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**A Multimodal Discourse Analysis and a Critical Reflexive  
View Towards a Website that Promotes a Native-Speakerist  
Course for Brazilians**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006) of a website that promotes a 'native-English' course for Brazilians. In order to carry out this investigation, I resorted to the ideology of Native-speakerism (HOLLIDAY, 2009) and to studies on an emancipatory pedagogy (MILLER, 2013; BOHN, 2013) to problematise the elements the website used for selling the course. This analysis is made in accordance with the principals of qualitative and interpretative research (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006) and based on a critical-reflexive (PIEDEDE, 2019) view of education. As a result of the investigation, I could (i) understand the symbiotic relationship between native-speakerism and the restrictive and uncritical pedagogy that permeates our society (BOHN, 2013) as well as (ii) the need to question any attempts of generalising our academic objectives and our relationship with those who take part in the learning environment.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis; Native-speakerism; Language Teaching and Learning; Educational System

## **RESUMO**

Essa monografia apresenta uma análise multimodal (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006) de um website que promove curso de inglês 'nativo' para brasileiros. Para embasar a minha análise, recorri à ideologia do Native-speakerism e aos estudos sobre uma pedagogia emancipatória (MILLER, 2013; BOHN, 2013), problematizando os elementos utilizados no site para vender tal curso. Essa análise foi desenvolvida de acordo com os princípios da pesquisa qualitativa e investigativa (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006) e baseada em uma visão crítico-reflexiva da educação (PIEDEDE, 2019). Como resultado da investigação, eu pude (i) entender a relação simbiótica entre native-speakerism e a pedagogia restritiva e acrítica que permeia nossa sociedade (BOHN, 2013) e (ii) a necessidade de questionar qualquer tentativa de generalizar tanto os nossos objetivos acadêmicos como a relação entre aqueles que fazem parte do ambiente de ensino.

Keywords: Análise Multimodal; Native-speakerism; Ensino e Aprendizagem de Línguas; Sistema Educacional

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

In my early years as a student of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), I used to see the so-called American and then British English as status to be achieved. After some time of deep reflection, which will be better explained along this research, I need hardly say that now I can identify the reasons behind this mindset. From childhood to adolescence, the only references I had of this language would mainly come from these two countries. Through English songs, films and English courses, I was regularly bombarded with the idea that speaking one of these variations of English without a trace of an accent was absolutely essential to be validated in the world.

Negatively affected by such triggers, as a Brazilian girl and adolescent who tried to speak English (a non-native language in my country) according to others' expectations, I should say my linguistic behaviour back then was connected to an experience I wanted to have, an experience that apparently would bring me closer to an idealization that was being sold – and still is – on a regular basis as the finest way of life one could ever live.

Looking at myself, the fact that someone can be highly influenced by a foreign culture having never left their place of birth is quite interesting. If we think about it, we can realize that such relationship is more than just influence, but control. Wanting, then, to have a lifestyle that does not belong to one's own culture brings to light the amount of exposure to what is foreign when compared to what is produced nationally, like the high consumption of English films, songs, and courses, as aforementioned. However, it is important to state that the imposition described here, with no generalization, happens more often between Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric countries, being the former the standard to be followed and the latter, the expected followers. As an example, I can say that I have never been influenced English wise by African countries which have English as their official language, as opposed to the big number of the aforesaid American products promoted and consumed within our borders, which I most definitely engrossed in.

This relation of power has only grown along the years, especially with the advent of the Internet and its forms of control (HUTTAYAVILAIPHAN, 2021). In popular media, such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube the presence of adverts luring people into consuming the so-called native-English taught by “native-speakers” is one of the strongest examples I could bring. This has been at the same time so notorious and problematic in my journey as an English learner and in the studies of Miller (2013), Bohn (2013) and Piedade (2019), that I decided to make it the topic of this monographic paper.

As to develop my research, I propose (i) to identify how the ideology of native-speakerism possibly works on a website called *Small Advantages* (which sells a ‘native-English’ course to Brazilians called *Gavin’s Elite Squad*), (ii) to develop my own thoughts on how it may impact the students and teachers’ perceptions of themselves taking my own experiences as an example, and (iii) to use multimodality to sew these elements together. Bearing this in mind, this paper is divided into five parts.

In this introductory chapter, I described how I have perceived myself as an EFL student since the beginning of my learning process, focusing on the major exposition I had to some Eurocentric cultures through movies, advertisements, and songs, for instance, and how this relation of power has become stronger with the Internet.

In chapter two, I bring the theoretical background of the issues that stood out to me when observing the website, which were the ideology of native-speakerism (HOLLIDAY, 2015), my thoughts on a humanised pedagogy (PIEADADE, 2019) and the multimodal discourse analysis toolkit (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006) to investigate Gavin’s discursive choices<sup>1</sup>.

In chapter three, I explain the methodological aspects I have chosen to organise and base this investigation, and with this objective in mind, I firstly present the qualitative approach and the reasons for the choice. Then, I contextualise both the course being sold (*Gavin’s Elite Squad*) on the website and its tutor, ending the chapter with an explanation of the analytical procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> This is better explained in chapter 4.



In chapter four, I analyse and interpret the given data according to the theories presented in chapter two and to my personal view on the matters, followed by a summation of the analytical chapter.

Finally, in chapter five, I bring my final considerations on the objectives pinpointed in chapter 1, stating the main aspects of the knowledge constructed throughout the investigative process.

Now, aware of my social and political commitment with language teaching and learning as the object of study (MOITA LOPES, 2006, 2013), I move on to my first theoretical reflections on native-speakerism, multimodality and a critical and responsive teaching approach.

## 2 THEORY

Relations of power, like the imposition of a linguistic pattern shown in the introduction section, have always managed to exist. It is present in organizational settings (SOARES; ARAUJO, 2016), in online interactions (BARRERE, 2017), in political environments (BERLATTO, 2010), in educational contexts (ROCHA; FERNANDES, 2014) and in many others. It takes critical thinking to be able to spot how they occur. The Internet has proven to be an efficient tool in terms of perpetuating them. The means through which they manifest is very subtle, however, utterly invasive. Many are, for instance, the 'native-speakers' of English who aim at teaching English to Brazilians, which can be easily found on popular websites such as *Preply*<sup>2</sup>, *Cambly*<sup>3</sup> and *Nativ Inglês*<sup>4</sup>.

In relation to this, Fairclough (1989 *apud* LILLQVIST *et al*, 2015, p. 2) explains that producers of media discourse exercise power over its consumers as "they have sole producing rights and can therefore determine what is included and excluded [and] how such events are represented [...]". Interested in understanding this movement, this monograph will analyse how one of these producers, Gavin Roy, constructed his discourse present on his website called *Small Advantages*<sup>5</sup>, in order to perpetuate dominance.

The details about the website itself and its creator are going to be explained in the methodological section. At this moment, I am going to introduce and explain (i) a paramount concept that is behind his discourse, which happens to be native-speakerism<sup>6</sup> and, after that, (ii) the tools that are going to be used in this analysis, and finally (iii) my thoughts on a more emancipatory pedagogy.

### 2.1 Native-speakerism

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<sup>2</sup> [www.preply.com](http://www.preply.com)

<sup>3</sup> [www.cambly.com](http://www.cambly.com)

<sup>4</sup> [www.nativingles.com.br](http://www.nativingles.com.br)

<sup>5</sup> <https://go.smalladvantages.com/>

<sup>6</sup> I first came across this concept while doing my post-graduation course at PUC-Rio, during the classes of Issues in Applied Linguistics.

