The Promise of English: Regimes of Truth, Power/Knowledge, and Neoliberal Rationalities in Colombia. A Foucauldian Analysis.

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Dedicatoria y agradecimientos:

"La utopía está en el horizonte. Camino dos pasos, ella se aleja dos pasos y el horizonte se corre diez pasos más allá. ¿Entonces para qué sirve la utopía? Para eso, sirve para caminar."

— ***Eduardo Galeano***

Esta investigación está dedicada a todes les que nos dedicamos a la labor docente y creemos que la educación merece ser la posibilidad que nos permita ser sujetes críticxs de la transformación social. Para quienes pensamos que el progreso no debe medirse en números, políticas o cifras, y menos aún de manera individual o aislada. En lugar de ello, debe considerarse progreso todo aquello que contribuya a la transformación social de las comunidades y al bien común, teniendo en cuenta la idiosincrasia de las realidades y contextos a los que asistimos.

Aunque sabemos que no es una lucha fácil, yo quiero seguir caminando. Ojalá de la mano de otres.

Quiero agradecer a mi alma máter, la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, por contribuir a la construcción de sujetes críticxs, por formarme, darme esperanza y enseñarme el verdadero significado de la docencia, tanto durante el pregrado como ahora en la maestría.

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Resumen

Esta tesis sostiene que la institucionalización de la educación en inglés en Colombia no surgió de forma natural ni simplemente como un proyecto de mejora educativa. En cambio, fue posible gracias a una serie de condiciones históricas, políticas y económicas que posicionaron al inglés como una herramienta para reproducir el conocimiento hegemónico y las racionalidades neoliberales.

Utilizando los conceptos de arqueología y genealogía de Michel Foucault, el estudio rastrea cómo el inglés se vinculó con el poder, la modernización, la ciencia, la movilidad y la competitividad. Muestra que, tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, el auge de Estados Unidos, la creación de organizaciones internacionales como la ONU, el Banco Mundial y el Consejo de Europa, y la expansión de la influencia política y económica occidental contribuyeron a establecer el inglés como lengua global de legitimidad y progreso.

La tesis también explica cómo los marcos lingüísticos europeos, como el Nivel Umbral y el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia (MCER), estandarizaron el aprendizaje y la evaluación de idiomas, convirtiendo el inglés en una habilidad medible y comparable. En Colombia, estos modelos se adoptaron mediante políticas como el Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo y Colombia *Very Well!*, que presentan el inglés como esencial para la competitividad, la empleabilidad y la integración en la economía global.

El autor concluye que estas políticas funcionan como tecnologías de poder: clasifican a los alumnos, regulan a los profesores, privilegian estándares e instituciones extranjeras y marginan lenguas, conocimientos y contextos locales. Como resultado, la educación en inglés en Colombia refuerza la desigualdad social y las formas coloniales de conocimiento en lugar de garantizar la igualdad de oportunidades.

Palabras clave: Política lingüística, Neoliberalismo, Análisis del discurso, Genealogía foucaultiana, Poder, Enseñanza del inglés en Colombia.

Abstract

This thesis argues that the institutionalization of English-language education in Colombia did not emerge naturally or simply as an educational improvement project. Instead, it was made possible by a series of historical, political, and economic conditions that positioned English as a tool for reproducing hegemonic knowledge and neoliberal rationalities.

Using Michel Foucault's concepts of archaeology and genealogy, the study traces how English came to be associated with power, modernization, science, mobility, and competitiveness. It shows that after World War II, the rise of the United States, the creation of international organizations such as the UN, World Bank, and Council of Europe, and the spread of Western political and economic influence helped establish English as a global language of legitimacy and progress.

The thesis also explains how European language frameworks such as the Threshold Level and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) standardized language learning and assessment, turning English into a measurable, comparable skill. In Colombia, these models were adopted through policies such as the National Bilingualism Program and Colombia Very Well, which continue to frame English as essential for competitiveness, employability, and integration into the global economy.

The author concludes that these policies function as technologies of power: they classify learners, regulate teachers, privilege foreign standards and institutions, and marginalize local languages, knowledges, and contexts. As a result, English education in Colombia reinforces social inequality and colonial forms of knowledge rather than guaranteeing equal opportunity.

Keywords: Language policy, Neoliberalism, Discourse Analysis, Foucauldian Genealogy, Power, English language teaching in Colombia

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CHAPTER I: The Making of English as Necessity: Discourse, Power, and Neoliberalism in Colombia

The problem: English Will Save You?

