LANGUAGE AND THE MEDIA: DISCOURSES ABOUT THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN BRAZILIAN MEDIA¹

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Abstract: This paper analyses the ways contemporaneous Brazilian media influence the production and circulation of discourses about English, examining how the English language is represented in media discourse. I shall explore how certain ideologies are established by means of a hegemonic discourse about the need that everyone in Brazil should know English, and how this prevalent meaning produces an imaginary effect of inclusion of all Brazilians. However, this discourse is contradicted by covert meanings that English should remain the possession of only a segment of the population.

KEYWORDS: English, media discourse, Brazil, identity, market, inclusion, exclusion

LINGUAGEM E MÍDIA: DISCURSOS SOBRE A LÍNGUA INGLESA NA MÍDIA BRASILEIRA

Resumo: Este artigo analisa a influência da mídia brasileira contemporânea na produção e circulação de discursos sobre a língua inglesa, a partir da observação sobre como o Inglês é representado nesse discurso. A análise explora como certas ideologias são estabelecidas por meio de um dizer hegemônico sobre a necessidade que todos no Brasil teriam de saber inglês e como esse dizer produz um efeito imaginário de inclusão de todos os brasileiros. Todavia, esse dizer é contradito por sentidos velados de que a língua deveria permanecer conhecida por apenas uma parcela da população.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Inglês, discurso da mídia, Brasil, identidade, mercado, inclusão, exclusão

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Introduction

Although there is no novelty in stating that knowledge of English is publicized as a requirement of absolute necessity worldwide, in this paper I depart from the claim that there is some specificity in the ways discourses about the necessity of knowing English are produced and distributed in each country and in how these discourses reach their audiences. In this view, I follow the argument put forward by Mignolo (2000), that there is no universal place from which one can enunciate, or rather, that there are only "local histories". It is thus the specificity of our (Brazilian) local history with the English language that is the focus of my research through the analysis of discourses about this language. It is necessary to research these "local histories" in order to understand how *Brazilians* are placed vis-à-vis their relationship with the English language, what kind of social imaginary is produced about this foreign language in Brazil and how these discourses construct representations that suggest the imaginary inclusion of all Brazilians but that result mainly in the exclusion of a segment of the population.

In my current research project³ I inquire about forms of the imaginary and symbolic presence of the English language in Brazil through the analysis of political and educational discourse as well as media discourse about the English language. The objective of the analysis is to increase our understanding of the ways these discourses produce identifications for us with a view to contributing to the reflection about the English language, in particular, but also about the Portuguese national language, mainly in institutional contexts of language teacher education.

Drawing on the assumption that media discourse is highly influential in the construction of meanings and the shaping of identities in contemporaneous societies, this paper analyses the specific ways contemporaneous Brazilian media influence the production and circulation of discourses about English, the way the English language is represented, the manner of representing Brazilians' relationship with this language and the impact of those representations on the construction of social identities in Brazil.

³ CNPq Research Project nº 311357/2006-7.

The theoretical background of the study is a theory of discourse analysis (PÊCHEUX, [1975]1988; ORLANDI, 1992, 1999 and others) which critically examines the historical discursive production of subjects and meanings. Meanings are constituted interdiscursively, in the sense that they are shaped by an intricate array of discourses already produced and existing in a discursive memory displayed in many different networks of discourses. Meanings are also shaped by elements that can either be remembered or forgotten and this is what constitutes a discursive memory. Subjects, in their turn, are positions occupied by individuals in the process of producing discourses; in Foucault's terms (FOUCAULT, [1969]1987), a subject position is a position opened by a discourse and that may be occupied by different individuals. In this process subjects suffer ideological interpellation which, if successful, causes the subject's identification (PÊCHEUX, [1975]1988).

The research corpus consists of two types of texts: 1) articles in Brazilian printed press which have the English language as theme, distributed in such topics as: the teaching and learning of English, business, tourism and market trends in teaching: 2) print and TV advertisements shown in Brazil's media and in which the verbal content is partially in English mixed with Portuguese. These are advertisements of products such as cars and clothes, not of English language courses, in which case statements in English would be expected. The corpus comprises articles published in some of the country's major newspapers and current affairs magazines, in the last fifteen years and print and TV advertisements published in the last four years. In the printed press articles, my objective is to analyse the dominant representation of the English language and how the reader/interlocutor is ideologically interpellated to identify with this representation. In the ads, my aim is to reflect upon the effects of unfamiliarity with the foreign language in contexts in which the unexpected use of this language provokes a certain degree of rupture in the social imaginary due to the fact that the foreign language is being used in unconventional spaces.