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), a native speaker is a person who, during childhood, acquires English as a first language in a natural setting (KACHRU; NELSON, 1996 *apud* KIM, 2011). Davies (1996, p. 156 *apud* COOK, 1999<sup>7</sup>) classifies it as a “bio-developmental” characteristic, once this is a historic fact that cannot be changed. Even though we all are native speakers of one or more languages, it does not mean that we cannot expand our communicational possibilities. I, a Brazilian woman who has Portuguese as a native language, managed to learn English to try to insert myself in and to understand a foreign culture. Nonetheless, even though I learned English to try to fit in in an idealised way of life, the relations of power intrinsic to our social system established a division which impeded any attempt of lessening my sense of inferiority. According to this mindset, I am not simply a person who speaks English, but a “non-native” speaker as opposed to its “native-speakers”, an inferior being as opposed to a superior entity.

To better comprehend this topic and my feelings towards it, in Cook (1999), we see that “(i)t is often taken for granted that the only rightful speakers of a language are its native speakers”. No wonder there is the “native” and “non-native” speaker dichotomy in the English Language Teaching (ELT) environment, as seen in ABOSHIHA (2015) and MARIÑO (2011). According to Holliday’s problematization, which I totally agree with, there is an

idealisation and promotion of teachers who are constructed as ‘native speakers’ as representing a ‘Western culture’ which springs the ideals both of English and of the methodology for teaching it (HOLLIDAY 2006, p. 6 *apud* HOLLIDAY *et al* 2015, p. 12)

This validation of a group of people (“Western culture”) in the detriment of others (non-Western culture) is the vested interest of Native-speakerism (HOLLIDAY, 2015), being it an ideology<sup>8</sup> that disseminates worldwide the ‘Western culture’ through ‘native-speaker’ teachers (HOLLIDAY, 2014). What is to be considered ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ cultures, in this case, has no

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<sup>7</sup> This quote was taken from Vivian Cook’s website. It can be accessed on <http://www.viviancook.uk/Writings/Papers/NS1999.htm>

<sup>8</sup> “a set of ideas put to work in the justification and maintenance of vested interests” (SPEARS, 1999, p. 19 *apud* HOLLIDAY, 2015, p. 12).

correlation with the geographical positions of the countries that belong to each group. These denominations, respectively, refer to the predetermined labels of 'collectivist' and 'individualistic' countries.

According to Triandis (2004, p. 10 and 11, *apud* HOLLIDAY, 2009, p. 148), "North Americans of European backgrounds, North and West Europeans, Australians and New Zealanders" are individualists due to their autonomous traits, therefore, focusing on human independence and freedom. On the other hand, "Latin Americans, Southern Europeans, East and South Asians, and Africans" are considered 'collectivist's since they are "bound by the group and are circular in thinking". For instance, Porto Rico is not considered a country of 'Western' culture even though it has English as one of its official languages and is located in the west. Holliday (2014), moreover, argues that there are some traces of power relations rooted in this dichotomy. Kramsch (1997 *apud* KIM, 2011, p. 55) states that native-speakership is "neither a privilege of birth nor of education [but] acceptance by the group that created the distinction between native and non-native speakers". In Holliday (2015, p. 13), this idea of 'native-non-native' is not "self-evident on technical linguistic or even nationality grounds. They are instead professionally popularised categories, often with skin colour as a determining characteristic". While navigating online, for instance, I have encountered influencers such as Gavin Roy<sup>9</sup>, Lecil Alvino<sup>10</sup> and Rebecca<sup>11</sup> (some popular native-speaker tutors on Instagram, varying from about 200 to 800 thousand followers) who share similar physical characteristics and happen to have Brazilians as their target audience.

As a Brazilian woman who works in the ELT and in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments, I am constantly told to follow some teaching procedures that clearly illustrate how the 'collectivist-individualist' roles are played. Teachers of English, like me, under different pedagogical contexts, are given the company's material with pre-recorded audios of characters who speak with the so-called 'American' and 'British' accents. Also, with the premise that lessons should be student-centred, we are not allowed to have 'high'

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<sup>9</sup> <https://go.smalladvantages.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://inglescomagringaoficial.com.br/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rebelenglish.io/>

*teaching talking time* (TTT) in order to increase the *students talking time* (STT), as if our interference would undermine the students' learning process.

However, I keep asking myself if there are not any ways in which lessons can be student-centred without diminishing the teacher's role in the class. To put it in other words and to anticipate the discussion made on section 4: why should we "reduce our TTT to a minimum" (as we are constantly told to) if we have received formal education to play the role of a teacher? Why should we strictly focus on the company's material (which approaches shallow aspects of foreign cultures) instead of using students' own experiences to carry out the lessons? In my opinion, this kind of pressure we suffer from language institutions represents a "disbelief in the ability of teachers labelled 'non-native speakers' to teach English with 'active' oral expression, initiation, self-direction and students working in groups and pairs" (HOLLIDAY 1994; 2005 *apud* HOLLIDAY, 2015, p. 13).

Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999 *apud* KIM, 2011, p.53) illustrate this situation by stating that 'non-native' English teachers "are likely to feel marginalized in terms of linguistic and socialpolitical power dynamics", and Widdowson (1994 *apud* KIM, 2011, p.53) exemplifies it by explaining that "(n)otions of authenticity and authority privilege the English used by NES<sup>12</sup> as the proper language for learning (...)". Being constantly exposed to this undermining pattern of interaction weakens my (and I believe my colleagues') self-confidence and trust in my own capability, a consequence that Holliday (2015) calls 'cultural disbelief' once my linguistic knowledge is questioned due to my cultural background.

It is known that no relation of power is sustained if clear to the eyes of the controlled and, in order for this to be maintained, it has to seem legitimate. As a consequence, a change of narrative was required. The motto now revolves around the 'individualist' communities using their 'inherent' autonomy to help (or to force?) the 'collectivists' do what they (supposedly) cannot due to the lack of natural ability. Therefore, native-speakerists tend to romanticise their roles "which mirror a wider 'West as steward' discourse in which the West assumes

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<sup>12</sup> Native English speakers.

the patronising role of looking after the non-West” (HOLLIDAY 2013, p.110 *apud* HOLLIDAY, 2014, p.2). In other words, with the undermining of non-native teachers' validation to teach English, the self-called 'native-speakers' find room to inconspicuously perpetuate control over 'non-native' countries.

As pointed by Holliday (2014; 2015), native-speakerism in ELT contributes to the Othering (a kind of cultural disbelief) of professionals who are not considered native-speakers, culminating in their distrust of their own ability to teach 'Western' English. Not only does this impact on how educators perceive each other, it also affects how students see their teachers' role, which in my view drains our tenacity.

Bearing all these things in mind, I think that a critical analysis of a website that promotes the “true American English” allows us to see how the Native-speakerism ideology occurs. In doing it, we can also understand how the concepts of 'Eastern' and 'Western' culture and 'individualist' and 'collectivist' countries create a hierarchy between 'native' and 'non-native' speakers, leading us to see how this very same website sells the idea of American culture as superior and therefore desired, as we will see in chapter four.

For us to comprehend how this works on practical terms, I will resort to Multimodality, better explained below.

## **2.2 Multimodal Discourse Analysis**

Meaning making has always been key to communication as well as making sense of a text. In a fast-paced and instantaneous world, however, the way these processes occur have changed, as visual communication has risen and consequently the need of becoming literate in it has become crucially important (KRESS, 2011; ROYCE 2002). Therefore, in order to fulfill their objective, the interlocutor resorts to modes (here used as analytical tools), which are “semiotic resources that allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action” (KRESS, 2001, p. 21-22 *apud* RIBEIRO, 2021, p. 26)<sup>13</sup>, making texts multimodal. In this sense, multimodality is the use of

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<sup>13</sup> Original text: “(...) recursos semióticos que permitem a realização simultânea de discursos e tipos de (inter)ação.” Translated by me.

a variety of semiotic modes and the particular way they are displayed, bearing in mind the objective of reinforcing, or complementing each other (*ibid*).

