usually drew on the sentimental role of these languages in the Uruguayan community on both a national and an international scale. On a national scale, this counter-argument drew on French and Italian as languages with a local history in the country and linked to immigration processes (massive immigration in the case of Italian, but not so in the case of French). As for the French language, further arguments relative to its previous preeminence in the educational system were also used. Even though strictly speaking English was also a migrant language in the country, social perception breeds it as a “global language” and does not link English to the national past in any way. On an international scale, this counter-argument drew on the humanistic values the teaching of French and Italian have been associated with in several parts of the Western world (see Levy 1993; Canale & López, 2014), as opposed to the instrumental value of EFL.

The instrumental goals of EFL as expressed in the document are in consonance with the ways in which teachers are expected to teach the language, favoring the acquisition of practical vocabulary and skills, presumably that which can be used in everyday business situations, occasional encounters, etc.: “In the first year of secondary education the student will learn the basic structures of the language and primordially practical vocabulary, and will acquire the necessary skills to use of the language in everyday situations, read simple texts of varied topics and have a basic ability in written communication”). In this respect, the focus on skill acquisition and practice—also made explicit in other sections of the document—can be considered one of the pedagogical styles favored by globalization—and to our purpose also by neoliberal approaches (Kramersch, 2014, p. 298).

The association of TEFL with the notion of practicality also works at the level of intertextuality with the official resolution of 1995, which—within the same neoliberal ideology—announces a new educational turn: English would now become a mandatory foreign language in secondary education and French would be eventually excluded from the curriculum.

The official resolution of 1995 (ANEP, 1995) was written by the Central Board of Directors in a context of reinforcement of neoliberal ideologies in Uruguay, in which neoliberal policy making in education was at its peak. Instrumentality and practicality were considered fundamental, as the acquisition of knowledge needed to be based on the new demands by the global order. These new forces of the market called for the Uruguayan state to educate students under a very specific logic: success on a global scale. The 1995 resolution is key to understanding the eventual political struggle to define EFL in Uruguay, given that this is the document in which explanations are given for the decision to make English a mandatory foreign language and for excluding French from the official curriculum. As this decision was deemed as inappropriate by many teachers and other stakeholders, a number of *Centros de Lenguas Extranjeras* [Foreign Language Centers] were created in 1996 so that French and other foreign languages would be taught to students outside of the foreign language curriculum. Students had the chance to decide whether they wanted to attend these classes, but they had to take English lessons.

This second document consists of two parts. In the first part, a contextualization of the local situation in the field of foreign language education is provided as well as the reasons upon which the decision to make EFL mandatory in secondary education is based. In the second part, the decision to make EFL mandatory is announced, and a set of short-term logistic and administrative policies are described (which do not pertain to our discussion and

are not transcribed here for the sake of brevity).

Resolución oficial 1995. Montevideo, 7 de noviembre de 1995.

VISTO La necesidad de que en el Ciclo Básico la enseñanza del idioma extranjero se adecue al tiempo histórico que vive nuestro país, en el contexto de naciones.

RESULTANDO que por Acta 75, Res. 6.de fecha 10 de diciembre de 1990, el Consejo Directivo Central dispuso que a partir del año 1991, el estudio del idioma extranjero en el Ciclo Básico de Educación Media fuera optativo entre los idiomas Inglés y Francés.

CONSIDERANDO

- 1) Que actualmente la demanda social se inclina en su mayoría a favor del aprendizaje del idioma Inglés, por el uso que de él se hace en los medios académicos, comerciales, así como por el lenguaje técnico empleado en distintos tipos de tecnologías, entre ellas el de la computación.
- 2) Que en este sentido, el alumno que cursa el Ciclo Básico, debe poseer al egresar del tercer año el dominio de un vocabulario mínimo que le permita el uso del idioma en situaciones de la vida diaria, la lectura y la interpretación de textos sencillos, así como de lenguaje computacional.
- 3) Que por lo expuesto se constata la necesidad de asignar a la enseñanza de dicho idioma, un lugar relevante en la currícula.
- 4) Que por otra parte, es objetivo de esta Administración concentrar la enseñanza de conocimientos básicos del idioma inglés en el ciclo primario, únicamente a nivel de sexto año de las escuelas en las que hoy se imparte la enseñanza de dicho idioma.
- 5) Que procede asistir de manera especial por razones de equidad educativa, a aquellos alumnos que no reciben clases particulares de algún idioma extranjero.