1. Language representation and subject interpellation

In the printed press, the statement⁴ that runs through all the references to the learning of English is: "Knowing English is an absolute necessity for Brazilians in their professional lives." This statement (*énoncé*) signifies in sentences such as

[S.1] O brasileiro descobriu que aprender a falar inglês é tão necessário quanto saber trabalhar com computador (*Veja*, 28/10/1998)

(Brazilians have found out that learning to speak English is as necessary as learning how to operate a computer)

[S.2] Saber falar inglês é "muito importante" para a maioria da população [a frase resume o resultado de pesquisa sobre "a importância do inglês para um profissional" e que assinala 86% de escolha para a categoria "muito importante"] (Folha de S. Paulo, 12/12/2004)

(Knowing how to speak English is "very important" for most of the population [the sentence summarizes the result of a survey about "the importance of English for a professional", in which the category "very important" scored 86%])

in which the English language is reduced to its utilitarian meaning of "vehicle for communication in today's globalized world". This meaning is produced by what we could call the discourse of the market and its process of marketization that turns everything into goods offered for consumption. In this process of marketization, the English language takes on the value of a commodity to be acquired.

The reduction of the meanings and value of a language to a means of communication that serves the global market contrasts with other meanings and values of languages, especially if considered from the point of view of foreign language teaching and learning as a school subject.

⁴ Statement is being used in the Foucauldian sense of énoné, that is, as a meaning that can be repeated in different formulations, each forming a unique enunciative event (Foucault, [1969]1987).

In education many educators and applied linguists (including me) defend that learning a foreign language should not be considered merely for its utilitarian and immediate meaning of preparation for the professional market, but rather as an opportunity for students to acquire an awareness of other systems of signifying the world and of other cultures. This awareness would thus develop the students' reflection about diversity and their tolerance for difference.

In the texts (S. 1 and 2), the market perspective about the English language, formulated as an absolute necessity of knowing English in one's professional career is imaginarily attributed to "Brazilians" in general ("o brasileiro") or to "most of the population" ("a maioria da população"). The interlocutor (reader) of these texts is thus interpellated into agreeing with this representation of the language, inasmuch as he or she identifies with the position of all "Brazilians" or "most of the population" that acknowledge the value of this commodity. In designating those that know the importance of English as "Brazilians" or "most of the population", this discourse constructs a subject position to be occupied by the potential interlocutor/reader (who is Brazilian him/herself).

Another characteristic of this discourse is that the texts address the interlocutor in a straight open manner sometimes, by interpellating this interlocutor/reader as an individual – "you", as illustrated in sequences 3 and 4 below.

[S.3] Do you speak english [sic]? Se a resposta foi "no" ou "o que você disse?", vale a pena começar a pensar no assunto, porque o mercado de trabalho pertence cada vez mais a quem fala uma segunda língua, principalmente o inglês. (O Globo, 15/8/1993)

(Do you speak english? [written in English in the text, the way it is reproduced here, with a small "e" in English] If your answer was "no" or "what did you say?", it is worth starting to think about the subject, because the job market increasingly belongs to those who speak a second language, mainly English.)

[S.4] Saber combinar as 26 letrinhas em inglês, hoje, é essencial para quem quer ser cidadão do mundo [...] Do you speak English? Não? Então comece já, senão você corre o risco de ser uma ilha cercada de inglês por todos os lados. (Folha de S. Paulo, 7/8/1999)

(Knowing how to put together the 26 small letters of the English alphabet today is essential for those that wish to be world citizens [...] Do you speak English? [the question is written in English in the text] No? So start now, otherwise you risk being an island surrounded by English all around.)

If in S.1 and S. 2 (above), the enunciator⁵ speaks from the perspective of someone who knows Brazilians' opinion about the importance of the English language, in S.3 and S.4, on the other hand, the enunciator places itself in the position of someone who attests the importance of knowing English and appeals to its addressee from this position.