Throughout the course of humanity, the variety of modes one can use to communicate has dramatically increased, ranging from the text's source to colours, for instance. Regarding writing and reading, the evolution of physical means of communication has evolved and continues to. For example, until the invention of the press, parchment rolls evolved into codices which then were transformed into books accessible to a wider audience (CHARTIER, 2002 *apud* RIBEIRO, 2021). Along with this evolution, there has been a change towards information consumption. An exemplification can be the indexing of texts in books, which provided the readers with the opportunity of an intermittent and personalised reading experience (*ibid*). The change in behaviour did not stop there. As explained by De Oliveira and Dias (2016), texts adapt themselves to different communication needs at the same time they reflect both the tools used in their construction and the cultural identity that is prevailing in society. Therefore, the Internet and the rushing world we live in concomitantly forge and demand a different information consumption style.

The use of more than one mode to convey meaning, by the way, is not new. As Cope (s.d. online)<sup>14</sup> explains, multimodality in oral texts could be – and still is – found in theatre and drama, where actors would use modes such as their bodies and voice intonation all together to convey an intended message. In fact, many studies on multimodality are based on the premise that there are no monomodal texts (NASCIMENTO; BEZERRA; HEBERLE, 2011). In the present moment, multimodality more commonly encompasses the integration of a higher number of modes. If we take Gavin's website as an example, we can see images, colours, different fonts, and other modes working together in order to serve the purpose of convincing Brazilians to purchase his online 'native-English' classes, which will be problematized at a later stage.

In multimodality, *texts* have a three-dimensional definition, where verbal production cannot be seen as a whole. They are "material objects that are resulted from a variety of (...) practices which employ an array of meaningful

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<sup>14</sup> Taken from a recorded lesson available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUQez2U2Jsc>

resources (...)” (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006, p.21 *apud* RIBEIRO, 2021, p.31)<sup>15</sup>. The medium through which communication is being established highly influences what modes are required to convey an intended meaning. On Gavin’s online page, for instance, the *text* is constructed with the aforementioned modes due to the characteristics websites have. As a contrast, the Instagram profile he uses to promote the same product requires a different orchestration of modes. In other words, texts are constructed around our individual communicative intentions, making them coherence-oriented (KRESS, 2011):

Coherence is a defining characteristic of text. The principles of coherence are social in their origins and, being social, they point to meanings about ‘social order’. The coherence of a text derives from the coherence of the social environment in which it is produced, or which it projects; it is realized by semiotic means. Nevertheless, the decision to select particular aspects of coherence, to shape coherence, to attribute coherence to a textual/semiotic entity or to deny it the status of coherence is always the act of a socially located maker and re-maker of a text. Power is involved in the making, recognition and attribution of coherence in a text. (*ibid*, p. 36)

In short, coherence is a social construction and, because of that, it is also present in the meaning making process of the text interpreters. This means that the coherence which worked as a foundation for the prompting text may not be the same that founds the reader’s interpretation, since “the principles of coherence differ from community to community and for different groups in communities” (*ibid*, *loc.cit.*). In the case of Gavin’s website, for example, we encounter a tailor-made text designed with the purpose of convincing Brazilians (not Spanish nor Argentinians) to purchase his product. The design of the text (as in the selection of modes) was based on the principle of coherence built around his background knowledge regarding the target audience he had in mind. However, the way this *text* is perceived by the people who are self-conscious about their English differs from mine, an EFL teacher who questions the ideology of Native-speakerism.

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<sup>15</sup> Translated by me. Original text: “objetos materiais que resultam de uma variedade de práticas representacionais e produtivas que empregam uma gama de recursos significativos (...)”



As seen so far, multimodality evolves along with technological innovations, and as a consequence, visual elements have become as relevant as written texts (DIAS, 2012 *apud* CANI and COSCARELLI, 2016). As stated by Kress (2003 *apud* CANI and COSCARELLI, 2016), in the modern world, screens have become predominantly the place for *texts* to occur, and verbal communication can only make sense if analysed along with the visual elements accompanying it. In this sense, contemporaneity asks for a visual literacy that encompasses all features of a *text* and its social, political, and cultural backgrounds (CANI and COSCARELLI, 2016). With this in mind, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) created The Grammar of Visual Design (GVD) in order to serve three important reading functions: ideational or representational, interpersonal or interactional, and textual or compositional.

The ideational or representational function is divided into two structures: narrative and conceptual. The narrative aspect represents the action, reaction, verbal, and mental processes, which are prompted, respectively, by where and how the participants (humans or not) are positioned, indication of movement and/or direction through the use of vectors, and a background that indicates the circumstances of time and space which the participants are experiencing (NASCIMENTO *et al*, 2011). The conceptual aspect, on the other hand, does not focus on the participants themselves, but on their attributes and identities. For instance, the participants are grouped in categories (classificatory process); they are also displayed in relation to a whole (analytical process); and there is not a background or it is little detailed, leading the focus to the image's participants and their characteristics (symbolic process) (*ibid*).

The interactional or interpersonal function represents the influence the orchestration of the features of the visual elements exerts on the ones interacting with the text (OLIVEIRA *et al*, 2016). The interaction is materialized through some visual elements, such as eye contact between the elements of the text and the readers; the perception of distance between the reader and the participants of the image; and the angles formed by the participant's body and the reader both horizontally, conveying a sense of attitude, and vertically, transmitting a sense of power (NASCIMENTO *et al*, 2011).

Finally, the compositional function identifies categories such as information value, framing and salience. As Knol and Fuzer (2019, p. 597) explain, “the areas of an image determines the value of information” and “it can be distributed from left and right, top and bottom, center, and margin”. According to the GVD, “the left side of a multimodal text generally contains already known information, the *Given*”, whereas the New is positioned on the right. In this sense, the New is the zone of prominence in relation to the *Given* zone (*ibid, op. cit.*). As it can be seen in the diagram below, the information placed in the centre of an image is the most essential, as opposed to the elements positioned in the margins of it. In addition, there is what is called the *Ideal* and *Real* information. Located at the top of the image, the Ideal is “essentially an idealized or generalized information and also the most salient part”, and, in contrast, placed at the bottom, there is the *Real* information, “which usually has more specific or practical informative value than the Ideal” (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006, *apud* KNOL and FUZER, 2019, p. 597). Moving forward to the framing category, “the existence or lack of framing features may connect or disconnect the elements of an image” (OLIVEIRA *et al*, 2016, p. 89), indicating if they belong or not to the same group or if they have a lesser or greater degree of importance in the image. The resources used to attribute emphasis or value to the textual elements encompass the salience category of the compositional function. These resources can be size, contrast of tones and colours, the location of the element in the piece, amongst others (OLIVEIRA, 2016, p. 89).

In order to analyse Gavin’s website, I am going use the GVD functions explained above. With this in mind, I find fundamental to add to the theoretical section my perspective of a teaching process that meets the humanistic touch such interaction should have.

### **2.3 Toward a More Critical and Responsive Teaching Approach**

In the process of writing this monograph, I had the opportunity of immersing myself into the analytical aspect of a website which has teaching ‘native’ English at its core. In this section, I am going to contrast the hindering

reality of the educational system (PIEADADE, 2019) with a prosperous and nurturing pedagogy that meets the autonomy proposed by Freire (1996).

