



“Running after my dreams”: How refugee and immigrant students conceptualize the experience of pursuing a university degree in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how immigrant and refugee students preparing to start a Brazilian public University conceptualize their experiences. Our goal here is to analyze their use of figurative language to talk about their views, experiences, and plans. In the light of Cognitive Linguistics and at an interface with Applied Linguistics, we identify, analyze, and interpret figurative language, especially metaphors and metonymies (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980; CAMERON et. al., 2009) that emerge in an interview with two Haitian students, a classroom interaction with an Asian student, and field notes of this interaction. Students talked about how they experience Brazilian society, their views of how it is to be a student in Brazil, their experiences as learners of Portuguese as a Welcoming language, and their plans. Building on previous work by Oliveira and Ferreira (2016), Gualda (2020), Ferreira et al. (2022), the results point to the use of conceptual metaphors such as EDUCATION IS COMMODITY, EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY, LEARNING IS KEY TO SUCCESS, and LEARNING IS STRUGGLE. Issues such as their hybrid identities as immigrant and refugee students in Brazil, as well as their new identities as future Brazilian citizens (or not), emerged in the talk.

KEYWORDS: Metaphor; Metonymies; Portuguese as a welcoming language; Language learning.



Correndo atrás dos meus sonhos: como alunos imigrantes e refugiados conceptualizam a experiência de perseguir uma formação superior no Brasil

RESUMO

O propósito deste estudo é investigar como imigrantes e refugiados, que se preparam para iniciar estudos superiores em uma universidade pública brasileira, conceptualizam suas experiências. Nosso propósito é analisar o uso que fazem da linguagem figurativa para falar de suas perspectivas, experiências e planos. À luz do arcabouço da Linguística Cognitiva e de interfaces com a Linguística Aplicada, identificamos, analisamos e interpretamos o uso da linguagem figurativa, especialmente de metáforas e metonímias (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1980; CAMERON et. al., 2009) que emergem em uma entrevista com dois haitianos, uma interação em sala de aula com um asiático refugiado e notas de campo sobre essa interação. Os alunos falaram sobre sua experiência na sociedade brasileira, sobre o que pensam sobre ser aluno no Brasil, suas experiências como aprendizes de Português como Língua de Acolhimento e seus planos. Engrossando resultados prévios obtidos por Oliveira e Ferreira (2016), Gualda (2020), Ferreira et al. (2022), o presente estudo indica terem os alunos apoiado-se em metáforas conceptuais, tais como EDUCAÇÃO É UMA MERCADORIA, EDUCAÇÃO É UMA JORNADA, A APRENDIZAGEM É A CHAVE DO SUCESSO E A APRENDIZAGEM É UMA LUTA. Outras questões relacionadas às suas identidades híbridas como alunos imigrantes e refugiados no Brasil assim como suas novas identidades como cidadãos brasileiros (ou não) foram igualmente abordadas na conversa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Metáfora; Metonímia; Português como língua de acolhimento; ensino-aprendizagem de línguas.

1. Introduction

In this study, a male and a female Haitian immigrant student, as well as an Asian refugee student, all of them attending the Pro-Immigrant project, a program hosted by a public University in Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais Southeast Brazil, talk about their experience in preparing to write the composition element required by ENEM, i.e., the Brazilian College Entrance Examination. The first talk was a welcoming activity to celebrate the approval of two Haitian students in ENEM and the beginning of their undergraduate studies. Students had previously agreed that the talk would be recorded and agreed to take part in the study¹. The interview took place online due to the COVID-19 pandemic². The participants are referred to by pseudonyms to protect their identities. The interviewed students from Haiti pseudonyms are Marie and Jean; the Asian student's Lucas. The data set from the Asian student, who holds a refugee status, resulted from an interview, a set of classroom interactions with the Portuguese language instructor, as well as from field notes taken during different sessions, as reported by Melo (2023). Our goal here is to compare how these students employ figurative language, especially metaphor and metonymy, to talk about their views, their experiences as immigrant and refugee students in Brazil as well as their plans. Issues such as their hybrid identities as

¹ The project "Immigration and Refuge in Brazil: panorama e subsidies for welcoming initiatives from an Applied Linguistics perspective" has been previously approved by the ethics committee of the Federal University of Minas Gerais. CAAE 25749319.0.0000.5149

² For information about our actions with immigrants at the onset of the pandemic, please see "Pró-Imigrantes" on <<http://www.letras.ufmg.br/profs/luciane/>>. Access date: 04/03/2023.



refugees and immigrant students in Brazil in search for a new identity as future Brazilian citizens (or not) emerged in the talk.