One more aspect to be noticed is that of S. 3, in which there is a relative clause introduced by the pronoun "who" ("quem"), in "the job market increasingly belongs to those who speak a second language, mainly English". The relative pronoun "who" introduces a restrictive relative clause whose antecedent ("those") is indeterminate (who exactly is referred to as "those who speak a second language"?). According to Pêcheux (1988), it is a characteristic of restrictive relative clauses to refer to indeterminate elements, which are thus non-saturated elements in the text. This constitutes for Pêcheux ([1975]1988) and Henry (1975) a pre-constructed, that is, a lexical item that refers to a previous and independent construction that signifies interdiscursively. In this particular construction, the pre-constructed element may be expressed like this: there are those who speak another language and to whom the job market belongs. The element that signifies in the utterance as a pre-constructed (or that produces an effect of a pre-constructed statement), as if it belonged to an anterior and exterior discursive domain,

⁵ In Oswald Ducrot's polyphonic theory of enunciation (cf. Ducrot, [1984]1987; Guimarães, 1995), the enunciator is the discourse figure that establishes the perspective from which an utterance is enunciated and the addressee ("destinatário") is its corresponding interlocution figure.

confers to the utterance the value of something that preexists to this utterance, the value of a truth *already there*, and about which one does not need to think. This is exactly the effect of the ideological interpellation on the subject, the addressee, in this case. As a result of the ideological effect provoked by the pre-constructed, the discourse addressee, individualized in the "you" (você) position, is invited to join "those who speak a second language" and who are aware of its importance.

Summing up the function of designation and address in this discourse, the effect of ideological interpellation occurs by means of two mechanisms:

Homogenization: the first mechanism is the designation of all or most Brazilians, and through this mechanism the addressee is "invited" to occupy the subject position of "Brazilians" or "most Brazilians". This designation manner produces an effect of homogenization over the subject and, as a consequence, leaves no room for divergent discourses that might question or criticize the hegemonic position in which English is placed;

Individualization: the second mechanism is the individualization that results from the form of address ("you"), complemented by the effect of a pre-constructed element ("those who"), which interpellates the addressee into occupying the position of those who "adequately prepare themselves for the job market".

The form of ideological interpellation that individualizes the subject produces the effect of rendering this subject responsible for his or her acts and choices. The individual is the form of subject that characterizes the capitalist mode of production: the subject of law, according to Haroche ([1984]1992). This subject is defined by his or her rights and duties in relation to the State, and by his or her individual responsibility. In the media discourse under analysis, this subject is interpellated from the position of an individual that should consider him or herself responsible for learning English: "You are responsible for learning English if you want to prepare yourself for the job market adequately etc." This subject, rendered responsible for his or her acts,

is summoned to respond and to know him or herself, in a process of self-subjectivation that is increasingly expected of the modern subject, according to Foucault (1988). The philosopher defines as *technologies of the self* the technologies that make the individual work for his or her own subjectivation, in the sense that the individual is tied to a particular identity. In this case, the form of identity that the addressee of this discourse is tied to is the identity of a Brazilian person who invests in his or her present or future career by acquiring the tools such as English that will make him or her fit for the job market.

This discourse constructs a subject position for the Brazilian individual. It is my argument here that this position may be occupied by real individuals (readers) that identify with (or rather, that attend to the ideological call of) such statements as "English is the foreign language that is necessary for every Brazilian always for the same reasons, the job market, and it is my individual responsibility to learn this language." This ideological effect of identification operates as a mechanism of imaginary inclusion: the inclusion of all those who identify as "Brazilian" and who are concerned with their professional careers.

Also, in the discourse of the press there is either implicitly or explicitly a comparison between English and its high value for the job market and Portuguese in Brazil. Explicitly, for example, we find a conflict between the two languages in the same magazine article that states that "Brazilians have found out that learning to speak English is as necessary as learning how to operate a computer", illustrated by this excerpt:

[S.5] Quem desembarca na Suécia, Noruega ou Holanda descobre países bilíngües onde, além da língua materna, todo mundo fala inglês – do caixa de banco ao motorista de táxi. Num movimento desigual e silencioso, um pedaço do Brasil começa a viver esta situação. Encarando o português das escolas públicas, a maioria dos brasileiros sobrevive longe de qualquer idioma parecido com o inglês. Mas uma fatia cada vez mais numerosa da população já deixou a condição de monoglota para pais e avós. (*Veja*, 28/10/1998)

(A person who lands in Sweden, Norway or Holland discovers bilingual countries where everyone speaks English besides their native language – from bank tellers to taxi drivers. In an unequal and silent movement, a portion of Brazil begins to live this situation. Facing the Portuguese language [teaching] of State-run schools, most Brazilians survive far from any language that is similar to English. But a fast growing slice of the population has left the status of monoglots behind to their parents and grandparents.)