The teaching of a language is a process that cannot be cemented, without room for flexibility, adaptations, and creation, as Green (1998 *apud* SANTOS; IFA, 2013) believes. A proof of that is the existence of many different studies regarding a great number of distinct pedagogies created with the intention of adapting such processes into the social conditions society is facing at a specific moment (MONTEIRO, 2020). Language itself reflects and is reflected by the always-changing environment we live in, having a crucial role in forming our identities (MATTOS; JUCÁ; JORGE, 2019). As stated by Fairclough (1995), it is mainly through discourse that we, as a society, can reach consensus and exchange practices, knowledges, and values. Notwithstanding such a powerful and liberating tool in the process of teaching, language (seen here as discourse) has been used to serve a profit-driven purpose in favour of those in power (BAGNO, 2010) and also to control the minds and bodies of students [and teachers]” (BOHN, 2013), undermining their autonomy. Even though there is evidence of a growing counter-cultural movement inside the academia, society still seems reluctant to allow the implementation of a reflexive-critical-ethical approach in private and public institutions (MILLER, 2013).

As it can be seen in advertisements of English courses, for instance, there is a constant publicity about ‘the best method’ to teach the language efficiently. This is no different from the promises made by Gavin when selling his product on his website. In fact, there is a more aggravating factor to it, which is not only to diminish an organic relationship between students and teachers (and the participants existence per se), but to stain their roles for being non-native speakers of English.

My experience as an EFL teacher for a private institution, I may say, corroborates the accurate description of a silencing teaching/learning environment given by Bohn (2013), in which the relation of power prevents the subalterns from being heard once their right to have a voice is taken from them<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In reference to Can the Subaltern Speak?, by Spivak (2012), mentioned by Bohn (2013).

. For about ten years, I have been constantly expected to perform within the 'ideal methodology', which not only limits my role in the classroom, but also the students', since there is a 'script' to be followed and, therefore, unexpected (and time-consuming) responses from learners are subtly discouraged. The environment just depicted contrasts with a humanised version of a classroom, where both students and teachers of languages play discursive roles (*ibid*), being free to express their feelings and interests. Bearing in mind everything said so far, I share with Bohn (*ibid*) some questions regarding our reality: when a whole system (perpetuated by governments and the institutions' principals, for example) has been created to silence the main characters of a classroom (the subalterns) by removing from them their agency, how can they be heard?

From my standpoint, both Miller (2013) and Piedade (2019) are precise when bringing to light a disrupting pedagogical system that objectifies teachers, students, and their pedagogical scenario, preventing them to exist in their complexity and both as a means and product of a whole. More than ever, it is imperative to fight against common-sense, against the reality that impedes any kind of questioning (FREIRE, 2005), regarding the often-standardized linguistic world that is forced upon us. Bearing in mind these obstacles in the educational system and my critical position as an educator, I am going to discuss about some actions that could help establish a more responsive learning and teaching environment in our society.

First and foremost, it is crucial to move in the opposite direction of a technicist pedagogy and to understand the need of a teachers' education based on the comprehension of the multiple social, historical, and cultural scenarios that constitute each individual, and focused on the importance of enabling them to embrace the differences that comprise our society (MOITA LOPES, 2006, 2013). Consequently, it may become feasible to perpetuate such competences throughout students' lives and make it possible to create a culture of autonomy. In this sense, we should move towards a more reflexive, critical, and ethical approaches to education (MILLER, 2013; PIEDADE, 2019).

Regarding a more reflexive concept, the process of teaching and learning English, as I have been talking about so far, opens room to a reality in which the learners see themselves as subjects, not objects, of the spatio-

temporal situations they are inserted, being able to reflect upon their always-changing reality (FABRÍCIO, 2006). As Freire (2005, p. 109) explains:

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be "in a situation". (...) Humankind *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled. *Intervention* in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from *emergence*, and results from the *conscientização* of the situation. *Conscientização* is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence.

In other words, to exercise our right to agency we must immerse ourselves in our reality and raise awareness about what is being presented to us, which in my case has to do with Gavin's website selling a predetermined correct way for Brazilians to speak English. This process might enable us to intervene in an oppressive system and regain the power to have our own narratives, to exist in/with them or, better saying, to write them ourselves (FERREIRA, 2017). Looking to my past and the present years as a student and a teacher, I realise how we tend to lack any sense of autonomy, since we are not encouraged (I would even say discouraged) to question whatever is dictated to us. I can say, therefore, automaticity prevails over agency, in many educational contexts, as Bohn (2013) says.

The reflexive notion mentioned above goes hand in hand with criticality, another imperative approach when it comes to a more responsive form of education. As stated by Piedade (2019), a critical approach is built within interpersonal relations and, therefore, involves a speaking-listening interaction where the participants problematize each other and their own processes of producing knowledge, going against dominant ideologies and passiveness. In this sense, I align with Moita Lopes (2006) when he sets forth that a classroom should be a social environment not separated from the world outside the school walls, but as an extension of it. That is why I intend to publicise amongst co-workers and students my own reflexions upon the website here analysed.

As seen so far, the critical and reflexive approaches promote together (since I do not see them as different aspects) the understanding of teachers and students as powerful agents of change and as individuals that can and should

be open to changes, being this paramount for the constitution of a responsive educational system. Along with these approaches, there is a third and equally important notion to better achieve such aim: ethics. An ethical perspective complements reflexivity and criticality by opening our eyes to fight against reductionisms and standardisations of any order towards us. It is important, then, to understand the classroom as a living environment with unique individuals who are not there to acquire knowledge, but to contribute to its formation. As Piedade explains (2019), schools should reflect the world's nuances and its people's subjectivities and complexities. In this scenario, a social transformation in education and new ways of producing knowledge are urgent (MILLER, 2012).

Having these issues in mind, my discontent with my own personal experiences as a student and as an educator led me to problematize the impositions made by the system (BOHN, 2013). I have never felt free to explore my potentialities neither as a student nor as an English teacher due to the constraints described above. For this reason, I found it important to critically analyse in section 4 a fragment of this scenario (in mention of Gavin's website) and express my standpoint regarding the reflective, critical, and ethical aspects that should be taken into account in order for us to reach a more responsive teaching approach. To do so, it is equally important to become aware of the methodological points of this research.

### 3 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

As explained in the introduction section, the way I perceive myself as a non-native speaker and teacher of English in Brazil has been highly influenced by the combination of many factors. I see now that such factors have come to my knowledge while questioning and analysing myself and my surroundings throughout my life. Understanding the different social environments in my upbringing and in my teaching career was decisive in making me evolve from having an unconscious subservient role in my decision makings to being a Brazilian teacher and speaker of English who deliberately endeavours to be non-compliant with a limiting and imposing education system.

Unwittingly, I went through a journey of self-discovery which could only have happened from the moment I understood myself as an observer of events, generating empirical data and interpreting them bearing in mind my own social trajectory. In other words, I unconsciously adopted a qualitative research methodology, which embraces the observer and consists of practices that humanises the world (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006). I understand, then, that due to its particular aspect, this paper requires the same approach.

What I have proposed in this monograph, I believe, cannot and should not be analysed by a detached researcher, once it requires warmth in the handling of data and its interpretation. The outcomes of the process are far from being objective and conclusive results. They must be understood as transitory, as social cut-outs seen through subjective and biased lenses (MOITA LOPES, 2006; PIEDADE, 2019). Therefore, the analysis of this paper should not be managed differently from the way I handled my own enquiries regarding the issues aforementioned. On the contrary, it should be carried out through a qualitative methodology as well.

According to the definitions given by Denzin and Lincoln (2006), the choice of an interpretative paradigm goes hand in hand with the investigative nature of this paper. As said above, it must be clear that the investigation will be carried out from a subjective position, taking into consideration not only Gavin's teaching methodology and its complexities, but *myself* and *my* social and cultural backgrounds.