The dominant discourses in the spread of English as necessary in various contexts in developing countries have been associated with access to the "wonders of the modern world," such as science, technology, power, international communication, and intercultural understanding (Crystal, 2000; Nunan, 2001, as cited in Guerrero, 2010). However, this assumption contrasts with reality. The imposition of English as a primary requirement for accessing educational and labor-related benefits across various contexts has led governments in developing countries to implement policies and plans to promote its learning, as it is considered the lingua franca that supposedly enables social mobility and economic opportunity. Yet, the outcomes have not aligned with these expectations. English learning and teaching have been reduced to the mastery of a linguistic code, in which teachers are instrumentalized to reproduce colonial forms of knowledge and practices under the guise of progress, understood primarily in economic terms. In this regard, Granados-Beltrán (2022) argues that "the language policy has been critiqued for the excessive incidence of transnational entities, such as the British Council, in comparison to that of local academics." (p. 630) In this sense, the language policy has been implemented by the Colombian Ministry of Education, without sufficient consideration of the reality and diversity of local contexts. Gonzalez, as cited by Granados-Beltran (2002), affirms that "the imposed leading role of the British Council holds back the development of a local community with enough validity to

construct the language policy."[1] Consequently, it is observed nowadays that different slogans and campaigns are promoted to learning English under various façades: "Learn with native teachers and experts in native pronunciation" (Open English); "learn a second language which is a means to fulfil your goals" (Smart); "learn all the Common European Framework of Reference levels in English (CEFR)" (American School Way); "We empowered Colombians through the transformative force of bilingualism" (Centro Colombo Americano); and "Studying abroad, finding international jobs, expanding your professional network, and helping children and young people begin to build future success all have one thing in common: English courses" (British Council)[2].

All these mottos present English as a gateway to improve living conditions; however, they also conceal problematic ideologies, such as native speakerism, "a pervasive ideology within ELT, characterized by the belief that 'native-speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology" (Holliday 2006, p. 385). As a result, discrimination against non-native English-speaking teachers might be an issue, manifesting in fewer opportunities and professional marginalization.

Another widespread misconception concerns the notion of "learning a second language", which is only fully possible "when the target language is taught/learned in the country where it is spoken (for example, learning English in the USA)" (Převrátilová, 2023, p. 92). Additional misconceptions include the belief that learning English can be standardized through the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This European framework remains distant from homegrown realities and overlooks the contributions and knowledge of local academics. In these campaigns, English is portrayed as the key to success in life, implying that those who do not speak it will be unable to access

[1] Retrieve from: https://revistas.udea.edu.co/index.php/ikala/article/view/349090/20811485
[2] Information taken for the intitutions' websites. Free translation by the autor.

opportunities or build a successful future. Moreover, English is frequently promoted as a pathway to international employment and education, while local labor and needs are rendered secondary.

In the labor market and according to the Statistical Analysis Report No. 69 issued by the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (2023), English proficiency was required or desirable for applicants in 78% of job opportunities in Colombia in 2021. Likewise, a study conducted by ANIF and Portafolio in 2025 finds that those who speak English fluently can earn up to 30% more than those who do not master the language and are 24.5% more likely to secure better-paid positions. In this context, global competition and the growing internationalization of the economy are making English an almost indispensable requirement (Guerrero, 2022). Administrative and support services, as well as public administration, are the sectors that most frequently require English proficiency. At the same time, artistic and real estate activities are the least demanding in this regard (ANIF, 2024). Additionally, evidence suggests that positions requiring English tend to require fewer months of prior work experience than those that do not include this qualification. The education level required for positions that demand English is split between secondary school graduates and university professionals. This indicates that mastery of English may, in certain contexts, partially compensate for the lack of a labor trajectory, serving as a substitute for professional experience (ANIF, 2025) rather than a complementary requirement.

These findings suggest that imposing English as a requirement or predominant language choice might contribute to the precarization of labor conditions, the reduction of professional opportunities, and the emergence of academic barriers. In many contexts, speaking English is perceived as sufficient to meet companies' demands, often disregarding academic background and other forms of knowledge. To illustrate this, some educational institutions have adopted the figure of the so-called “self-contained teachers”, who are expected to teach multiple subjects in English despite lacking pedagogical training or

disciplinary knowledge in those areas. Conversely, some professionals choose to seek employment in phone-in service companies, such as call or contact centers, as the income offered in these positions may exceed that of their trained professions. The discourses that present English as bringing only benefits have been disseminated and continue to circulate thanks to those who hold power (Foucault, 2005, as cited in Guerrero, 2010).