Previous research in foreign language learning in Higher Education has followed a similar trend. Ferreira (2016) investigated how Brazilian learners in the German for Academic Purposes program at a Brazilian federal university interacted in their native language, their motivations to learn a foreign language as well as their motivations to participate in study abroad programs. Data were collected using a focus group methodology with one focus group of six students. Metaphor-led discourse analysis (CAMERON et al., 2009) was employed to examine both systematic and cognitive metaphors and metonymies in the data that emerged from the focus group interactions. The analysis also examined how some metaphors and metonymies were co-constructed by participants and appeared systematically in the flow of talk to conclude a stretch of conversation; this normally took place as stabilizations in the language system occurred. Data collection procedures included applying a semi-structured questionnaire. The analysis identified the presence of systematic metaphors such as *LEARNING IS HARD WORK* and *EDUCATION IS A COMMODITY*, intertwined with conceptual metaphors³ such as *EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY* and *DIFFICULTIES ARE WEIGHTS*. These metaphors point to the motivation for learning verbalized by the Brazilian foreign language learners who took part in Ferreira (2016). The study also revealed compelling evidence for an interrelation among systematic metaphors and conceptual metaphors, where systematic metaphors in discourse are motivated by cognitive metaphors in thought.

Another study carried out by Ferreira (2014) investigated how university students conceptualize their experience in learning German as a Foreign Language. The conceptual metaphor *LEARNING IS A CONTAINER* appeared in expressions such as “to speak German means to be *inside*, and not to speak German is to be *outside*”, “[...] it is to *walk into a labyrinth* and not being able to find the *way out*”, “[...] sometimes to know German is, as if you were *on a lonely island*”. Participants have also expressed negative feelings toward their experiences in learning German as a Foreign Language. They used discursive metaphors such as “...it was a wrong decision *on my part*.” The use of metaphors which describe the learning process as an act of violence – “to *bang your head against a brick wall*” – points to the difficulties faced by these learners during their journey. To refer to these difficulties, one of them classified the experience as “*crossing a river without being able to swim*.” Other conceptual metaphors such as *LEARNING IS A DISCOVERY*⁴ and *LEARNING IS JUMPING HURDLES* were also used to elaborate their views and feelings as learners of German. Spatial metonymies which conceptualize the head as a container were thus recurrent in the data, where the head stands for a container of knowledge.

³ Conceptual metaphors are written in uppercase and are regarded here as mappings between experiential domains as defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). According to the authors, our thought is structured by mappings departing from a more concrete experiential source domain, for instance ‘journey’, to a more abstract target domain, such as ‘life’.

⁴ Systematic metaphors are written in capital and italic. Systematic metaphors are stabilizations in the flow of talk, they are usually employed to summarize a stretch of talk (CAMERON, 2010).

From a slightly different point of view, but within the same theoretical and analytical paradigm, Oliveira and Ferreira (2016) examined metaphors that emerged from learning narratives⁵ by international students at a Brazilian public university. The authors' assumption is that the use of metaphors by these students can facilitate our understanding of how the participants conceptualize their ability to speak Portuguese as an Additional Language (PAL). The *corpus* for this study consists of nineteen learning narratives available on the AMFALE (*Aprendendo com Memórias de Falantes e Aprendizes de Língua Estrangeira*) website⁶, which stores learning narratives of students of various languages. The Brazilian Portuguese learners answered a set of questions relative to their motivations to study the language, their learning difficulties, and strategies, and what the learning process had been like. A top-down (from thought to language) and a bottom-up (from metaphorical expressions to thought) analysis was conducted to identify the metaphors that were used and what they revealed about the learners' conceptualization of the learning process. Conceptual Metaphors such as LEARNING PORTUGUESE IS A JOURNEY and LEARNING PORTUGUESE IS A BRIDGE emerged from the narratives, revealing interesting aspects about the learners' experiences. Such aspects included the view that learning a language is a bridge to learning about its culture. In the words of the learner, learning the language is a way of "uniting more the continent," that is a way of building a bridge to better connect the South American countries⁷.