### 3.1 Behind the Website: The Native-American Coach

Having made the decision of analysing a website that promotes the ideology of native-speakerism, I find it important to give some details about the main person behind (and before) the advertisement: Gavin Roy. In this subsection, I am going to briefly describe his background with the information I gathered from my online searches. But firstly, I would like to explain the choice of the word *coach* instead of *teacher* in the heading.

As explained in the theory section, there should be a movement towards the humanisation of teachers, students, and their interaction in a learning environment (MILLER, 2013; BOHN, 2013; PIEDADE, 2019). Much has been brought to light regarding the process of becoming a teacher, from the constraints imposed by the educational system (taking from the educators and students their humanity) to the path that can help lead us to a free and responsive pedagogy (*ibid*). Bearing this in mind, Gavin and his so-called solution for Brazilians to speak English like native-Americans goes against the movement for more autonomy in the classroom, praising the idea of a ‘right methodology’ (MILLER, 2013), which disregards the individuality of those who compose a classroom. Therefore, in my view, a person who deliberately chooses to standardise experiences and to instruct people to achieve a simplistic (and intangible) aim, distances themselves from the role of a teacher and performs the one of a coach.

The task of trying to learn more about Gavin was not an easy one. Even though he is a popular online influencer, it took me more time than I expected to find information about him. When typing his first name along with the name of the website on Google, we can see that his name is Gavin Roy, but further information about him is not easily found. What I could find after scrolling down a bit was a website called Everybody Wiki<sup>17</sup> with what seemed to be reliable information on him. According to the description found on the website, Gavin is “an American polyglot, English teacher, a specialist in Portuguese Language with PhD in Atmospheric Sciences”. In the biography section, it is explained that once he was fluent in

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<sup>17</sup> EVERYBODY WIKI, online, accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2022, translated by me



Spanish, he found that it would be interesting to learn Portuguese as a second foreign language due to the similarities between the two languages, teaching himself the former through textbooks and grammar. Except for the information that says that he has got his master's degree from the Highlands University, there is nothing on the website that confirms his status of teacher and specialist in Portuguese. This is, in addition to the one I gave above on not calling him a teacher, another reason for referring to him as a *coach* or *mentor* of “native English”.

Another source of information on Gavin is his Instagram account. His profile is called *Small Advantages* (the same as the course and website where it is promoted) and in the description he defines himself as an “American with a Brazilian soul” and states that he “learned Portuguese to teach us English” (Figure 2). It is indeed known that Gavin has come to Brazil a fair number of times and has also participated in high-profile TV programmes in the country. However, it can also be stated that there is no information whatsoever that proves he has formal knowledge about the act of teaching. With these things in mind, the self-promotion as an English teacher and the advertisement of a product that diminishes Brazilian teachers, learners, and speakers of EFL, exemplify how powerful the problem of Native-speakerism is.

As to understand the problematisation made in chapter 4, I now explain how it is going to be conducted.



Figure 1 Gavin's profile on Instagram (18th June 2022)

### 3.2 Analytical Procedures

Having given Gavin's profile , I am now going to describe how the analysis will be carried out. The *Small Advantages* website has a main introductory fragment, which is divided and analysed into two pieces, figures 3 and 4. For organisational and analytical purposes, these pieces' elements were also commented on separately: in figure 3, I observe Gavin's image (figure 5), the only written texts that refer to the students-to-be (figures 6 and 7) and the course's name (figure 11); in figure 4, the elements I chose to investigate are the short descriptions of the course on the left (figure 8) and its modules on the right (figure 9).

The elements specified above were scrutinised in relation to the native-speakerism ideology and the teaching/learning pedagogy the course may imply in contrast to a more responsive and emancipatory view of education, described in chapter three. The analysis itself starts with a brief description, introducing the reader to the two-part introductory section of the website (figures 3 and 4). In subsection 4.1, I analyse the ideational components of the discourse, giving emphasis to the shape of the elements and the images on the background and foreground. In subsection 4.2, I focus on the interpersonal and compositional components, beginning with the former and finishing with the latter, so as to follow what I understood to be a more coherent path. In the interpersonal analysis, I investigate: Gavin's gesture, gaze, and physical distance it conveys from the course's prospect; the "demands of goods-and-services" and the "offers of information" (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006). In the compositional analysis, I interpret the fragments according to the Information Value Framework (figure 10), observing what pieces are *Ideal* and *Given* as opposed to *Real* and *New* (*ibid*), respectively, and the meanings they might infer.

After explaining the research methodology, the character behind the website to be analysed and the analytical procedures, I believe we are now well-equipped to begin the data problematisation.

## 4. ANALYSIS

In this section, I analyse the introductory fragment of the website called Small Advantages, which sells the course called *Gavin's Elite Squad*, through the lenses of Multimodality, making connections with Native-Speakerism, my personal critical view on the educational system and the directions that could be taken towards a more critical-reflexive teaching approach (section 2). Such semiotic landscape (c.f. KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006) is used as a means of selling a product ('native-English' to Brazilians) without the need of a conventional physical space. As explained by Oliveira and Dias (2016), institutional websites have their own functional and compositional characteristics which have been materialised over long period of time in similar kinds of circumstances. For this reason, the website in question can be scrutinised in a way which a group of people belonging to the same community can relate (in this case, Brazilian teachers, and students of English willing to break this pattern). However, given the many elements multimodality encompasses in an investigation, I am confining this analysis to three investigative components based on the Grammar of Visual Design (2006): ideational also known as representational, having to do with how aspects of the world are experienced by us in a semiotic landscape; interpersonal also understood as interactional, which represents the interaction involving the discourse producer, its receiver/reproducer and the object represented; and textual also called compositional, regarding the position of each participant in the semiotic landscape and its effects in the meaning making.

The participants to be analysed through the aforementioned components are the ones which compose the introductory fragment of the main page of the website, which, for practical purposes, I divided into two parts (figures 3 and 4) and can be accessed by prospects who click the button that indicates they want to become Gavin's students.

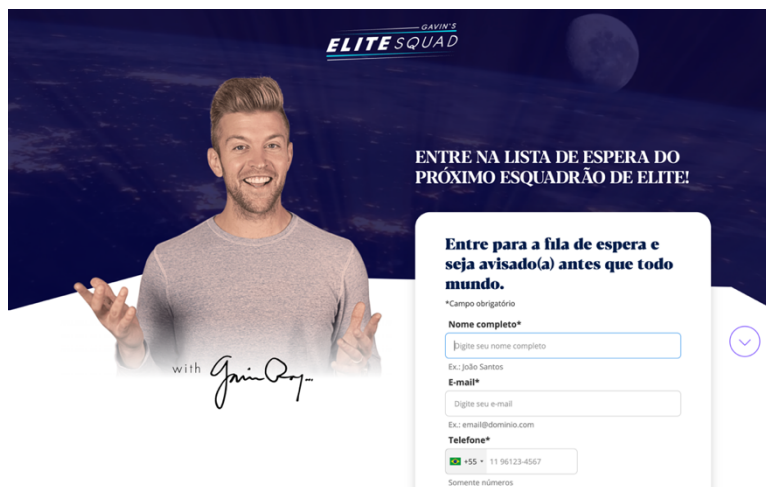


Figure 3 Small Advantages' Introductory Fragment (Part 1)

This first piece of the introduction (figure 3) is assembled by Gavin's image in realistic colours on the left in the foreground and the Earth and moon in a blue background. In addition, located in the top centre of the header, there is a logo of Gavin's team (Gavin's Elite Squad) and, below his image, there is the preposition 'with' followed by his handwritten signature. On the right, next to Gavin's image, there is a written text inviting prospects to enter the waiting list, and below there is a form to be filled in by them.

