

Times of change in a Brazilian University: Insights From Research Into the Language, Literacy and Digital Practices of Academics

Tempos de mudança em uma universidade brasileira: percepções de pesquisa sobre as práticas de linguagem, letramento e digitais de acadêmicos

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ABSTRACT: With the current policy of internationalization of federal universities in Brazil, with the design of an appraisal system, and with the rapid trend towards digitization, there have been far-reaching changes in the day-to-day organization of academic life and in the communicative practices of academics. Before the internationalization policy, the main language of research was Portuguese, but now there is a growing shift to English in some fields. This article focuses on the impact of these changes on the language and literacy practices of academic staff, and on the stances and strategies they have adopted vis-à-vis the changes. It draws on interviews conducted with academics during a critical ethnographic research project carried out in two federal universities in 2019. The focus was on their academic trajectories over time, their techno-linguistic biographies and their views on the changes. I present detailed insights from research conducted with three academics at one of the federal universities.

KEYWORDS: Academic Literacies, Digitization, Techno-Linguistic Biographies, Changing Literacy Practices, English and Portuguese.

RESUMO: Com a atual política de internacionalização das universidades federais no Brasil, com o projeto de um sistema de avaliação e o rápido avanço para a digitalização, há mudanças de longo prazo na organização da vida acadêmica diária e nas práticas comunicativas dos professores universitários. Antes da política de internacionalização, a principal língua na área da pesquisa era o português, mas agora há uma mudança crescente para o inglês em algumas áreas. Este artigo enfoca o impacto dessas mudanças nas práticas de linguagem e letramento de docentes, e nas posturas e estratégias que eles/as adotaram diante das mudanças. Baseia-se em entrevistas conduzidas com acadêmicos/as em um projeto de pesquisa etnográfica crítica realizada em duas universidades federais em 2019. O foco eram as trajetórias acadêmicas, as biografias tecno-linguísticas e as percepções sobre as mudanças. Apresento insights detalhados de pesquisa realizada com três acadêmicos/as em uma das universidades federais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Letramentos Acadêmicos, Digitalização, Biografias Tecno-Linguísticas, Práticas de Letramento em Mudança, Inglês e Português.



Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyze the changing language and literacy practices of Brazilian academics from a critical, ethnographic perspective. The article provides close examination of the ways in which internationalization, the building of international research networks and collaboration, and digitization have contributed to change in academic practices. It also takes account of the ways in which different language and literacy practices (including use of English, Portuguese and other languages) are bound up with these processes of institutional change.

The article draws on wider research, carried out in 2019 by a team of researchers in a project entitled: *The Changing Language and Literacy Landscapes of Brazilian Universities: English in Policy Development and in Practice*. The research team included researchers from Brazil and from the United Kingdom (UK)¹. The research sites for this broader project were two federal universities that were in an initial group of universities receiving government funding promoting internationalization. In this article, the focus is on academic biographies co-constructed with three academics in one federal university. I chart the changes that have taken place over time in their academic literacy practices, including increased use of digital resources for communication in academic life, the impact of the internationalization of research, the ways in which different languages have been bound up with these changes, and their own views and strategies vis-à-vis the changes. Another article in this special issue of RBLA, by Martin-Jones et al., charts changes taking place in university policy-making in the other federal university (Beta University), in the wake of internationalization.

The context for this research

In the past, Portuguese – the national language of Brazil – was the main language used in academic contexts, both orally and in writing. However, French was also quite influential (Giraud, 2014). With globalization, things have changed considerably. Brazilian academics are now under increasing pressure to build international research networks and to publish in international journals where the use of English is the norm. These pressures are, of course, shared with academics in other countries in the non-Anglophone world. The increasing dominance of English in global academic publishing has been well documented by Lillis and Curry (2010) and Curry and Lillis (2018).