ATENTO a lo expuesto

EL CONSEJO DIRECTIVO CENTRAL RESUELVE:

Disponer que a partir del año 1996, el idioma extranjero obligatorio para los alumnos que ingresan a primer año del Ciclo Básico, sea el Inglés...)" (p. 1-2)

[Official Resolution 1995 November 7th, Montevideo, 1995

Given the need to make the teaching of English in the first years of secondary school appropriate for the historical times our country is living, in the context of nations [sic]

Given that according to the Act 75, Resolution 6, dated December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1990, the Central Board of Directors decided that from 1991 on the study of a foreign language in the first years of secondary education would be mandatory, choosing either English or French.

Considering

- 1) That the present social demand mainly inclines towards the learning of the English language due to its use in academic media and business, as well as for the technical vocabulary used in several types of technologies, being computers one of those.
- 2) That, in the same line, the student that is in the first years of secondary school needs to finish their courses with a command of a minimal vocabulary bank that will allow them to use the language in everyday situations, read and interpret simple texts, and also the language of computers [sic].
- 3) That given the abovementioned reasons, the need to give the teaching of this

- language a relevant place in the foreign language curriculum.
- 4) That, on the other hand, it is the aim of this Administration to offer the teaching of basic knowledge of English in the first years of secondary education, with the exception of those primary schools in which the language is already being taught today.
  - 5) That the next step will be to assist in a special manner –for reasons of educational equity- those students who do not have private lessons of a foreign language.
- The Central Board of Directors resolves:  
That from 1996 on the mandatory foreign language for students who start the first year of secondary education will be English....] (p. 1-2)

Unlike our first document, the interactive nature of this text is somewhat different. This document is to be read by other policy makers, school administrators, heads, etc. and to be eventually communicated to teachers and society at large. In the same line, its normative nature is also different as it does not call for future action but instead informs on what is going to be done in the near future and the steps that will be taken. In the first part of the document, the normative force of the text is somewhat hidden, favoring a set of descriptions of what the educational situation at the moment was, which will eventually justify the decision.

Lexical chains seem to play a fundamental role in representing experience. The first lexical chain we can identify represents EFL as a phenomenon of growing importance in a wide context (“the historical times our country is living;” “the context of nations;” “the present social demand”). The second lexical chain reinforces this idea by presenting EFL as an unquestionable need in the local educational context. According to the logic of the market, once the need has been spotted, there is an obligation to satisfy it (“the need to make the teaching of English (...) appropriate;” “the study of foreign language in the first years of secondary education would be mandatory;” “the need to give the teaching of this language a relevant place in the foreign language curriculum”). In this manner, the increasing hegemony of EFL in Uruguayan education is presented as something that is market-driven and that does not depend on the will or interest of particular agents.

In spite of placing EFL within the logic of the market, in terms of heteroglossic negotiation it is interesting to note that the text indirectly reports the views of several stakeholders (the Administration, the Central Board of Directors, social demand). However, all of them are included to support the same opinion and idea, so alternative voices are not represented and therefore no contestation is possible. Instead, the voices and actions of other stakeholders are included to reinforce the voice of authority at the same time that it fails to associate authorities with any type of agency since they just seem to respond to the demands imposed by the market. As well as in the previous document, both the selection of verbs with high modalization or modulation and the use of the declarative mode also help to construct authority in the text. In terms of relational modality, the writers are positioned as those who “own” and define reality and those who make decisions (see the use of verbs such as “resolve”) as opposed to readers who cannot contest it or to explore the existence of alternative views.