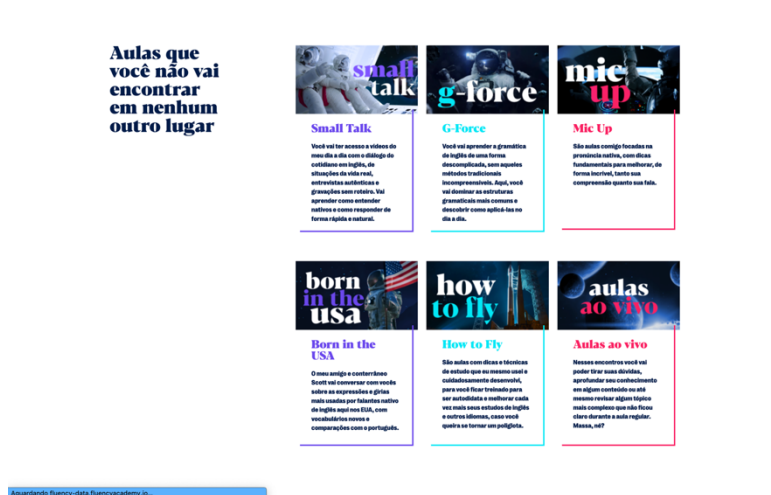


Figure 4 Small Advantages' Introductory Fragment (Part 2)

In the second and last part of the introductory fragment (figure 4) there is, on the left, a written text stating that such classes cannot be found in any other place, and, on the right, there are six characteristics of the course that is being sold. These characteristics are formed by headings (*small talk*; *g-force*; *mic up*;

*born in the USA; how to fly* and *aulas ao vivo*) positioned over illustrative images and above short descriptions of each element.

The information I gave above will be key in the analytical processes explained in the following subsections.

#### **4.1 Ideational / Representational Component**

What we first encounter when accessing the website is the ensemble of participants (apart from the written texts) with little to non-angular shape (figure 3). As proved by the given images of the moon and the Earth, curved forms tend to be instinctively associated with a natural and organic order (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006), denoting infinity and safety (DONDIS, 1973 *apud* KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006).

From my perspective, such choice made by the discourse maker captivates those who (un)consciously refer to the given website in search for a 'solution' (speaking English like a native) to a made-up problem (speaking English like a non-native). The native-speaker, the self-defined ultimate authority in terms of spreading the definitive way of teaching and learning English (KIM, 2011), is seen here as the one to be trusted, the one whose exclusive expertise (*ibid*) seems to be unquestionable, given the nature-like/curved traces of the participants of the discourse. The asymmetrical relation of power that is conveyed by the shapes of the semiotic elements in the text are deeply connected to the so-called 'individualist' attributes (HOLLIDAY, 2014) which the ideology of native-speakerism use to qualify Eurocentric countries and their peoples (TRIANDIS, 2004 *apud* HOLLIDAY, 2009). Therefore, in my perception, the way that Gavin refers to the potential students at the top of the form (in a tone of guidance mixed with urgency), for instance, illustrates Holliday's (2015) thoughts on the 'individualist' behaviour, once it transmits an idea of comfort and trustworthiness (due to their supposedly autonomy and constant pursue of freedom) to those who are believed to be deficient in these traits (the collectivists), leading to a relationship of hierarchical dependence.

Another issue I identified in the advertisement is the promulgation of a *right versus wrong* methodology for learning and teaching a language, as it

conveys the idea that, after purchasing the course, one will be propelled into “outer space” (given the moon and Earth images), an exclusive environment accessed by few, far from the mundane. However, in order to reach a normally unreachable place, human skilfulness, dedication, and effort are needed. Like astronauts who embark on a rocket heading for space - built with state-of-the-art technology developed through science and men’s expertise -, prospects apply for the course, apparently designed by the knowledge Gavin possesses, in order to achieve ‘excellence’ in English speaking. This idea, from my perspective, contrasts with the perception I share with Piedade (2019) regarding a process that should be inherently ethical and all-embracing, taking into account students and teachers’ individualities.

Still about the header (figure 3), the combination of these two aspects (nature and workmanship) can be seen in the roundish rectangle where the ones interested in the course should type their personal information in order to enter the waiting list. As observed by Dondis (1973, p. 44 *apud* KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006, p. 54), straight lines tend to convey an “honesty, straightness and workmanlike meaning”, whereas curvaceous ones generally denote “endlessness, warmth and protection”. Therefore, the shape of the form, which is rectangular with curved corners, may get across the message that, once it is filled in, the students-to-be will be moving towards an ‘innovative methodology’ that will take them to a ‘wholesome, heavenly’ place, even if the text or the images (better explained on section 4.2) say otherwise.

Having encountered the header and been convinced by it, the prospect understands that there is more to be seen regarding the course. On the right side of the form, inside an ‘embracing’ and ‘inviting’ circle (given the description above), there is an arrow pointing down indicating continuity. Such natural interpretation results from the common conceptual space arrows may share, generating a “significant impact on comprehension and learning” (ACARTÜRK; COSKUN; EMIL, 2021, on-line<sup>18</sup>). Syntactically, in order to connect two entities through the idea of process, relational arrows are used (KOSSLYN, 1989 *apud* ACARTÜRK; COSKUN; EMIL, 2021) and, in the case of Gavin’s website, the

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<sup>18</sup> Taken from <http://www.revistasignos.cl/index.php/signos/article/view/816/384>

two entities are the header of the website and the details about the course in the second piece of the introductory fragment.

As a complement of the first part of the introductory fragment (figure 3), further down we encounter the segment where the details of the course are given (figure 4). Not differently from the early piece, the second fragment being analysed is also composed by shapes, differing from the header only regarding the choice of the geometrical forms. More specifically, in figure 4 rectangles are absolute, apart from the fonts and the illustrations of each heading, giving room to a technological connotation in the message, as seen in the GVD (2006). In addition, it is possible to link the choice of rectangles with the fact that they can be “aligned with each other in geometrical patterns” allowing the display of elements into modules (*ibid*, p. 54), and this is exactly what can be found in the segment in question. The six components of the course are organised into two lines and three columns, and the lines that form the rectangles are aligned with each other in terms of length and height. The shapes in question, however, are not in their full form. They are composed by the bottom and right (partially) lines, indicating that the modules are to be put together in order to complete the course. In more contextualised words, they build up the rocket which will take them to outer space using the pieces / modules given.

Once again, the website corroborates the idea that there are pre-established ways for learning English. Contrasting the idea of a responsive approach to teaching and learning (cf. PIEDADE, 2019), in which students are seen as individuals whose background *should* be used in the process of moulding and (re)creating realities, Gavin’s course provides students with the processes *he* understands to be the right ones in order to achieve what *he* believes must be accomplished. We are presented, one more time, with an interaction explained by Holliday (2015) in which ‘non-native’ learners are exposed to the guidelines issued by ‘native-speakers’, alluding to the dichotomous nature between ‘individualists’ (Gavin) and ‘collectivists’ (Brazilian learners of English), in which the former (given their autonomy) ‘instructs’ the latter (due to their lack of agency), contributing to a cultural disbelief (HOLLIDAY, 2015).