Harvey (1989) and Giddens (1991) were among an initial group of scholars who presented an analysis of the economic, political and symbolic changes that have been ushered in with the expansion of capitalist markets. They highlighted the consequences of these changes for different nation-states. With the growing global circulation of people, material and symbolic resources, national languages have lost

¹ There were eight members in this research team: Marilyn Martin-Jones, Elizabeth Chilton and Eleni Mariou, at the University of Birmingham, UK; and, in Brazil, Maria Lúcia Castanheira, Gilcinei Carvalho and Andrea Mattos, at the Federal University of Minas Gerais; and Ana Souza, and Izabel Magalhães at the University of Brasília.

part of their symbolic value and, in numerous contexts, including academic contexts, English has gained considerable global currency.

In addition, Heller (2011) and Duchêne and Heller (2012) have drawn attention to the ways in which language and communication have become central to particular dimensions of late capitalism, particularly in the tertiary sector and in the knowledge economy. Language issues are becoming more visible in the Higher Education sector, in different countries, as a result of internationalization– in research, teaching and university administration.

In Brazil, there has been increasing debate about the nature and scope of internationalization and there have been diverse policy initiatives, at governmental and institutional levels, related to the global positioning of Brazilian higher education institutions, e.g., in terms of research and in terms of student recruitment at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. In 2017, the Federal Government introduced a funding programme aimed at reinforcing trends towards internationalization in selected departments in federal universities. This programme was introduced through *CAPES (Coordenação do Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior)*. *CAPES* is a federal agency, under the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for quality assurance and for the evaluation of higher education institutions in Brazil. The 2017 funding programme in support of internationalization was called *CAPES PRINT*. In the initial stage of this programme, only university departments and research groups ranked 5-7, in the top-ranked universities, were awarded funding.

The biographies and views of Brazilian academics that are analyzed here thus need to be understood in the light of this wider context, including, in particular: (1) the greater visibility of language and different forms of communication in university life in the late modern era; (2) the current global scenario in which English has become a dominant language (Phillipson, 2010); and (3) the significant ongoing shift towards digitization of communication, towards mobile technologies, towards the online resources of the internet and towards the use of particular devices such as computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones, to communicate across globalized and local networks and to co-construct knowledge.

The changing language and literacy landscapes of Brazilian universities: The wider research project

Research methodology

A critical ethnographic approach was adopted in gathering², and then analyzing, the data. At the data-gathering stage, this included participant observation, the writing of field notes, interviews with senior administrators focusing on policy developments and interviews with academics in different disciplines. The aim of the interviews with academic staff in different disciplines was to build an account of change over time in their academic literacy practices and uses of text (on paper and on screen) and on their techno-linguistic biographies. The construction of techno-linguistic biographies is an approach that has been developed

² This project received Ethics Committee approval on May 19, 2015, CAEE 42099315.5.00005149.

within sociolinguistic studies of social media use (e.g., Page *et al.*, 2014) and within Literacy Studies (cf. Barton; Lee, 2013). According to Page *et al.* (2014: 128), it is a “participant-centred way of documenting change over time in social practices, especially as these relate to people’s lived experiences with technology and their language use online”.

At the data analysis stage, we took account of the perspectives, values and understandings of the research participants, and any changes across time and space in their online and offline literacy practices. We also took account of the institutional and policy changes at work in contemporary university life in Brazil and the wider political and economic processes underpinning these changes over time. As Heller (2012, p. 27) puts it, adopting a critical approach involves “understanding the histories and interconnectedness of both the processes of categorization at work, and of the practices that constitute them.”

The setting of the research presented in this article

The three academics considered in this article were based in one of the two universities in the wider project. This university, which I will call Alpha University, was founded in the 1960s, and it is one of the leading federal universities in Brazil. It is also a large university recruiting approximately 46,700 students each year. Internationalization and the building of international research networks at Alpha University has intensified over recent decades since a considerable proportion of members of the academic staff now have doctoral degrees from European or North American universities and they have been involved in increasing academic mobility. Moreover, each year the university acts as host to over 600 international students, who come from other countries in South America and from countries in Africa.