A strange relationship between "the Portuguese language of State-run schools" and English – or rather its absence in this context – is established: supposedly poorly taught Portuguese might prevent the learning of English or might at least render it more difficult. The unfavorable light that is shed on the teaching of Portuguese suggests that most Brazilians that survive without English have a less than adequate standard of living, since the necessity that is emphasized in statements such as "Brazilians have found out that learning to speak English is as necessary as learning how to operate a computer" (Sequence 1) and others in the article is not being fulfilled.

I have argued that this kind of media discourse emphasizes languages' market value, an emphasis that "naturally" presents English as the most valuable language on the global market nowadays. Compared to English from a market perspective, the Portuguese language obviously has a great deal less market value. This mode of making languages meaningful influences and may even determine the way we are called upon to relate to languages ideologically, and it is a consequence, I daresay, of media discourse: languages are commodities whose chief characteristics are their relative value vis-à-vis other commodities and general demand, and as commodities their value is measured by their usefulness for immediate purposes. In this view, the lack of prestige of Portuguese is evident: a language that is not "adequate" or "fit" for the global market.

If media discourse (as much as other discourses) influences identity construction in the ways individuals are interpellated and if we accept the idea that the media have great influence in current processes of meaning production, a question may be asked: what kind of impact on the identity construction of real Brazilian individuals is possibly caused by this discourse, especially on those individuals who see themselves in a position of deprivation, such as those who "survive" without English or who do not yet "master" this language? What is the possible impact on those who are imaginarily excluded from the ideological call of identifying with the subject position of "individuals who struggle for a career and thus testify the absolute necessity of knowing English in Brazil"?

These projections of deprivation, insufficiency or inadequacy on the identity of Brazilians may be of use to understand, at least to some extent, the fascination with the English language that seems to be a common identification among Brazilians (as analysed in Grigoletto, 2003). By occupying this subjective position, individuals made subjects are led to identify with the hegemonic discourse of a particular language's superiority over others and of languages' market value.

2. A divided enunciative space

The analysis of the advertisements focused on two aspects of the enunciative space⁶ constructed by the ads: a specific mode of enunciation which mixes two languages, Portuguese and English, and the mode of "communication" with the virtual reader/spectator of those ads. It must be said that the printed ads were published in newspapers and magazines of wide circulation and aimed at a general audience of people seeking information on current affairs. No advertisement was collected from specialized magazines in some scientific, economic or cultural domain.

The first aspect to be noticed is that the ads present a divided enunciative space due to the mixture of the two languages. This mixture causes the first effect of unfamilia-

⁶ The concept of enunciative space ("espaço de enunciação") is proposed by Guimarães (2002) to designate the divided space in which a language and its speakers operate, in the sense that a language is normatively divided and the individuals who are speakers of that language are unequally divided between included and not included (or not included in the same way). It is a space regulated by disputes and is, therefore, a political space. In this text, the concept of enunciative space is being considered in contexts in which two languages, Portuguese and English, symbolically and imaginarily divide the same space.

rity produced by the ads. A second effect is the particular way of "communicating" with the reader/spectator: the ads always show something unclear and obscure about the product or enterprise that is being advertised. This effect may be achieved by two mechanisms: either the text does not clearly reveal what is being advertised or what is stated in English has no direct or clear relationship with the product being advertised.

The first two ads illustrate the mechanism of not clearly revealing what is being advertised. In the first, spread across two pages of a magazine (see Appendix 1), what is strange and unclear is that the ad does not inform what products are made by the company, whose name, **Lanxess**, appears alongside the words in English Energizing Chemistry (on the second image). Nor is there any information about the kind of business the company does in Brazil. Thus, what is advertised is probably unclear to the general public of the magazine, as if the ad was addressed to a particular audience that would be familiar with the subject (i.e., chemistry to produce some kind of energy) and with the company. The strange effect caused by the words in English may be increased by the reproduction of the chemical formula for sugar drawn above the photo of the Sugarloaf Mountain, in Rio de Janeiro. A formula that is inscrutable to the noninitiated as much as the statement in English may be.

A second illustration of the same mechanism is the ad in Appendix 2, which puts two foreign languages side by side, English and Spanish, composing the slogan of the ad. In Spanish comes the word **España**; in English, the words **technology for life**. Similarly to the first ad, this ad does not clarify the product or brand being advertised. In fact, what seems to be advertised is the country Spain itself, by means of advertising its air traffic control capacity (the statement written in Portuguese means *Traffic control – Spain is world's number one in air traffic control*). An internet search on the site **www.spainbusiness.com.br**, publicized at the bottom of the page, reveals a homepage written in English that belongs to the Official site of the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade. Thus, the interpretation of this ad also seems to be available only to some business people but not to the general public.