A new area of research, closely related to the field of Portuguese as an Additional Language (MOLSING; PERNA; IBAÑOS, 2020) and to Foreign Language Learning⁸ in general (KUBOTA, 2004; LARSEN-FREEMAN; LONG, 1991; SPADA; LIGHTBOWN, 2013) is the field of Portuguese as a Welcoming Language (GROSSO, 2010; AMADO, 2013; FERREIRA et. al., 2019), our immediate interest. It is a branch of knowledge that focuses on the teaching of Portuguese for immigrant and refugee learners. In the present study, we aim at focusing on these learners' learning experience as immigrant and refugee students in Brazil, how they perceive their experience, how their learning process has helped them to pass the Brazilian College Entrance Examination (ENEM), and how ENEM has contributed to the fulfillment of their dreams. We also focus on their subjective experiences as immigrants and refugee students in Brazil, on how they conceptualize their feelings about it, how they describe the learning opportunities they encounter, as well as how they regard the Brazilian society and its people from the point of view of their blended identities as Afro-Caribbean and Asian language learners, and future students of a prestigious Brazilian public University. Our interest includes their career plans as well.

Although it draws on a theoretical framework previously employed in sister disciplines, it innovates in addressing a new context and area of research – Portuguese as a Welcoming Language – and identifying the metaphors and the metonymies employed by the *Pró-Imigrantes*

⁵ Learning narratives are narratives that motivate reflection about the learning process and conscious raising of the learning context, where students are at a given moment and where/what they want to be. They are lived experiences of the language focusing on meanings and emotions involved in contexts of learning and teaching (KALAJA et al., 2008).

⁶ PAIVA, V. M. O. AMFALE. *Aprendendo com metáforas de falantes e de aprendizes de línguas estrangeiras*. Retrieved from <http://www.veramenezes.com/nar_vanlac.htm>. Access date: Mar. 18, 2023.

⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.letras.ufmg.br/congressometafora/Oliveira_Ferreira.pdf>. Access date: Mar. 23, 2023.

⁸ We opt not to distinguish Foreign Language Acquisition and Second Language Acquisition here.

to conceptualize certain aspects of their preparation to take the ENEM exam. The research procedures and questions, as well as the profile of the participants show in the next section, followed by data analysis and final thoughts.

2. Methodology

Methodologically, this study takes a descriptive and interpretive approach to qualitative research. Although we were able to find some studies which investigate students' experiences, emotions and expectations in relation to foreign language learning in Brazil from an Applied Linguistics (GOMES JUNIOR, 2015; PAIVA, 2008) and Cognitive Linguistics perspectives (FERREIRA, 2016; 2014), there are only a few studies that examine students interactions in the field of learning Portuguese as an Additional Language from both a Cognitive Linguistics and an Applied Linguistics perspectives (GOMES JUNIOR, 2021; FERREIRA, 2007; 2016). In addition, there are only a few studies working from an emic perspective based on data generated in the field Portuguese as a Welcoming Language (FERREIRA et al., 2022; FERREIRA; MELO, 2023).

A semi-structured questionnaire was designed and used to conduct the interview with the participant students (FERREIRA et al., 2020). The questions we asked Jean and Marie were as follows:

- a) When and how did you first come to Brazil?
- b) What was your motivation to prepare yourself for ENEM and to start college in Brazil?
- c) What was hard and what was easy for you when taking the ENEM?
- d) Could you give any advice to other migrants that are currently preparing to take the ENEM?

The questions we asked Lucas were as follows:

- a) What courses would you like to take at the University?
- b) What is your opinion about the classes not being remote anymore from next year on?
- c) What were your expectations when you took the ENEM? How do you feel about being able to study at a public university in Brazil?
- d) Can you talk about your migration path and why you chose to come to Brazil?

3. The participants

The two Haitian participants, Marie and Jean, were asked to talk openly about their experience as foreign students at the University. The third participant, Lucas, was interviewed by his Portuguese teacher in 2021. In this interview, he addressed questions such as what courses he would like to enroll at the University (Excerpt 5), how he felt about the Universities in Brazil going back to on-site classes (Excerpt 6), and what led him to migrate to Brazil, and not elsewhere (Excerpts 7 and 8).