With the COVID-19 Pandemic, the university moved to digital communication in 2020/2021. However, in April 2022, face-to-face teaching returned, and in a recent meeting organized by the *Instituto de Letras* (Institute of Letters) about the university’s outreach activities, there was a presentation about English courses offered to local community residents.

The three academics

I turn now to the insights drawn from the interviews with three academics, focusing on the changes that had occurred over time in their academic literacy practices, due to digitization, and the significance of the new trend towards internationalization of the university and the strategies and stances that they had adopted vis-à-vis these changes: The three academics were Daniela Santos, Enrique Silva, and Inês Martins³. In what follows, I briefly summarize their academic histories. Then I draw out key themes from my analysis of their interviews, illustrating my account with reference to extracts from the interviews.

³ Fictitious names are used to refer to the academics participating in this study, in order to preserve confidentiality.

Daniela Santos

Daniela Santos is a sociologist who is based in the *Centro de Desenvolvimento Sustentável* (Centre for Sustainable Development) at Alpha University. She served as Director of this Centre for four years, from 2012 to 2016, and, when she was interviewed as part of our project in 2019, she was the Coordinator of the Post-Graduate Programme⁴ in Sustainable Development. She was also participating in national and international research networks related to this field of research. The academic staff at the Centre were all scientists. Daniela was the only social scientist in the team and the only woman.

She had completed a Master's degree in Anthropology in 1994 at Alpha University and then a Doctorate in Sociology in 2000. She then went on to do post-doctoral research on Sustainable Development at the University. This was followed by post-doctoral research based at a university in France. She now participates in several national and international research networks, in Latin America and beyond, related to Sustainable Development. She is also the Director of Communication and Events for the *Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ambiente e Sociedade - ANPPAS* (National Association for Post-Graduate Research in the Environment and Society).

Daniela is originally from Venezuela and speaks, reads and writes Spanish, Portuguese, French and English. When we interviewed her, she had been living in the city where Alpha University is located for 28 years.

According to Daniela, the first years at the Centre for Sustainable Development were difficult for the staff partly because it was not situated on the university campus. However, the Centre became more visible within the University when they received the highest ranking (grade 7) in the national research evaluation exercise run by CAPES. In fact, the Centre has had an international orientation from the outset since it initially had French financial backing. It has also attracted visiting researchers from several different countries.

Enrique Silva

When we interviewed him in 2019, Enrique Silva was a permanent member of staff in the Philosophy Department at Alpha University. He was also the Coordinator of the Post-Graduate Programme in Metaphysics.

He is originally from Ceará, in the Northeast of Brazil. His Master's degree, in Contemporary Philosophy was completed at the Federal University of Ceará. After this, he moved to the Federal University of Minas Gerais to do a doctoral degree in Philosophy, from 2005 to 2009. He eventually took up a post at Alpha University in 2011.

Enrique's research interests lie in the Philosophy of Knowledge and in the Philosophy of Space and Time. From 2017 to 2018, he was a visiting scholar at a leading university in the United Kingdom. He speaks, reads and writes English with fluency. He has published in Portuguese and in English. His first publication in English appeared in 2014 and, since then, all his publications have been in English.

⁴ Postgraduate programmes play a key role in the organisation and funding of research in Brazilian universities. They include both academic staff, doctoral researchers and MA students, with doctoral researchers and MA students often being linked to particular members of staff through participation in their research projects.

Inês Martins

Inês Martins is a senior academic who began teaching at Alpha University in 1978. In her early university career, she had been concerned with English Language Teaching (ELT). Prior to that, in 1975-6, she had completed a Master's degree in Linguistics for English Language Teaching at a British university. Five years later, she embarked on doctoral-level research at the same British university, specializing in Ethnography and Discourse Analysis.

From 1992 to 1999, she initiated and then coordinated an international research link programme involving academic staff from three universities: Alpha University, a British University and another leading university in Brazil. In 1993, she went back to the United Kingdom for one academic year as a visiting scholar, returning to Alpha University at the end of the year. She has also been a Visiting Professor at other universities in Brazil.