The first—and what appears to be the most powerful—justification for making EFL mandatory is introduced as given information, detached from any individual or institutional agency: “Given the need to make the teaching of English in the first years of secondary school appropriate for the historical times our country is living, in the context of nations”

[sic]. In presenting this as given information, presupposed shared knowledge, or assumptions (Fairclough, 1989), the text does not allow for the contestation of its referential meaning, and the reader is therefore forced to agree with it. The lack of precise information about the “historical times our country is living, in the context of nations” is clear proof of the extent to which this debate had circulated in other documents, the reason for which it was not necessary to make the debate explicit. However, there are other assumptions as well. The idea that Uruguayan education is inserted in the global logic (“the context of nations”), that it has to act accordingly (making English the mandatory foreign language) and that this is a positive educational move, are all favoring a neoliberal construction of EFL. In this respect, and by the same logic of existing global forces for which nobody is responsible, the situation of foreign languages is presented as something given, something that happened without planned human or institutional actions, and something that moves toward a natural and logical development. This type of metaphor in which actions exist without any agents is also common in neoliberal and global practices (Fairclough, 2003).

In terms of intertextuality, the previous decision by the Central Board of Directors to allow students to choose between French and English in 1991 is made explicit in the text as a means to contextualize how (and why) this change is taking place, or how this new “context of nations” calls for a reorganization and reevaluation of foreign language instruction in the curriculum. This, again, brings us back to the instrumental motivation to teach EFL: if the international landscape had changed then so should foreign language instruction. Also, the resource of incorporating previous texts—as well as other voices—is used to reinforce the voice of authority and not to contest it or to present or acknowledge the existence of alternative positions.

As well as in the 1993 syllabus, the practicality or instrumentality of EFL is introduced as a key factor in determining the status of EFL in Uruguayan foreign language curriculum. However, this idea is not only associated to language policy makers but also to social demands: “[Given] That the present social demand mainly inclines towards the learning of the English language due to its use in academic media and business, as well as for the technical vocabulary used in several types of technologies, being computers one of those”. Practicality is now associated to specific social practices in the academic world, in business, and in technology, which are some of the main sources of powers of English as a global language (Crystal, 2003). EFL—and in a broader sense foreign language teaching in general—becomes associated with preparing students to perform certain activities in the new global order. In this respect, language teaching implies *looking forward* (instrumental ends) rather than *looking back* (sentimental ends). This is, in more general terms, a phenomenon that has also been addressed by conceptual history: modern societies tend to be future-oriented (Koselleck, 1993).

Among the justifications provided to make English a mandatory foreign language in the curriculum, the document uses intertextual arguments that bring us back to the 1993 syllabus, adding a technological argument: “That, in the same line, the student that is in the first years of secondary school needs to finish their courses with a command of a minimal vocabulary bank that will allow them to use the language in everyday situations, read and interpret simple texts, and also the language of computers” [sic]. Unlike the previous document, this text also echoes an on-going debate in Uruguayan foreign language education: the divide between public and private instruction: “That the next step will be to assist in a special manner –for reasons of educational equity- those students who do not have private lessons of a foreign language”. This public/private divide is by no means new

and has been discussed in more detail elsewhere (Canale, 2013). In the 1990s, EFL instruction had become widely spread in private education (through the creation of a substantial of bilingual schools and language centers) which is associated with middle and, above all, upper classes. For this reason, “educational equity,” therefore, is linked to the spread of English in secondary school regardless of students’ socioeconomic background. As we shall see later, the concept of “equity” is also key to understanding the political struggles to (re)define EFL by the left-wing ideology.

### **LEFT-WING DEFINITION OF EFL: THE 2008 SYLLABUS FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION AND THE STRUGGLE TO (RE)DEFINE EFL**