The first participant, a Haitian male student in his late twenties, came to Brazil to reunite with his family. He and his younger sister finished high school in Brazil, both attended the *Pró-Imigrantes* courses, and both are currently students at a prestigious public University in Belo Horizonte. Jean has been an engineering student since 2021. While he was preparing to apply to study in the *Pró-Imigrantes* project, he already knew he was going to apply to civil engineering.

The second participant is Jean's sister, Marie, she is in her early twenties. She also finished school in Brazil after migrating from Haiti with her family. Like her brother, her mind was already set to pursue a degree while she was attending the *Pró-Imigrantes* project: "Pharmacy". She attends the same university as Jean and was admitted in 2021.

The third participant⁹, who is in his mid-thirties, migrated to Brazil in 2013. His migration process was a winding path. Before moving to Brazil, he had already been in some other Portuguese-speaking countries. Therefore, he already had some knowledge of Portuguese when he arrived in Brazil. Although he had graduated from college in his home country, he decided to go back to the University in Brazil. While attending the *Pró-Imigrantes* project, he was not so sure about what career to pursue. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he thought about getting a nursing degree to be able to help Brazilians who were ill¹⁰, then he changed to Petroleum engineering, and he even considered getting a language degree. Currently, he is studying architecture in a prestigious public institution Southeast Brazil.

4. Data analysis and discussion

The expressions underlined are the focus of our analysis. They are metaphorical vehicles, words or phrases that occur in semantic fields (or domains) different from the one present in the topic flow and that, potentially, can modify it in terms of meaning (CAMERON, 2007). These vehicles appear in bold, in all excerpts that follow.

In excerpt 1, line 5, Jean refers to the "path we went until we got here", meaning their learning journey as immigrant students learning Portuguese as a Welcoming Language (see FERREIRA et. al., 2022) in the first place, and as immigrant students trying to complete their high school education in Brazil¹¹. Edwards et al. (2004) claim that metaphors of movement and journey introduce a certain spatial relationship to learning, depending upon the emphasis placed on the point of departure and arrival, and the moving experience itself. This claim is based on Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) argument that most of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatial metaphors, and that spatiality is so essential that it is difficult to find any alternative metaphor that could structure the concept, probably due to its abstract characteristics.

⁹ Due to his refugee status, his nationality will not be revealed.

¹⁰ Retrieved from <<https://covid19.who.int/region/amro/country/br>>. Access date: Mar. 23, 2023.

¹¹ Jean and Mary are brother and sister. His use of "we" includes him and her.

Excerpt 1¹²

1 My name is Jean, [...]
 2 I am now a student at a Brazilian Federal University right?
 3 But before I was a student here we have, we have a history right,
 4 when we arri-arrive here too.
 5 What we, that is, the path we went until we got here right
 6 Thank God we manage to enter, I entered 2016
 7 and in May 2016 and May las-may so last month
 8 I completed six years here in Brazil.
 9 that is not less, less days, that is lots of days
 10 Thank God and I, I have always felt like I wanted to study,
 11 not leave the studies behind
 12 because the studies, so we know that without, without, without studying
 13 it is very hard to people to get somewhere
 14 to get to be somebody in society
 15 you need to study
 16 of course
 17 and I had this oppor-opportunity to take part in many Portuguese courses,
 18 also I took part in the reading project "Ler"¹³ [...]
 19 I...after that- after that I, I took part in a course and...
 20 I did not finish the high school in my home country
 21 then I chose to take a course...a-a, so,
 22 I did EJA (Education of Youth and Adults)¹⁴ right?
 23 a course where the person can prepare to take ENEM [...]
 24 I finished in 2019 if I am not mistaken
 25 then I tried ENEM for the first time as a test to see how the exam is,
 26 then I did not get a good grade
 27 after that I ha-had the opportunity of taking part in the Pro-Immigrant project
 28 that helped me a lot
 29 then...then I tried ENEM again
 30 I got a grade that allowed me to pass
 31 I was approved
 32 to start studying at UFMG, I achieved that
 33 so after I had been approved...in that selection process...
 34 but I had this problem (sic) of starting
 35 because I was working and I could not start
 36 I had to drop out my studies but I managed to start this year
 37 because it was-was in...in the last year
 38 I was supposed to start
 39 but I did not
 40 I only started this year..