Inês is a member of several learned societies in Brazil and Latin America that focus on research related to language in social life. She has undertaken several research projects supported by Brazilian funding bodies. She has also published several volumes in Portuguese and one in English. In addition, she has published numerous articles also in Portuguese and in English. The articles in English have appeared in international journals in her field.

Insights from the interviews with the three academics

Our interviews with the three academics provided revealing insights into their career pathways, through higher education research, teaching and administration. The interviews also provided insights into their lived experiences of change over time at the university and into the ways in which they were drawing on their language and literacy resources, and on different digital resources, in their day-to-day work in 2019. In the sections below, I draw out commonalities and differences between the three academics, in the ways in which they were positioned vis-à-vis the changes taking place in higher education in Brazil, and into the ways in which they responded to and dealt with these changes. I focus, in particular, on the impact of internationalization policies, on their views on the growing dominance of English in research and knowledge-building and on the institutional shift towards digitization of communication, in different dimensions of university life, in research, in research administration, in departmental administration and university management, and in communication with students.

Dealing with the growing dominance of English in global research and knowledge-building

Daniela, Enrique, and Inês were all keenly aware of the pressure to publish in English, due to the increasing value of English on the global higher education market. They were also aware of the ways in

which the metrics for evaluating research outputs were weighted towards publications in English. However, they each took rather different stances on these issues.

When Daniela was asked whether she and her scientist colleagues used English when publishing their research, she responded in definitive terms: “*Sim, senão, não seríamos nota 7*” (Yes, if we hadn’t, we would not have been ranked at grade 7). She went on to point out that the use of English for publications in high impact international journals was an explicit strategy that had been adopted by the Centre for Sustainable Development well before the introduction of the internationalization programme by CAPES in 2017. “*Isso não é só agora pelo PRINT. Isso já foi desde o momento que a gente passou por ser [nota 7] centro de excelência ... a gente já tinha isso como parâmetro*” (This [strategy] is not just [linked] to [CAPES] PRINT. It has been [in place] from the moment when we became a Centre of Excellence, ranked 7... we already had this as a parameter).

The strategic approach expressed by Daniela also needs to be interpreted in the wider context of knowledge-building in the sciences in Brazil. A good deal of research output in the sciences is published in English. This was reflected across the interviews that were conducted with scientists as part of the broader project that I am drawing on here. As indicated earlier, most of the members of the Centre for Sustainable Development were scientists.

In the Philosophy Department, Enrique and his colleagues were reorienting towards English. Enrique’s first publication in English had appeared in 2014 and, since then, he had become committed to publishing in English. In his interview, he argued that he and his colleagues “must be able to write in English ..., to communicate [about] ourselves; to have more students from other countries”. This also appeared to be a strategic view, linked to the aim of enhancing the department’s prospects of improving their performance in the next research evaluation exercise. The departmental strategy relating to the use of English in knowledge creation was also being extended to students. In discussing his role as Coordinator of the Post-Graduate Programme in Metaphysics, Enrique pointed out that, in the post-graduate entrance examination, all applicants had to demonstrate knowledge of English. The department also offered a course in English each year along with an English-medium course on the methodology of Philosophy. A further example of concern within the department about the shift towards internationalization lay in the fact that the departmental journal, published online and via open access, as with most Brazilian journals, had an international editorial board and, according to Enrique, between 30 and 40 per cent of the contributions were published in English.

Although she had the linguistic resources to do so, Inês did not express the same strategic approach to publishing in English. She indicated that most of her published work was in Portuguese, but she had also published articles in English in international journals. For her, the main concern was with gaining access to research at the cutting edge of her field, most of which was in English – so she prioritised reading in English.