In other ads, there is the use of English in statements that seem to have no clear relationship with the product being advertised, as in the two examples below.

In the ad of the clothes manufacturing company Diesel (Appendix 3), the few words and phrases that are included are all in English: Diesel for successful living and Global warming ready. Two factors may be found strange: the use of the English language and the phrase "Global warming ready". Why was this phrase included in a clothes ad? Besides, the photo composition suggests that global warming has already caused damage to the world. In the background it is possible to distinguish the well-known four effigies of former American presidents carved on the rocks of Mount Rushmore, in a scenario in which the mountain seems to be almost totally submerged under the sea. This scenario suggests that global warming has already caused vast floods on our planet. Therefore, the question may be posed again: What is the immediate relationship between a global warming threat and a clothes manufacturing company that makes casual clothes for the young?

The second and last example is a TV advertisement (not included in the appendices for obvious reasons). The spectator is shown a short film in which a character that looks like the idiotic, simple-minded and pure-hearted character of the movie Forrest Gump tells an older man seated beside him on a park bench how he got into his car and drove nonstop and with no destination for a long time. The whole monologue is narrated in American English by the character with a Southern American accent and with subtitles in Portuguese. The images that follow the narrative show the Forrest Gump-like character driving his car through a typical North American Southern country town that looks very real with its people in the streets and shops showing signs written in English. The ad advertises the new Volkswagen Golf car. Some possible effects that may cause strangeness: why does the ad allude to the movie Forrest *Gump*, featuring a simple-minded and pure-hearted fellow, to advertise a sophisticated German car manufactured by a company that has a subsidiary in Brazil? And why use English?

It might be argued that contemporary advertisements are meant to cause impact by resorting to unfamiliar associations, unexpected features, unusual slogans and strange characters. Fontenelle (2002), for instance, describes how contemporary advertising media discourse focuses more on imprinting the brand name and image on the spectators' mind and memory than on a specific product. To achieve this aim, advertisements use spectacular effects that will most probably be retained and remembered. It is also common knowledge that ads are targeted towards a specific audience that are expected to be familiar with the brand or to recognize the product and who are its potential consumers. It might be added that ads are designed to appeal to the spectator primarily through its visual content and only secondarily through its verbal content. This is all true. But the fact that the English language has been chosen to help convey these characteristics should not pass unnoticed. Would the same effects of strangeness, unexpectedness and unfamiliarity be caused if the only language used in the ads had been Portuguese? What potential exclusion is established when English, not Portuguese, is selected? Who is potentially excluded? Certainly, for a start, the people who read or see the ads but do not understand English. Of course, it may be claimed that these ads address an audience constituted by people who know English and among whom the potential consumers of those products will be. But this supposition only adds to my argument that this discourse is anchored on a basis of exclusion: those that cannot understand the appeal of the ads possibly because of their unfamiliarity with English are not part of the target audience and thus do not count. With their whole or partial linguistic content in English, the ads produce a division among the Brazilian population: those that know English and are thus eligible as target audience/consumers and those that do not know English and are cut off from the communication chain.

The ads reveal a mode of enunciation that is based on a double effect of strangeness, a double absence: the obscurity of the product being advertised and the incomprehension of the English language for those segments of spectators that cannot understand this language. Both the visual and

verbal language elements compose an aura of strangeness and mystery. My claim is that the verbal elements in English contribute to increasing the effect of strangeness that seems to be sought by these advertisements. In this search, the ads cultivate an obscure language to which the use of English is one more addition: even for those spectators who can overcome the language barrier another obstacle awaits them in some cases: the enigma of what is advertised.

As regards the association with English, the specific mode of enunciation of the ads as well as their mode of "communication" with the virtual spectator point to an underlying conception of English as a language restricted to those who are able to decipher not only the language itself but also the more or less secret codes of the ads.

The English language thus seems to have a role in these ads in the way contemporary subjects are interpellated. In the enunciative space underlying the ads, English is represented as more important than Portuguese and perhaps also more legitimate. For the spectators of these ads, English is represented as a language that may grant them access to the secret codes of the ads, to understanding their messages. The others, those who cannot decipher the contents in the foreign language, are excluded and obliterated from this virtual communication space.