¹² Clara Mota (UFMG/ IC Fapemig) has transcribed the data.

¹³ *Projeto Ler* is a university continued education project which aims to emancipate people with the status of refugee or immigrant. See <<https://www.projetoLER.com/>> for more information. Access date: Mar. 23, 2023.

¹⁴ EJA is a Youth and Adult Education Program where young adult students can complete high school faster. For more information, see <<http://portal.mec.gov.br/component/tags/tag/32737-eja>>. Access date: Mar. 23, 2023.



In line 6, Jean mentions “we manage to enter, I entered 2016 [...] / so last month/ I completed six years here in Brazil”. Jean employs here a container metaphor generally used to talk about nation (MUSOLFF, 2015; HART, 2010) as a bounded space in which people can or cannot enter. This container metaphor is based on the container image schema (JOHNSON, 1987). Johnson claims that conceptual metaphors and metonymies are motivated by basic image schemas, such as source-path-goal and container. For example, in excerpt 1, Jean mentions he went on a learning path. This utterance presupposes that there is a starting point, that is, when he started attending school in Brazil, a trajectory, which is the disciplines, exams, successes, and difficulties in his educational path. There is also a goal to be achieved: the attainment of a degree at the end of his course. As for the container image schema, it emerges from our experience with bounded spaces and its borders, meaning that items may be in or out of boundaries. Therefore, container metonymies are spatial metaphors; for instance, in excerpt 1, Brazil is conceptualized as a bounded space, and Jean entered this bounded space when he crossed its borders.

In lines 12 and 13, Jean asserts that “without studying/ it is very hard for people to get somewhere/ to get to be somebody in the society/ you need to study”. Jean conceptualizes this location he wants to occupy in society as a special space where immigrants be treated as part of that society, in this case the Brazilian society. We may say that a University degree is key to better opportunities and better acceptance by the welcoming country, motivated by the systematic metaphor LEARNING IS HARD WORK. Jean, Marie, and the refugee student interviewed for this study share this belief. In fact, it is an assumption shared by many Brazilians themselves, who regard the University degree as a path to achieve higher status in Brazilian society. According to Ferreira and Oliveira (2020), they are motivated by the EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY metaphor, and students choose that path to achieve a better life.

As excerpt 1 shows, when talking about their plans, many immigrant students, especially Haitian students in the *Pro-Immigrant* project¹⁵ assert that they want to enjoy all the education opportunities available in Brazil (Excerpt 1, lines 16, 25), such as free technical schools and higher education. In this sense, Jean’s utterance was motivated by the conceptual metaphor EDUCATION IS A COMMODITY, a belief also commonly shared by Brazilian students, especially those from lower income families, who believe that a career will help them ascend in the social ladder. Hence, education is regarded as a commodity, as a good, as something of a high value which will help immigrant and refugee students achieve recognition in the Brazilian society. Through education, immigrant and refugee students can enhance their economic value and perhaps be regarded as being part of it.

This view of education, shared with Brazilian students from lower income families, is an instrumental view of education. If EDUCATION IS A COMMODITY, it is regarded as a symbolic economic capital (BOURDIEU, 1977), as excerpt 2 shows one more time, in Marie’s voice.

¹⁵ Instagram: @projetoproimigrantes; Facebook: Pró Imigrantes; Youtube: Pró Imigrantes UFMG. For more information, visit <<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcLgrKI2TaQJN4vvfiX5MTA>>. Access date: Mar. 23, 2023.



Excerpt 2.

Marie:

- 1 Knowledge is the only thing that nobody can take away from you, so knowledge is a big
- 2 thing, if you have knowledge and education, that is everything in life, it is success because
- 3 through education you can achieve everything.

Since both Haitian students are siblings and live together, there is a possibility that the family socially shares this belief. Their father was a schoolteacher in their home country and even taught them the first words in Brazilian Portuguese. One of them even mentioned that, at home, the father would talk in Portuguese with them, revealing a family effort toward establishing a family language policy (CURDT-CHRISTIANSEN, 2016). Another possibility we need to consider is that EDUCATION IS A COMMODITY could be a systematic metaphor (CAMERON et al., 2009), which emerges spontaneously during their interaction in the flow of talk. Marie talked after Jean, and she might have picked up some of his metaphorical language.