Internationalization of university research and building on language resources: Opportunities and constraints

While Federal Government policy on internationalization in Brazilian universities was introduced in 2017, through the launch of the CAPES PRINT programme, individual academics and research groups had been developing international research networks well before then, building on research collaboration developed during doctoral and post-doctoral research visits to universities in other countries. All three academics being considered here had established personal research links of an international nature and had developed the language and literacy resources needed to sustain these links. They had also been involved in considerable mobility, including long stays abroad for academic purposes. However, only Daniela and Inês were based in departments and university programmes that had received CAPES funding in the first stage of the CAPES PRINT scheme.

The research Centre where Daniela worked had already engaged in collaboration with scholars in other countries well before 2017. Daniela made particular mention of the collaboration with French researchers and funding from France, in her interview. Inês had initiated and then coordinated an externally funded, three-way research link programme with scholars from a British university and another Brazilian university, from 1992 to 1999. As part of this research link programme, she had organized five international conferences, in English, at Alpha University.

All three of these Brazilian academics had a range of language and literacy resources within their communicative repertoires. This had facilitated the development of research collaboration across national boundaries. Although Portuguese and English had become Daniela's main working languages, she was also able to communicate easily with Spanish-speaking researchers across Latin America. She was also able to draw on her knowledge of French during her post-doctoral research project at a university in France and during her work as Director of the Centre, with its close links with researchers in France.

Since Inês had begun her academic career with a focus on English Language Teaching (ELT) and Applied Linguistics, and since she had gone on to do both a Master's degree and a Ph.D. at a British university, her knowledge of English worked to her advantage, enabling her to coordinate the international research link, to participate in international conferences and to organize international events at Alpha University.

Enrique had also spent a year at a leading university in the United Kingdom, building personal links with scholars there. He had a fluent command of English and opted to use English in his interview, signaling his confidence in his use of the language. He also indicated in his interview that he and his colleagues spoke a range of languages between them, including English, French, German and Italian, as well as Portuguese, so they were well placed with regard to building externally funded research networks. However, as indicated previously, in 2019, when we conducted this interview, funding was not yet available for his department. They had not been included in the first stage of the CAPES PRINT programme, since they had only been evaluated at grade 4 in the previous research evaluation exercise.

Digitization of communication: Research, teaching and university administration

All three of the academics I am focusing on here were making regular use of digital resources in their work at the university: in their research, in building and sustaining research networks, in teaching and in administration. But they also made reference to the challenges stemming from digitization of communication in academic life. Moreover, the changes in this area were most striking for those who had been longest in the university sector. In this section, I will begin with change over time (and with the specific case of Inês). I will then provide examples of the ways in which the three research participants were using digital technologies, and I will go on to discuss some of the challenges stemming from the digitization of communication in academia.

Significant change over time

Academic life in Brazil, and elsewhere, has changed a good deal over time. Senior academics, like Inês and other senior academics that we interviewed, were particularly aware of these changes. Their experience differed from that of Enrique and Daniela. The senior members of staff could recall the moment when computers began to be used by academics across all disciplines. At the beginning of the 1990s, academics at Alpha University were told to take a course on the use of computers, and Inês recalled that she had taken this course. It had been scheduled at lunch time. In her interview, Inês provided a brief narrative account of this first encounter with computers at Alpha University in the early 1990s, and of how it reshaped her daily work schedule. As she put it:

In 1992, there was a move in the Departamento de Letras ... this was a recommendation from senior university administrators, that all lecturers should take a course in using the computer. So, I took this course, it was from 12am to 1pm. I finished teaching and I went to take this course. And after that I went home and, you know, fed my children, and went back to the university. And I came back to the university at 3 pm and I worked until 7 pm. (Inês Martins (fictitious name), interview, 7th April 2019)

Inês added that she did not learn much from this course because it was quite technical and it focused primarily on the language of computing. Before that, in the 1980s, when she was writing her Ph.D dissertation in the United Kingdom, the main writing tool had been the typewriter. She recalled that her thesis had been typed by the department secretary after work hours. While Inês had found the shift to computing technically challenging at first, she eventually adapted to the changes ushered in by digitization, along with her colleagues.