According to Guimarães (2002, p. 21), "any and all languages are divided [...] and this division is marked by a hierarchy of identities. That is, this division unequally distributes speakers according to the values that pertain to this hierarchy" [my translation]. In his text, Guimarães refers to the varieties of the Portuguese language in the Brazilian enunciative space, but it seems to me that his reflection may be extended to disputes between two different languages – Portuguese and English in this case – in the same enunciative space as constructed by media discourse in particular. In the ads under analysis, the spectator is placed *between* Portuguese and English, in a hierarchical dispute which discloses issues of legitimacy, inclusion and exclusion.

Final thoughts

Concluding this paper, one can see how certain ideologies are established and reinforced in Brazilian media discourse through the production and circulation of a hegemonic discourse about the need that *all Brazilians* should know English, while this discourse is contradicted by veiled meanings that English should remain the possession of a (already) selected segment of individual citizens. Through various means English is also covertly constructed as a more legitimate language than Portuguese.

My final claim is that in a country in which so many are excluded from access to quality education or to any kind of education at all, these discourses only contribute to the reinforcement of this exclusion by imaginarily and symbolically placing individuals across an enunciative space that unequally distributes two languages, Portuguese and English, and that, as a result, also unequally segments groups of individuals. On one end are those who are able to respond to the Market's call and who, therefore, identify with the maxims of this discourse (i.e., that mastering English is an absolute necessity, that it is the individual's own responsibility to go after the skills that are required by the job market, and so on). On the other end are those who are excluded from the start because they "survive without English" and are thus not fit for the global market.

The emphasis on the view of languages as commodities and on the market value of languages, present in Brazilian media discourse, contributes to the production of a reductionist concept of languages and of the possible relationships between individuals and one or more languages. Although a discussion about foreign language teaching and learning in secondary school education in Brazil is beyond the scope of this paper, the scenario drawn by Brazilian media discourse vis-à-vis the English language, as illustrated by this analysis, certainly produces significant and lasting effects on the minds of individuals concerned with this field (educators, learners, policy-making administrators) and on their discourses and actions.

In fact, we start wondering how much of this hegemonic view of the English language as a commodity has already influenced educators, learners and families, when we consider that a pervasive statement (*énoncé*) in discourses that circulate in schools is that "English language learning does not take place in (State-run) schools". Or when we consider that one of the meanings which can be attributed to this statement is that there is no learning of English *because* the process is not geared towards teaching the students the tools required by the market. One wonders therefore how State-run school students feel when confronted with a hegemonic discourse that attributes just *one* meaning to the English language – i.e., its market value – and disregard all other possible objectives of foreign language learning and all school practices in teaching a foreign language.

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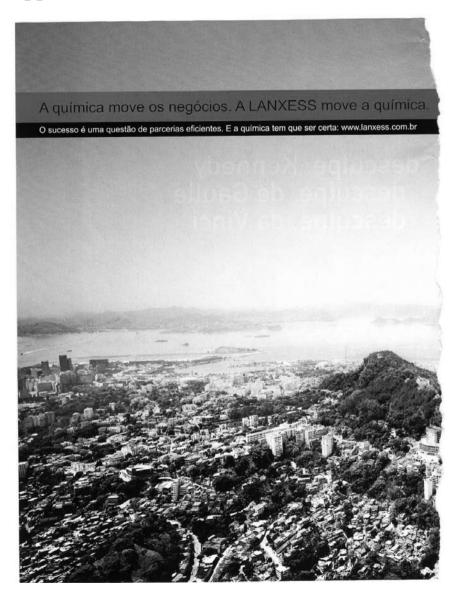
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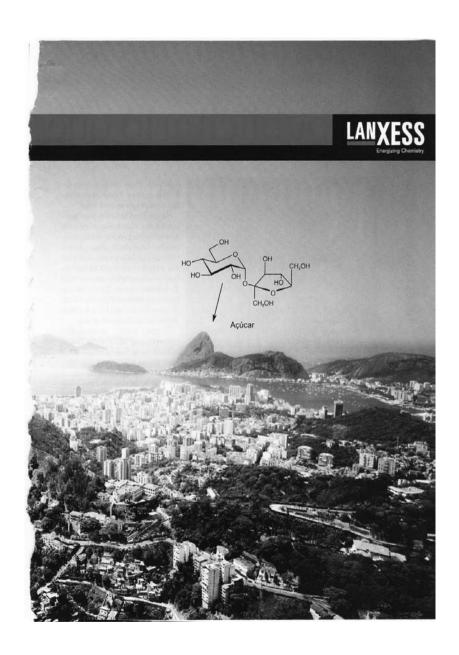
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Appendix 1





Appendix 2



Appendix 3