Besides the 'individualist' / 'native-speaker' traits explained above, the presence of Gavin in figure 3 substantiates a rather important aspect of the native-speakerism ideology (HOLLIDAY, 2015) being promoted on the website. As the most prominent participant of the landscape (once he is positioned in the foreground with distinctive colours), Gavin carries characteristics that contribute to the way the viewer interlinks such details with the course itself. In other words, what is being advertised on the website is a 'native-English' course for Brazilians (non-native speakers), and the product's reliability is ensured by the colour of Gavin's skin (ALI, 2009). From my standpoint (a white Brazilian teacher who has privileges which bear the hallmarks of a long-lasting racist structure), I can say that the gaps between the different social and economic positions are enlarging and even changing, giving more room for disparities in terms of treatment and validation. The fact that I am considered a white teacher in Brazil and non-white from a native-speakerist perspective, for instance, illustrates the endless impositions that are made for the maintenance of an oppressive structure.

In order to promote a more comprehensive analysis, in the next subsection, the introductory fragment of Small Advantages will be scrutinised through its interactional/ interpersonal and textual/compositional components.

#### **4.2 Interactional / Interpersonal and Textual / Compositional Components**

As seen so far, texts are not composed unintentionally, but built around the producers and viewers' backgrounds in order to achieve, for instance, the goal of persuasion / bond making (cf. KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006). Bearing this in mind, this subsection aims to analyse the position of the images' elements and the meaning they may convey regarding the aspects of teaching/learning and native-speakerism. In order to do so, I will follow the discourse's interactional and textual components, as in the GVD (2006), dividing it into small fragments properly identified in the captions.

Firstly, in order to better support my analysis regarding the textual/compositional components, I find it important to approach some interactional / interpersonal aspects once they are also essential to understand



how the producers of discourses and their respective target audience may interact with each other through the images' elements.



Figure 5 *Small Advantages'* Introductory Fragment (Part 1.1)

In the introductory fragment, the only human participant is Gavin (figure 5), the native-American tutor who promises Brazilians the secrets to speak English like a 'native'. Given his popularity amongst those who have interest in following this path (as seen in the introduction and theory sections), Gavin becomes a fundamental participant for two complementary reasons: the direct look into the viewers' eyes, creating "a visual form of direct address" acknowledging "the viewers explicitly" (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006, p. 117); and the medium close shot, which denotes a far personal distance between the viewer and the participant (*ibid*).

Regarding the way he gazes at the audience (with a smile and arms positioned in a way that conveys an ongoing informal chat), it can be inferred that he is making a friendly invitation for them to start "a relation of social affinity" with him (*ibid* p. 118), which is reinforced by his handwritten signature below his image. In terms of proximity, Gavin is positioned in a distance that is neither too close to the viewer nor too distant from them. The image taken from his waist up suggests he is proposing an affable relationship between himself and his target audience. With this in mind, it is fair to say that Gavin uses his own image to illustrate what Holliday (2014) understands to be an inclusive and kind front used by 'individualists' to (try to) hide their vested interest in spreading the western culture to the societies believed to need discipline. On a website where the students are only spoken to to fill in a form, it can be inferred

that they are neither represented nor a protagonist of it (BOHN, 2013), being only expected to perform a command, contrasting with the inference of a reciprocal interaction from Gavin's image.



Figure 6 Small Advantages' Introductory Fragment (Part 1.2)



Figure 7 Small Advantages' Introductory Fragment (Part 1.3)

As a complement of the possible roles Gavin's image plays in the header, the written texts present in the introductory fragment also have an important part in the interaction between the producer of the piece being analysed and its target. In figures 6 and 7, we can find what the GVD, constructed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), calls 'demands of goods-and-services', being, in these situations, invitations in the imperative form for the viewers to enter the waiting list of the course. In other words, it can be said that these invitations are subtle commands "in which case[s] the expected response is for the [reader] to undertake what he or she has been asked to do", even though they may feel free to decline (*ibid*, p. 122). But joining the image and the written texts, it is possible to understand that the likely intention behind the selection and orchestration of participants is to transmit a friendly request, decreasing the possibilities of a refusal.

**Aulas que  
você não vai  
encontrar  
em nenhum  
outro lugar**

Figure 8 Small Advantages' Introductory Fragment (Part 2.1)






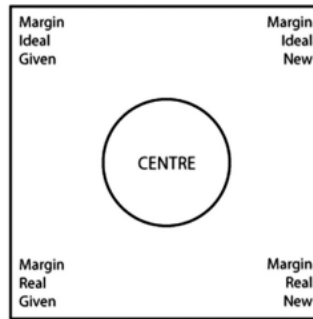
 <p><b>Small Talk</b></p> <p>Você vai ter acesso a vídeos do meu dia a dia com o diálogo do cotidiano em inglês, de situações da vida real, entrevistas autênticas e gravações sem roteiro. Vai aprender como entender nativos e como responder de forma rápida e natural.</p>	 <p><b>G-Force</b></p> <p>Você vai aprender a gramática de inglês de uma forma descomplicada, sem aqueles métodos tradicionais incomprensíveis. Aqui, você vai dominar as estruturas gramaticais mais comuns e descobrir como aplicá-las no dia a dia.</p>	 <p><b>Mic Up</b></p> <p>São aulas comigo focadas na pronúncia nativa, com dicas fundamentais para melhorar, de forma incrível, tanto sua compreensão quanto sua fala.</p>
 <p><b>Born in the USA</b></p> <p>O meu amigo e conterrâneo Scott vai conversar com vocês sobre as expressões e gírias mais usadas por falantes nativos de inglês aqui nos EUA, com vocabulários novos e comparações com o português.</p>	 <p><b>How to Fly</b></p> <p>São aulas com dicas e técnicas de estudo que eu mesmo usei e cuidadosamente desenvolvi, para você ficar treinado para ser autodidata e melhorar cada vez mais seus estudos de inglês e outros idiomas, caso você queira se tornar um poliglota.</p>	 <p><b>Aulas ao vivo</b></p> <p>Nesses encontros você vai poder tirar suas dúvidas, aprofundar seu conhecimento em algum conteúdo ou até mesmo revisar algum tópico mais complexo que não ficou claro durante a aula regular. Massa, né?</p>

Figure 9 Small Advantages' Introductory Fragment (Part 2.2)

Differently from figure 7, in figures 8 and 9, we encounter 'offers of information' (*ibid*), meaning that the sentences are considered statements of facts. On one hand, in figure 8, the piece of information states that such classes cannot be found anywhere else, being the 'elite squad' the only group where the students-to-be can enjoy the unique experiences promised by the interlocutor, reinforcing the idea of students as a uniform group of individuals who must have rules to follow. In figure 9, on the other hand, the text assumes a more descriptive role, detailing the modules of the course and, therefore, justifying the statement in figure 8, positioned on the left. What can be seen here is an exclusive invitation for students to be part of a 'privileged' group, diminishing the outsider and creating an environment of competition that goes against my personal beliefs of what an inclusive and responsive teaching/learning system (cf PIEDADE, 2019).

In order to make a more comprehensive and cohesive analysis of the fragments, I am now carrying out the investigation focusing on the compositional / textual component of the semiotic landscapes, taking into account the position of each participant in the text and how they relate to each other (figure 10).



*Figure 10 Information Value (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006, p. 197)*

As explained above, the way figures 8 and 9 relate to each other (entirely shown on image 4, chapter 4) can be interpreted the way it was due to their place in the fragment being analysed. I concluded that the descriptions in figure 9 justify the statement present in figure 8, and this was also possible because of the position they assumed in the semiotic landscape. For those who already knew Gavin from other platforms, the fact that he has a course that is ‘unlike anything else’ (as in courses which classes are conducted by Brazilians) is a Given piece of information, hence they are positioned on the left, whereas the modules of the course may be new to his followers, therefore being placed on the right. It can be said, then, that the latter is the zone of prominence in relation to the first (KNOLL; FUZER, 2019).