Inês also drew attention to other technical changes that had taken place at Alpha university during her career experience. She mentioned these changes when talking about organizing an international research link in the 1990s. Inês remembered her reliance on the use of a fax machine, on international phone calls and

correspondence and highlighted the slow pace of communication at the time. The preparation of seminars and conferences as part of this research link involved the production of programmes and handouts which needed to be typed and photocopied. She remembered countless trips to the unit at Alpha university where photocopying services were organized. She also remembered the use of transparencies that were prepared with pens in different colours and projected on an overhead projector. She contrasted this with the use of digital resources such as the power point slides and video resources used at seminars and conferences today, and with the possibilities of organizing international seminars and talks online via Zoom, Microsoft Teams or other online resources. She also spoke of the convenience of drafting, revising and sending off research papers on a computer, contrasting this with the time when only typewriters were available.

The digital resources used by the three participants in their contemporary life: Opportunities and challenges

All three of the research participants that I am focusing on in this article were reliant on digital resources as they carried out their work across different dimensions of their lives as academics. In their research, in building and sustaining research networks, in teaching and in administration. They used different devices in the process, ranging from computers to iPads and mobile phones. They used both computer software and social media.

In her interview in Portuguese in 2019, Daniela talked about her role in the organization of international collaboration for the Centre where she worked. She pointed to the advantages stemming from the use of technology in developing research on an international basis. As she put it: *“Hoje que essa nossa internacionalização custa na hora de você publicar o livro, na hora de você trazer alguém. Então, hoje, é muito pelo skype”* [Today our internationalization is costly when you have a book to publish, when you invite someone. So today it’s all on skype.]. But, in her interview, Daniela also drew attention to some of the challenges involved in managing international research networks. At another point, in her interview, Daniela explained how she organized online meetings for her Centre. She noted that they are difficult to organize because they involve academics from different countries, with different time zones, and – in the case of the Centre for Sustainable Development – participants were often people who had jobs outside of universities.

[A tecnologia] é do dia a dia. Porque é a única maneira da gente fazer, né? Até nossos encontros são assim marcados na agenda do google, porque aí países diferentes, horários diferentes, então a gente consegue. Esse, por exemplo, da rede, que eu coordeno, a gente faz uma reunião do comitê gestor da rede uma vez, duas vezes por ano. A gente faz as grandes, que são as presenciais, tá? Que se, geralmente, se a gente tem recurso, consegue fazer duas por ano. Mas do comitê gestor, a gente faz uma por semestre. E essa aí. Tu não tem ideia de como isso é complicado de montar (risos). Porque, assim, quando eu posso, outro está em aula, outro está em. Nossa, difícil. Mas a gente consegue, tá? Então, muitas vezes, é aquele que, é o sacrifício, trabalho voluntário. Aí, eu só consigo fazer com que todo mundo esteja junto, quando, para mim, são 2 horas da manhã. Pronto. Às vezes é o cara da França, que “puts, aqui é meia-noite. A gente vai ficar conversando 2 horas, vou dormir 2 horas”, né? Mais ou menos isso. (Daniela Santos (fictitious name), interview, 17th June 2019)

[Technology] is part of daily life. Because it's the only way one can do it, isn't it? Our meetings are even set in the google diary because there are different countries, different times, so we manage it. This one, for example, the network I coordinate, we have a meeting of the managerial board once, twice a year. We do the big ones in which we meet face-to-face, right? Usually if we have money, we manage to have two a year. But in the case of the managerial board, we have one per semestre. And that one. You have no idea how difficult it is to organize (laughs). Because when I'm free, someone is teaching and someone else is in. Oh, dear, it's difficult. But we manage to do it OK. Then often we have to sacrifice ourselves, and we end up doing work we're not paid for. Then I only manage to have everyone together [virtually] when for me it's 2 the morning. There you are. Sometimes it's the guy in France who says, "Oh, my goodness, here it's midnight, we're going to talk for 2 hours, I'm going to bed at 2 in the morning". More or less like that.]