As discussed earlier in this paper, before the turn of the century several pilot programs were implemented to teach EFL in Uruguay. However, the language was not taught in all primary schools, but only in a relatively small number of schools around the country. One of the educational turns that took place when the left-wing party took office in 2005 was the attempt to expand the teaching of EFL to all primary schools. This decision was backed up by a discourse that, unlike previous neoliberal policies and actions, underscored the need to democratize and universalize the access to foreign languages from the early years of instruction as a way of empowering citizens (Brovetto, 2011; Canale, 2013). Even though this meant some continuity in the foreign language policy favoring English over other languages, this official decision was supported by discourses that differed from those that had motivated neoliberal language policies in the 1990s. As a means to alleviate the hegemonic role of English in the foreign language curriculum, this new language policy also discussed the need for students to learn another (optional) language within the curriculum (and not necessarily in the Foreign Language Centers). It is also important to mention that for the first time policy makers presented the teaching of Portuguese as obligatory in the whole country (and not only in the border areas). Even though this possibility had been entertained in the framework of MERCOSUR in the 1990s, it had not been made an official statement. To date, this specific policy has not been fully implemented, but it is important for at least two main reasons. Firstly, it opens up an ideological space to change the social value attached to the language in society (traditionally associated with negative attitudes in the Northern border); secondly, this measure places English in a different local context in which other regional languages and cultures are also highly valued, which in fact seems to be in consonance with the local left-wing approach to education.

In 2008, a new syllabus (ANEP, 2008) was designed for primary education that consisted of regulations and recommendations for the teaching of content subjects as well as Spanish as a mother tongue and foreign languages. The text is 422 pages long but only contains a small section devoted to EFL. The syllabus contains a description of the guiding theoretical and pedagogical principles, a description of the several content areas, and a description of foreign language teaching goals. Unlike the first syllabus I analyzed, the 2008 syllabus was designed by more than 120 stakeholders (teachers, coordinators, administrators, policy makers, etc.), and around 12 institutions were consulted. The target audience of this text is primary teachers, school administrators, and other decision makers. The first part of the document provides a (new) definition of education, which will eventually serve the purpose of redefining EFL as well:

La educación es ese escenario en el cual el poder y lo político adquieren una expresión fundamental ya que es allí donde el significado, el deseo, el idioma y los valores se vinculan con y responden a las más profundas creencias sobre la naturaleza misma de lo que significa ser humano, soñar y luchar por una forma concreta de vida (como adaptación a la realidad o como transformación hacia un mundo más justo y solidario, más humano). (p. 17)

[Education is the stage on which power and politics become of fundamental importance since *it is* there [sic] where meaning, desire, language and values are associated and connected to the deepest beliefs of the very nature of what it means to be a human being, to dream and to fight for a specific way of life (adapting oneself to reality or attempting to change it to make a more fair and caring world).] (p. 17)

Unlike previous documents in which education seemed to be market-driven, the 2008 syllabus policy makers make an explicit attempt to (re)define education in terms of other political interests and power relations, which is clearly represented by the lexical chain that surrounds the terms 'education' and 'language' ("power," "politics," "meaning," "desire," "values," "beliefs," "dream," "fight"). These views had not been previously acknowledged by neoliberal discourses, for which self-regulation of the market erased any type of conflict of individual, institutional or broader political interest in education.

The use of declarative sentences and existential verbs (see underlined extracts) sets the tone for the definition presented and excludes any possibility of heteroglossic negotiation, as no voices or alternative definitions are directly or indirectly included (for instance the implicit definitions previously adopted by neo-liberal policy-makers). This is also favored by the lack of an explicit agent of this definition, as stakeholders do not take an explicit positionality (such as "To us," "As we understand it," or "For this new Administration").

In laying emphasis on education as a transformative process -as opposed to the perpetuation of the neoliberal *status quo*- this document is intertextually reacting to previous neoliberal policies in a sink-or-swim logic: "adapting oneself to reality or attempting to change it to make a more fair and caring world," which also connects them intertextually to more critical views of education in which social transformation becomes a key concept. This reaction to previous neoliberal language policies and the rejection of their implicit definition of education is reinforced later in the document:

La educación contemporánea se enfrenta con una sociedad fuertemente segmentada, fragmentada hasta el extremo del individualismo y la competitividad promovidos por un modelo capitalista que deshumaniza a través de la pérdida de la historicidad, la subjetividad y el descreimiento en las utopías. Las relaciones sociales se impregnan de indiferencia, desconfianza, violencia e inseguridad lo que significa la negación del hombre (del yo y de los otros) como sujeto histórico. Se impone a niños, jóvenes y adultos vivir el presente sin pensar en el futuro, se jerarquiza el tener, posesión de bienes materiales, frente al ser como proceso de concientización de su lugar en el mundo y la posibilidad de transformarlo. (p. 24)