In addition, some primary metaphors appear in Marie's talk. When she mentions the role of knowledge in life, her description is motivated by a primary metaphor: IMPORTANT IS SIZE (GRADY, 1987). Primary metaphors are based on primary scenes from experiences lived in childhood, which motivate a correlation between importance and size (see excerpt 2, line 2). They correlate a larger size/volume of objects to higher value, threat, difficulty, etc. For instance, when we say, “Tomorrow is a big day” (p. 291), we mean tomorrow is an important day.

A similar phenomenon occurs in excerpt (3), in which the embodied experience of ‘good is up’ and ‘bad is down’, an early life experience, structures cognitively Marie's utterance (“it is made of ups and downs”):

Excerpt 3.

Marie:

- 1 Hence, study and you will find your way to access higher education and achieve approval
- 2 at ENEM, too. Don't give up because it is not easy to study and have this goal all year
- 3 round. It is made of *ups and downs*, sometimes we feel like “I want to study,” I felt really
- 4 happy to study, I felt determined to study but sometimes I didn't. I felt more tired, even
- 5 lazy but if we have a goal, we can achieve everything, and so it is when you feel
- 6 determined. That is it!

To sum up, excerpts 2 and 3 reveal how Brazil is seen as a country of opportunities by Haitian immigrant students, as it is the case of Jean and Marie. This belief has been previously described by Gualda (2020) in the context of the PEC-G Afro-Caribbean exchange program in Brazil. The participants explained to the author that they see the possibility of attending college in Brazil as a key opportunity to their careers back home. Knowledge is conceptualized by them as a commodity.

The same is true of Marie. When asked about what Marie would recommend to her fellow immigrant and refugee students in Brazil, she reinforced such a belief, asserting that “knowledge is the only thing nobody can take away from you.” In other words, there are metaphorical vehicles in the excerpts that corroborate the conceptualization of knowledge as a commodity.



The ups and downs in the path also emerge in excerpt 4, in which Jean talks about the amount of effort required to go through high school. His speech was motivated by the metaphor LEARNING IS HARD WORK, conceptualized in terms of the huge effort both Haitian students (he and his sister) made to access higher education in Brazil.

Excerpt 4.

- Jean:
- 1 that is...the University is not like a normal school [...],
 - 2 it is not like high school
 - 3 we need to make a lot, a lot of effort right
 - 4 to be able to follow stuff. But I realized that...we do not need,
 - 5 to worry a lot,
 - 6 because to worry can cause, it can cause a lot of emotion [...]

Comparing the metaphors and metonymies used by both Afro-Caribbean immigrant students to those uttered by the Asian refugee (excerpt 5), we found striking differences as well. In the excerpt, the student explains his desire to pursue a degree in petroleum engineering, and not metallurgical engineering because he believes that the first one would provide better income, and a job as a metallurgical engineer could demand working under elevated temperatures.

Excerpt 5.

- Lucas:
- 1 You don't earn a lot of money, right?
 - 2 It's not like oil. And the work is really heavy, right?
 - 3 Imagine that, 40, 50 degrees, right?
 - 4 Temperature, the whole day, you have to...
 - 5 come in wearing a uniform, that coat, right?
 - 6 Thick... imagine that.

In excerpt 5, line 2, Lucas employs a metaphorical expression in which *carrying weight* correlates to *facing difficulties*. This expression is motivated by the primary metaphor DIFFICULTIES ARE WEIGHT (GRADY, 1987). In excerpt 6, the metaphor “heavy” appears once again in his speech. However, he refers to a distinct context: Lucas had to leave his job to move to another state in Brazil to be able to start his undergraduate studies, a move he was not willing to do at the time. During the interview, for example, Lucas was asked, how he felt about the classes at the University no longer being remote (excerpt 6):

Excerpt 6.

- Lucas:
- 1 To me it's... to me it's worse, right?
 - 2 To me, wow... I prefer online classes, my whole life
 - 3 Then I can choose where to work, right?
 - 4 I can take the course and work
 - 5 Not now, now I'll lose my job, right?
 - 6 I'm going to move
 - 7 And that's another..wow..
 - 8 That's heavy, right? That, right? It is.