When asked about his relationship with technology, Enrique indicated that it had had a positive effect on his research: It had made it possible for him to have access to archival material on international websites. He explained this as follows:

10 years ago, or 15 years ago, I remember [it was during] my Masters degree, I was asked to read about a particular topic and I didn't have the internet or any material available, at least the specialised material that I am interested. (Enrique Silva (fictitious name), interview, 5th April 2019)

As Enrique went on to report, his academic life changed considerably over the following 15 years due to gaining access to archival material on ancient philosophy. He said that he felt digitization had made a big difference in his own work, and in his teaching, since his students could also navigate the internet. He noted that they read texts in three languages: English, Italian and French. This kind of work has also made the colleagues and doctoral students in his philosophy group more confident, opening up international resources that can be used in their publications.

However, when asked about other digital resources, he made explicit mention of the challenges of email, and he said that he was having problems dealing with the demands of keeping up with email. The academics participating in research by Tusting *et al.* (2019) in UK universities also mentioned that they felt they had lost control of emails and they had to deal with them "everywhere" (Tusting *et al.*, 2019, p. 86). This had led these British researchers to pose the dramatic question: "email, a blessing or a curse?" (Tusting *et al.*, 2019, p. 85). In our research in the two federal universities in Brazil, several participants expressed frustration at being taken away from their academic writing due to the pressures related to dealing with email messages.

Enrique was one of these. He talked about the specific challenges arising from the arrangements that he had made for receiving emails. He had set up a personal email account and had arranged for his work-related email to be directed to this account too, so that he could keep on top of his duties as Coordinator of the Post-Graduate Programme. This had resulted in a significant increase in his workload and this was difficult to manage. He was also having difficulty achieving a balance between his administrative responsibilities and his personal research.

Enrique was characterizing an experience which is common to many in academic life: On the one hand, the advent of new communication technologies has facilitated workplace communication, but, on the other hand, it has increased the amount of communication. Communication related to academic affairs

also occurs across space and time, blurring the boundaries between the worlds we inhabit. As Tusting et al (2019, p. 83) have observed: “Work ceases to be a place; it becomes an activity, a practice which can ‘take place’ anywhere”. Giddens (1991) was one of the first scholars to draw attention to the significance of this blurring of boundaries between work worlds and life worlds in his account of the social changes associated with late modernity.

As we saw in Daniela’s short narrative, the international meetings were held in her home and were often scheduled in the early hours of the morning. She already worked for long hours each day. Because of her administrative responsibilities when she was Director of the Centre, she taught her classes in the evening between 8:30 pm and 10:30 pm. Tusting *et al.* (2019, p. 40) write about academics “never switching off” and we see echoes of this in Daniela’s account of her long working hours. Similar accounts were given by Enrique and Inês.

We also see this blurring of boundaries in the accounts given by all three academics regarding their patterns of communication with students. They all used WhatsApp to communicate with their students, to arrange classes and oral examinations, and to forward documents in pdf form, such as course materials. This is a ubiquitous practice among academic staff in Brazilian universities. WhatsApp is filling a gap that has arisen due to the limited administrative support for teaching staff at many universities. For example, when asked about her use of WhatsApp in working with students, Inês said: “every course of mine has a WhatsApp group”.

The institutional management and evaluation of research: Increasing digitization and the demands on Brazilian academics

A significant change in Brazilian academic life took place in the 1990s, with the creation of a new digital platform called Lattes (named after a Brazilian scientist). Today, all Brazilian academics are required to enter details of their degrees, their employment history and their publications on this platform. They are also required to keep updating their details. Prior to the creation of Lattes, academics had to produce these different kinds of information in different formats, for different purposes. Before the advent of computers, this meant re-typing documents over and over. Inês made reference to this era of complex bureaucratic procedures in her interview and provided a detailed narrative about her lived experience of producing a large folder of documents when applying for a permanent post at Alpha University in the early 1980s.