[Contemporary education faces a highly segmented society to the point of individualism and competitiveness, favored by the capitalist model that dehumanizes through the loss of historicity, the loss of subjectivity and the loss of faith in utopias. Social relations are

impregnated by indifference, mistrust, violence and insecurity, what results in the neglecting of man (the “I” and the “others”) as a historical subject. It makes children, adolescents and adults live our present without thinking of the future. It prioritizes the possession of goods, against “being” as a process of raising awareness of his/her own place in the world and the chance to transform it.] (p. 24)

“Contemporary society” is then represented as the result of neo-liberalism. “Individualism” and “competitiveness” are presented as extreme conditions of neoliberalism and rejected as such. The negative view of neoliberalism is supported by the lexical chain surrounding both terms (“segmented society;” “dehumanizes;” “loss;” “indifference;” “mistrust;” “violence;” “insecurity;” etc.), and neoliberalism (and more specifically capitalism) is presented as the agent who caused it. Also, this lexical chain has a clear effect in making other keywords of neoliberal theory become negative, such as “the possession of goods,” which in other contexts could be interpreted in a more positive way.

In opposition to the negative construction of neoliberalism and capitalism in the text, social transformation, then, becomes one of the pillars of the educational policies that this new syllabus proposes. In this respect, the very definition of EFL plays a pivotal role in the document. Despite the intrinsic complexity of the left/right semantics mentioned in the theoretical framework and the complex relation between language and political ideologies, EFL can still be perceived as a symbol of neoliberalism and capitalism by some radical sectors of the population. For them, the decision to expand its teaching could eventually be considered a threat to emancipatory education, if the definition of EFL by neoliberal ideologies is accepted. On the other hand, excluding EFL from the curriculum would certainly provoke a negative reaction given that the social demand is inclined toward the teaching of the language, as the analysis of questionnaires indicates (López, 2013). For this reason, EFL is (re)defined in the document as a symbol of empowerment instead of as a symbol of neoliberalism:

En el contexto internacional actual el inglés tiene una relevancia sustantiva ya que es una lengua de comunicación internacional, la más aprendida como lengua extranjera y la que concentra mayor cantidad de producción de conocimiento. Se constata que es el idioma con mayor presencia en la producción científica en el mundo informático, así como la lengua a la que se recurre con más frecuencia para acceder a material científico-cultural. En este marco, la inserción del idioma inglés en la escuela facilita el acceso a una multiplicidad de culturas contemporáneas que hablan esa lengua. Indudablemente, el inglés ha estado fuertemente vinculado a los centros mundiales de poder que han dominado gran parte de la cultura occidental hasta nuestros días. Resulta indispensable diversificar el origen cultural de los saberes, facilitando el acceso a materiales culturales provenientes de diferentes naciones de habla inglesa. El acceso masivo a esta lengua sustentado por la educación estatal contribuye al “empoderamiento” de los sujetos en la medida en que tiende a la igualdad de oportunidades. (p. 60)

[In the current international context, EFL has substantive relevance given that it is a language of international communication, the most popularly learned as a foreign language and the one that concentrates the greatest amount of knowledge production. It has been attested to be the language with the strongest presence in technology, and the language which is most frequently used in online searches of scientific and cultural

production [sic]. In this line, including EFL in primary school classrooms facilitates the access to a wide number of contemporary cultures who speak the language. Undoubtedly, English has been strongly associated with world-wide power centers which –to our days- dominate a great portion of Western culture. It is paramount to make sources of knowledge more diverse, facilitating the access to cultural materials [sic] from different English-speaking countries. Massive access to this language, supported by public education, contributes to the “empowerment” of people in as far as it provides equal opportunities.] (p. 60)

Intertextually, this document draws on previous documents and neoliberal policies—such as the ones analyzed in this paper—and so uses some of their arguments to justify the expansion of EFL in Uruguay: English as a language of international communication, its importance in technology, the substantial number of scientific research conducted and written in English, and its popularity as a foreign language all over the world. The fact that such arguments are employed by both the neoliberal and the left-wing definition of EFL indicates that these arguments have become part of what van Dijk (2005) calls group knowledge as opposed to ideological knowledge given that there seems to be total agreement between different political parties on their truth value.