*Figure 11 Small Advantages' Introductory Fragment (Part 1.2)*

Still in the compositional component, in figure 3, we encounter a richer fragment in terms of participants, given the fact that it is the first piece the prospects see when accessing the website. To begin with, the participant positioned in the middle top is the name Gavin gives to his group of students (figure 11) and, therefore, based on the Information Value Framework (figure 10), a piece of information which idealises the process of being a student of his. The name of the group and its central position in the landscape prepare the observer for what is to come, once what is placed in the middle of the discourse tends to carry the most important role (KNOLL; FUZER, 2019). In addition, the

word 'elite' is the one with more salience, given its writing in bold and in upper-case, attracting the viewers' attention (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006) to a message being conveyed by it. In my view, this word choice comes across an issue problematised by Holliday (2015), in terms of native-speakerism, once, in the given context, being taught by a 'native' places the 'non-native' speaker in (what is established as) the best-trained/educated group in Brazil. Consequently, such tendency ratifies the segregation not only between the ones who 'learned' the 'native-English' and the ones who did not, but the ones who could afford the course and the ones who could not, that is to say: the elite and the non-elite, as dichotomic and excluding as they seem.

Below the website's heading, we find Gavin on the left in medium close shot (as mentioned previously) and, on the right, the form for prospects to enter their personal information. Again, considering the Information Value Framework (figure 10), students-to-be may feel comfortable to type their details in the website due to the fact that the famous 'native' tutor is in the *Given* zone (where the information provided is known to the viewers), which may not happen if there was not a familiar face promoting the course. In addition, above the form there are two salient sentences, inviting students to become part of the waiting list (figures 6 and 7). It can be understood, then, that the discourse producer purposefully positioned the form on the *New* zone, next to Gavin's image, along with sentences in bold and in the foreground, so as to increase the number of possible clients.

As to conclude the chapter, I bring some considerations on my analysis in the subsection below.

### **4.3 Considerations on the Analysis**

Having analysed the *Small Advantages* website through the three multimodal components presented in the GVD (2006) and connecting my interpretations with both native-speakerism (HOLLIDAY, 2015) and a more responsive teaching/learning pedagogy (PIEDEDE, 2019), I can say that my perceptions of an educational system that tries to underestimate our individual and social capacities have become more critical.

In this chapter, I gathered some evidence that led me to see a pedagogical context established by Gavin in which he distances himself from his students-to-be, placing them in a position of minor importance and conformity, without any protagonism or autonomy. This can be seen in the combination of his own image and the written texts next to it (figure 3), once his medium close shot and the position of his arms denote a certain proximity (characteristic of informal conversations) to the course prospects, whereas the sentences addressed to them are only there to convince them to take part in the waiting list of the course. Such complacent aspects can also be seen in the elements in figure 4, where students are not invited to play an active role in their own learning process, but to feel compelled to enrol in the course due to the tone of exclusiveness present in the headline (figure 8), the course modules (figure 9) and in the name of group of those who partake in it (figure 11).

In other words, what I could infer from the introductory segment I analysed was the perpetuation of an impersonal pedagogy that takes from the students their agency and autonomy, at the same time it works on the maintenance of a vertical relationship between them and the tutor (Gavin), in which the latter occupies the highest end. Given the native-speakerist nature of this English course, it is possible to state that the role Gavin, a 'native speaker', plays in the teaching/learning environment and the one that 'non-native speaker' teachers are given are interlinked. If Gavin, as it could be seen, is promoted as a self-important leader due to his geographical and ethnical backgrounds, Brazilian teachers will naturally be seen as the opposite, having their importance belittled for not coming from an Eurocentric culture, as set forth by Holliday (2015).

The conclusions I have come to were only possible because even though I have separated my multimodal analysis into components for organisational purposes, I do not mean to state that they should be seen (or that I see them) separately. On the contrary, our possible interpretation of a discourse happens in a non-linear and dynamic way (DONTCHEVA-NAVRATILOVA; POVOLNÁ, 2012), without divisions or steps to follow. This organic aspect can be translated into how meaning was negotiated between me and the website's discourse maker, which made me refer back to my own social background in order to

develop my interpretations of the aspects (amongst the ones the discourse producer chose to use) that attracted my attention from where I stand.

Having shared some of my thoughts on the analytical chapter, I now bring some remarks concerning what I have learned throughout this investigative process.

## 5. SOME (IN)CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

In this monograph, I tried to expose and explain some perceptions regarding the English learning/teaching process I have been constructed throughout my life as an EFL learner. As described in this paper, these impressions are consequences of feelings of discomfort I have experienced (especially when I was younger) for being considered a 'non-native' speaker of English. As mentioned in the introduction, this label unconsciously, but purposefully, confined me to exist within expectations established by the discriminatory ideology of native-speakerism (HOLLIDAY, 2015), which still insists to endure in the EFL environment (as seen in the analytical chapter).

Therefore, I decided to focus on how this native-speakerist course for Brazilians, called *Gavin's Elite Squad (promoted on Small Advantages)*, was being sold and on the mechanical pedagogy behind it, as well as to develop my own thoughts on how it may impact the students and teachers' perceptions of themselves, taking myself as an example. With this purpose, I decided to analyse the website *Small Advantages* (through which the course can be purchased) resorting to Multimodal Discourse Analysis (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006) in order to investigate the choices made to create meaning.

Something I came to understand throughout this process was that both native-speakerism and the constraining pedagogy that dictates our society (BONH, 2013) take part in a symbiotic relationship in which they need each other to survive and multiply. In other words, native-speakerism supports the profit-centred system that perpetuates pre-established social-economic roles, reinforcing the dichotomy between the elite and non-elite (as on the website), for instance. Concomitantly, the present system assists native-speakerism and its similar hierarchical structure in a broader level, segregating and ranting cultures and ethnicities. As a consequence, this perception made me reflect about my own performance as an English teacher, leading me to (re)think more critically about my responsibilities as a teacher and my interaction with my students.

Regarding a constraining pedagogy and native-speakerism, there is a parallel example that I have come to see as a professional who works in a



private English course. As stated and explained in the analysis and throughout this monograph, there is an ongoing and successful objectification process of both students and teachers in institutions such as the one I work for and in the environment promoted by Gavin, as well as in others. In other words, teachers and students do not have the freedom to exist as transformative and responsive agents inside the schools, being treated as the institutes' assistants and clients, respectively.

Another understanding I had in the process of writing this paper was the fact that we need to question any and every attempt of formatting our teaching (and also learning) research objectives. In other words, neither Gavin's course, nor the lessons I teach or the lessons I was taught in the post-graduation course, should be reduced to descriptive practices. All these contexts are full of life, with real human beings carrying their own subjective experiences, which reinforces the fact that we should treat these pedagogical situations with the social responsibility and ethic they require.

Lastly, another point I would like to share that came to my attention is that my process of analysis was non-linear, that it was connected to my emotions and my own necessities. I learned that my production, similarly to what I believe education should be, was not (and does not have to) be inflexible or insipid. On the contrary, it should reflect and respect the individualities of those who partake in it.

I now conclude this monograph bearing in mind that the reflections originated here will continue to reverberate in my professional and academic life, becoming, eventually, part of further research I may carry out in the future.



## APPENDICES




**smalladvantages** 

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**Gavin Roy**  
Fort Collins, CO, USA   
Americano com alma brasileira   
Aprendi português para te ensinar inglês!   
Conheça meu curso - Gavin's Elite Squad   
[linktr.ee/SmallAdvantages](https://linktr.ee/SmallAdvantages)



with *Gavin Roy*

GAVIN'S  
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