The current digitized system also places considerable demands on Brazilian academics on an annual basis. For each university, the system serves the function of keeping a record of the research activities and the research output of the members of each postgraduate programme. And, cumulatively, this digitized record-keeping contributes to the assessment of research quality by university management committees and, ultimately, by CAPES, the federal agency, within the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for quality assurance. The steps in the recording-keeping processes involved are as follows:

- Members of the academic staff are required to update their Lattes on the CNPq/*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) platform.
- The post-graduate coordinator and secretary transfer data from the Lattes *Curriculum Vitae* (CV) of all staff members to a complex electronic form called Sucupira platform.
- After that staff members are expected to revise their part of the form. Those who have retired, but still formally collaborate with the post-graduate programme, receive their part by email, and they are asked to revise it.
- Then the coordinator of the post-graduate programme writes a qualitative report, which is attached to a quantitative report.
- When the report is finished, it is sent to the senior management staff at each university who examine each post-graduate programme report. If the reports are approved, they are all sent to CAPES electronically. This is done at the beginning of every academic year.
- Every four years, CAPES invites specialists in every discipline (for example, the Linguistics Committee) to evaluate all reports.
- Then, on the basis of these evaluations, post-graduate programmes are ranked from 1 to 7.

Each of the steps listed above involves a range of literacy events, involving different social actors who have different institutional positioning. As Street (1984: 97) observed, in his landmark volume on literacy as a social practice, literacy is more than just the “technology in which it is manifested”. The range of literacy practices – from the regular entering and updating of personal research details by individual academics to the reading and assessment of the quality of research in each postgraduate programme – is bound up with managerial practices at an institutional and, ultimately, governmental level. While the literacy practices in Brazilian universities take this particular digitized form, such managerial record-keeping practices have become quite commonplace in other national contexts. As Tusting *et al.* (2019, p. 136) have pointed out: Academics writing is “influenced by institutional and departmental strategies put in place to manage academics’ practices and performance”.

Concluding comments

As indicated at the beginning of this article, the three academics, who provide the main focus in this article, were part of a wider group who participated in a research project that I conducted with colleagues, into the impact of internationalization and digitization on the working lives of academic staff in two federal universities in Brazil. The issues that I have addressed here are echoed in other interviews that we conducted, as a research team, in the two universities.

Building biographies with members of academic staff from different disciplines and post-graduate programmes, and taking account of their techno-linguistic experiences, has been a particularly valuable enterprise. Biographies such as those discussed here have generated significant insights into the specific

nature and scope of the changes that have been taking place in the working lives of academics in Brazilian universities over recent decades. As a research team, we have documented significant changes taking place due to internationalization of higher education research and due to the increasing dominance of English, in international research fora and in publishing. We have also shown how different language and literacy resources were being drawn upon by our research participants, and how they made personal and strategic choices regarding language use. In addition, we have taken account of the far-reaching changes that have taken place due to digitization, including changes in the ways in which texts are used and produced in the research activities of individual academics, in the building of research networks, day-to-day teaching and administration and, at the same time, in the institutional management of research. Lastly, we have been able to throw light on the challenges arising from these digital changes and on the different ways in which Brazilian academics interpret the changes and deal with them.

Our experience of working in this way, as a research team, has reinforced for us the value of starting ‘on the ground’, with individual research participants in a particular context, when investigating the impact of social and institutional change in higher education. Working closely with academics, and with their own accounts of the changes in their working lives, provides a fruitful and focused means of building an understanding of the social and institutional changes that are reshaping the language and literacy landscapes of universities in the twenty-first century. As Tusting *et al.* (2019, p. 1) have put it:

Close examination of how writing practices are changing, and how those changes are being managed and experienced, can [...] throw light on issues of broader significance, such as the nature of knowledge production and what it is to be an academic.

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this article to Elizabeth Chilton who passed away shortly after the end of our research “The Changing Language and Literacy Landscapes of Brazilian Universities: English in Policy Development and in Practice”. Liz was a member of the research team, a bright woman and lovely colleague, who was unable to continue her promising work.

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