The discursive power of such arguments is clearly illustrated by the superlative structures used to refer to the ecological vitality of the language (“most popularly learned;” “concentrates the greatest amount of knowledge production;” “strongest presence in technology;” “most frequently used in online searches”). These arguments could as well be used to reject the hegemony of the language and therefore stop the expansion of EFL in Uruguay. However, the next move in the text helps the reader understand them in a different way.

The text acknowledges the hegemony of English with a strong position, seen in the use of the adverbs “strongly” and “undoubtedly” which also erase the possibility of heteroglossic negotiation: “Undoubtedly, English has been strongly associated with world-wide power centers which –to our days- dominate a great portion of Western culture.” However, the use of the passive voice allows the text to hide the agency of critics and not to present themselves (the left-wing) as those critics (“English has been associated with...”), and concomitantly hide the true identity of the countries involved (“world-wide power centers”).

EFL as a threat is only a pre-text, given that the final move is to provide the reasons why this scenario calls for the expansion of EFL to primary schools in Uruguay: universal and equal access to EFL is a means to empower citizens. The use of the quotation marks when including the word “empowerment” in this text can be interpreted in several ways. It can either be interpreted as: a mechanism to point to it as a technical term that belongs to critical pedagogy, as an intertextual strategy to point to the term as a keyword imported from previous documents (it was also frequent in left-wing political discourses of the time (Canale 2009)), or merely as a strategy to point to the fact that the term is a literal translation from English.

As the reader may remember, the *topoi* of “equal opportunities” and “equity” were also present in the 1995 resolution. However, in the 2008 syllabus these *topoi* are, for the first time, at the service of empowerment, a term which is strongly associated with left-wing ideologies and pedagogies in Latin America and which is still used today in local educational legislation as a trademark of left-wing educational change. In this way, the text is able to think outside of the “English domination” logic and to present EFL as a means to empower

citizens to contest the very reality that—among other factors—English dominance has created. This idea also interacts intertextually with other left-wing political discourses of the same period (Canale, 2009) in which the candidate for President representing Frente Amplio, José Mujica (president in the 2011-2014 period), had also emphasized the fact that EFL should be learned so that—in the new global order—citizens could become empowered and resist the neoliberal logic.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the socio-political arena, ideologies fight to define and appropriate the meaning of concepts and of the words associated with those concepts. This struggle may imply contestation, redefinition or even rejection. Texts—such as the ones analyzed here—are the means for social practices to become instantiated and crystallized, but they never exhaust their potential to explicitly and implicitly draw on previous texts to reinforce, reject, or contest their meanings, and they are always in a potential conflict in the process of appropriating words and concepts (Lemke, 1992).

Neoliberal and left-wing foreign language policy documents in Uruguay are not an exception. Even though the transition from neoliberal to left-wing policies was characterized by a continuity in foreign language education (both favoring EFL), the discourses embodied by both are to a certain extent different. Strikingly, these discourses are different even when some of the arguments they use to defend and justify the expansion of EFL in the foreign language curriculum are similar. In this respect, the political struggle to define EFL in this period is a struggle for political *meanings* rather than a struggle for *changing directions in EFL policies*.

This struggle for political and social meanings becomes clear when we look at the way these texts use lexico-grammatical and discursive resources to construct and represent reality as well as to interact with the imagined readers of the texts. Both neo-liberal and left-wing documents present their own definition of education and language teaching as the only possible definition, avoiding the introduction of alternative views either by imposing monoglossic mechanisms or by including other voices when these share their views. The right-wing implicitly defines education and language teaching in terms of market-driven forces, which allows for institutional agency to be detached from any type of political or economic interest. On the contrary, the left-wing document explicitly defines education as a domain of constant struggle for transformation, acknowledging power relations and political interests but without making institutional agency explicit either.