When Lucas mentions the experience being “worse” for him and preferring online classes his “whole life”, he refers to his experience in his home country (he already has a degree in his home country) and to what he would like to be able to do in Brazil: to be able to study and work simultaneously. Since he had been accepted to a university in another state in Brazil (in a city different from the one where he had been working at the time), this would not be possible unless he moved to a different city.

In the sequence of talk, he also asserts that when he finished his first college degree in his country of origin, he was not expecting to go back to college and have to take exams anytime soon, as it has happened in his life as a refugee in Brazil (Excerpt 7, line 8) – “have you ever imagined that?/ *starting everything from zero?*” How many difficulties and milestones seem to be hidden in such an utterance and the emphasis the previous rhetorical question in his dialogue puts on them.

Excerpt 7.

- Lucas:
- 1 I remember that I graduated, on the day I graduated
 - 2 during my last exam, that I passed
 - 3 On that day I thought well, that is the last exam of my life
 - 4 now I’m never writing an exam again
 - 5 But I’d never imagined that when...
 - 6 after I’m going to start all over again.
 - 7 Have you ever imagined that?
 - 8 Starting everything from zero?

Lucas’ utterance is motivated by the source-path-goal image schema (JOHNSON, 1987), which motivates the conceptual metaphor EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY. College education has a starting point, when students are admitted and begin college (source); then there is a path full of ups and downs along the course work until the goal is reached: the graduation. His use of this expression reveals that he seems to experience his educational path as a loop, he was forced to go back to the source in the journey and start it all over again as a refugee student in another country. Apparently, excerpt 7 reveals that to him, it felt as if his college education path would never end.

Before coming to Brazil, Lucas lived in a few other countries in Africa, where Portuguese is an official language, such as Angola and Mozambique. He also worked in those countries, where he ended up learning Portuguese. In our interactions, Lucas also mentioned that he met some Brazilians during the period he worked in Africa. He narrated having a Brazilian colleague and friend to whom he mentioned his dream of moving to Brazil and becoming a Brazilian. His friend did not believe him at first. When Lucas arrived in Brazil, he was invited to this friend’s house. The conversation he recounts in excerpt 8 took place there:



Excerpt 8.

- Lucas:
- 1 Before arriving here I used to work with a Brazilian friend
 - 2 I told him, my dream is to go to Brazil and I will become Brazilian
 - 3 Then, after arriving here I went to my friend's house, went to his house
 - 4 Then there's his nephew...
 - 5 his sister died and left him with her son
 - 6 Then one day I was there and my friend told his nephew off
 - 7 He said that the person who does not study becomes a hopeless person
 - 8 So one day he lectured him and told him, look at him
 - 9 he was talking about me
 - 10 his dream has always been to run after his dream.
 - 11 now he has fulfilled it, and he is here.
 - 12 When I said that at first
 - 13 he had never imagined that I would be here one day
 - 14 Then he pointed out that I would always run after my dreams
 - 15 now I've got everything I have been looking for

Lucas' story about fulfilling his dream of becoming a Brazilian citizen carries an allegory. Gibbs (2011) claims that human beings are intrinsically allegorical beings. According to the author, it is common for people to go through an experience and try to make sense of it by reading it as an allegory. People who have faced a severe problem in life, for instance, might talk about it and conceive of it as if it encompasses a deeper symbolic meaning, as if, below the surface, the problem was there to teach a lesson. People are drawn to the idea of uncovering hidden meanings under an allegorical narrative (OKONSKI; GIBBS, 2019), and this idea extends to stories found in daily life, as if certain events represented more than what they really are. Gibbs (2011) calls this the "allegorical impulse", which can be defined as a cognitive phenomenon that creates people's tendency to draw connections between ordinary events and larger symbolic themes. This indeed is related to a metaphoric way of thinking since both phenomena, metaphor, and allegory, point to comprehending one thing in terms of another. Because human beings think metaphorically, it is possible to claim that they also think allegorically.

Allegories, then, can be comprehended as a type of extended, more complex metaphor, in which an entire story is based on a certain source domain (GIBBS 2011; RITCHIE, 2017). However, what differentiates allegories from any extended metaphor is the fact that its core is a narrative which maps its features on another domain in such a way that is consistent with the source domain in question. In the words of Ritchie (2017, p. 93), "allegory is a metaphorical story organized around one or more unifying concepts". In Lucas' case, it is the narrative about him, an Asian refugee student in Brazil, trying to fulfill his dream of fully integrating into the Brazilian society by getting into college.