Neo-liberal documents tend to reinforce their own orientation by only incorporating other voices when these voices agree with their own, by only drawing on intertextual connections with other texts with a similar orientation, and by creating lexical chains which reinforce their idea that TEFL is about practicality and instrumentality. On the contrary, the left-wing ideology document incorporates other voices to contest them. When the arguments of these previous documents are incorporated, they are redefined in light of new TEFL objectives. In fact, the 2008 syllabus draws on previous neo-liberal voices to construct a different orientation to the teaching of the language. The 2008 syllabus explicitly fights for the definition of EFL drawing, for instance, on other types of lexical chains (underscoring criticality, transformation, and empowerment). This complex dynamics—in which the same arguments may be put at the service of opposed views and in which some meanings remain while others are contested—points to a very important fact: there is conceptual change in

the definition of EFL in the shift from neo-liberal to left-wing ideologies but not conceptual replacement, as indicated by the coexistence of new and old meanings.

An important conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of the texts: both parties define EFL as an instrument, but they do it for different purposes and through different strategies. While the right-wing represents EFL as an instrument for achieving success in the global market, the left-wing represents EFL as an instrument for social empowerment, defying previous logics. In the same line, the conceptual change involving the definition of EFL seems to be on a par with other political and educational changes in the region favoring critical political theories, models of citizenship and pedagogies. In the 1990s, neoliberal language policies represented EFL as a key to success in a globalizing world and as a door to global practices. EFL was required for the insertion of the country into a new market-governed logic. “Equal opportunities” in EFL (the difference between public and private schools) became associated with having access to the English language, a symbol of belonging to the new globalizing world. In the 2000s, left-wing language policies reject neoliberal and capitalist ideologies. They resignify the meaning of EFL by using similar arguments to those of neoliberal policy makers but in a different political context and with a different orientation. In this transition, EFL moves from being an object of high exchange value in the global market (Heller & Duchême, 2012; Kramsch, 2014) to being a tool for empowerment that enables citizens to transform current (hegemonic) practices, which is ultimately what this left-wing policy considers the aim of education to be. Now equal opportunities is not just a business of having access to the language in order to enter a global order but rather having access to the language to achieve empowerment as a necessary step toward social transformation. In this manner, foreign language policies are struggling to redefine the meaning of EFL locally, resisting global hegemonic discourses. At the same time, the very status of EFL in Uruguay may start to be gradually challenged by at least two other languages: Portuguese, which is now presented in official discourses as the second mandatory foreign language, and French, whose decline after WWI may be alleviated by new agreements the central government has made to promote the teaching of the language in the near future.

Fighting over the political meanings of EFL is a way of fighting for ownership of concepts and for the interpretation of social reality. The attempt to change the meanings associated to EFL are clear if one considers, in particular, the fact that underlying the continuity in EFL policies, there is a discontinuity in its political definition.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Text analysis is an important component of language policy as it informs us about official arguments and discursive strategies in top-down language-related decisions. However, it only allows us to analyze language policies as texts rather than as (actual) classroom practices. Several authors have highlighted the importance of engaging in ethnographic approaches to language policies (Menken & García, 2010; McCarty, 2011; Johnson, 2013, just to name a few) to obtain substantial—and ecologically valid—evidence to account for stakeholders’ agency and to understand the multilayered processes involved in policy making.

Given that my aim was to discuss the definition of EFL in terms of political struggles for meaning and conceptual change, my analysis only focused on the macro- and meso- levels of policy making and did not capture the many strategies for language policy and text appropriation by teachers and students in classroom practices, among other stakeholders.

However, future research may use the findings of this study to shed light on how the appropriation process takes place and to show to what extent neoliberal and left-wing definitions of EFL are instantiated in other practices and artifacts of the classroom ecology, such as textbooks and materials, teaching and learning practices, teacher discourse, among others.

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<sup>i</sup> I am most grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and to the Editorial Committee for their valuable suggestions and comments. Any remaining mistake is my sole responsibility.

<sup>ii</sup> However, it should be noted that some schools have mainly focused on synchronic views of conceptual change (Skinner, 1988).