Excerpt 9 comes from field notes taken after a session where the Portuguese teacher and Lucas were doing some training based on exercises for the ENEM. In this session, Lucas employed a metonymy to talk about a concept he had not learned yet, the concept of irony.



Excerpt 9.

Lucas:

- 1 And it's not easy for me to understand like not-
- 2 it's like “you're pulling my leg, right?” [...]
- 3 Irony it's like...
- 4 There's a lot of romance, right? with irony, right?

His use of “romance” in excerpt 9 (line 4) is a conceptual metonymy¹⁶ motivated by a part-whole relation (KÖVECSES, 2010). He uses this word because he thinks irony is widely used in romance as a genre. By the time they were doing this exercise in class, the subject “textual genres” had not been taught yet. Therefore, Lucas uses the word “romance” to refer to any type of fictional text, such as the genre romance itself but also to refer to comics, poems, etc. “Romance” (part) is being used to refer to a whole (a group of fictional texts). “Romance” is the vehicle that allows mental access to the target entity “fictional texts”. In this context, it's likely that the student uses metonymies to make sense of contents that he has not formally learned yet, but that he needs to access directly or indirectly to comprehend a given text.

5. Final thoughts

The present study investigated how two immigrant and a refugee student, all of them advanced learners of Portuguese as a Welcoming Language in the *Pro-Immigrant* project conceptualize their experiences during the preparation to take College Entrance Exams and access higher education in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Looking at the data from a Cognitive Linguistics perspective, the present study reveals an instrumental view of Brazilian Portuguese as an asset, a commodity, by the two immigrant students. They believe that attending the University and getting a degree in Brazil will enable them to achieve a better status in the Brazilian society. This is a belief shared by their Brazilian peers as well, who regard a college degree as an economic capital, in Bourdieu's sense (BOURDIEU; PASSERON, 1977). LANGUAGE IS A COMMODITY is a metaphor that emerged in the talk of both Haitian participants when they mentioned their reasons to study Brazilian Portuguese and prepare to take the ENEM. In our experience with immigrant students in the *Pro-Immigrant* project, other data sets provided similar evidence to this view of education as a recently published newspaper article by Caetano on the *Pró-Immigrants* project reveal¹⁷. In the present study, the Asian refugee student in case seems more geared toward becoming part of the Brazilian society, whereas the Haitian students seem more concerned with what they can learn

¹⁶ Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define conceptual metonymy as a mapping between a source meaning and a target meaning, in which the source meaning provides mental access to the target meaning.

¹⁷ Retrieved from: <<https://g1.globo.com/mg/minas-gerais/noticia/2023/03/13/a-fe-da-minha-familia-e-por-uma-vida-me-lhor-diz-venezuelana-que-se-prepara-para-enem-em-cursinho-para-imigrantes-da-ufmg.ghtml>>. Access date: Mar. 14, 2023.

here to help improve their home countries. Both stances, although different, may be a positive contribution of the recent international immigration in Brazil as a whole.

The two interviews, the classroom interaction, and the field notes to which we resorted here show use of different figurative language by the participants, that is metaphoric, metonymic, and allegorical expressions motivated by the following conceptual and systematic metaphors: LANGUAGE IS A COMMODITY, LEARNING IS HARD WORK, EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY, DIFFICULTIES ARE WEIGHTS to name a few examples. These metaphors reveal how culture plays a significant role not only in the language learning process itself but also in the outcomes of the process, as previously pointed out by Ferreira and Oliveira (2020). As learners come in contact with the target culture in Brazil, they acquire a new language. At the same time, they acquire a new blended identity as citizens of their home countries and citizens with an immigrant or refugee status now living in Brazil. If, metaphorically speaking, culture can be considered a 'parent,' we would like to claim that its 'child' (the learner) will inherit characteristics that will shape his or her new blended identity in Brazil.

CRediT STATEMENT

Luciane Ferreira: review and editing (lead); writing (equal); methodology (equal); conceptualization (equal); data analysis (equal); review of the literature (equal).

Lívia Melo: data collection, transcription and analysis related to the Asian student (lead); original draft (lead); methodology (equal); conceptualization (equal); review of the literature (equal).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors certify that they have no involvement with any organization or entity in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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