Despite the demands imposed by companies and the programs implemented by public and private institutions to improve English proficiency, the most recent results of the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) 2025 reveal that Colombia remains at a 'low' proficiency level and that its performance has declined compared to 2024. According to this report, Colombia is the fourth-worst-performing country in Latin America in terms of English proficiency (El Tiempo, 2025). While the report highlights a modest improvement in Latin America, it also indicates that reading skills in Colombia performed better than oral expression (EF, 2025). At the national level, the EF ranking reveals significant territorial gaps and disparities among regions and capital cities, which may pose an additional challenge for English-language education. Although these data suggest that a strong command of English is a key factor in improving educational and employment prospects, they also expose deeper structural problems and persistent inequalities within the country's English-language education system.

Research on English language teaching in Colombia and other Latin American countries[3], such as Chile, Ecuador, Argentina, and Honduras, has documented teachers' discomfort with the rigid pacing schedules and standardized curricula they are required to follow. These curricular frameworks, often aligned with CEFR expectations, tend to overlook national and local contexts while prioritizing economic market expansion, which may be one

[3] Some of the revised studies include: Neoliberalismo y proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa en Chile: una mirada dialéctica al estado del arte en sectores vulnerables. Yasna Yilorm Barrientos, Haydeé Acosta Morales. (2016), Poder y conocimiento: análisis Foucaultiano de la reforma educativa en Honduras. Clara Elizabeth Chávez Suazo (2025), and El Inglés Como Lengua Extranjera en el Contexto Universitario Ecuatoriano. Eder Intriago, Jhonny Villafuerte, Johanna Bello y Doris Cevallos (2019)

reason English proficiency has not improved significantly. The national report of the Saber 11 examination issued by the Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación (ICFES) reveals that, between 2017 and 2024, the predominant level of English among public school examinees remained at A-, with 37% to 57% of students performing at this level, indicating that a significant portion remains below the expected level (B+). Only 2% of the tested students achieved a B+ level. In contrast, 25% of students attending private schools were positioned at levels A1 and A2, while 66% fall within the B1 and B+ levels.

These findings show that, notwithstanding governmental efforts, progress in English proficiency has been minimal, particularly in the public sector. In this regard, Guerrero (2010) argues that the Basic Standards for Competences in Foreign Languages in Colombia fail to uphold their promise of guaranteeing, among others, access to equality, since:

> English is associated with power, learning, science and civilization; at the same time is promoted as the language of equity, but in fact, it contributes to the delivery and perpetuation of privilege and inequality because it favors the advantaged groups who have access to the right sort of linguistic capital (p. 301).

Therefore, this discourse of equality falls short, as it fails to account for existing social gaps. Standardized examinations such as Saber 11 or Saber Pro are unfairly designed insofar as they privilege a specific type of knowledge while disregarding the conditions under which education is imparted and the unequal access to technological, economic, and other resources. For instance, elite private bilingual schools often offer intensive English instruction (between eight and twenty hours per week), and in some cases, provide content instruction in both English and Spanish. In contrast, public schools typically have two to three hours per week and face overcrowded classrooms of up to 50 students (Guerrero, 2010). This inequality partially explains the previously mentioned disparities between public and private institutions in the English component of the Saber 11 test.

From a Foucauldian perspective, knowledge functions as a mechanism of control, generalizing, normalizing, and homogenizing ways of being through dynamics of power and dominance that shape what is recognized as legitimate knowledge (Foucault, 1976). In the case of English language learning, it has been positioned as the most relevant to acquire. According to Nussbaum, as cited by Guerrero (2016), “this emphasis on English reflects a broader neoliberal agenda in which economic growth and global recognition are prioritized, frequently at the expense of vulnerable populations and their quality of life. This is the ideological framework within which public policies are formulated.” (p. 21).

A study conducted by Guerrero in 2010, which analyzed the Ministry of Education’s publication of the Basic Standards for Competences in English, reveals that knowledge of English has been discursively presented as granting “automatic and unlimited access to economic profits” (p. 297). However, the economic benefits associated with English proficiency tend to favor more international organizations, such as the British Council, which has coordinated Colombia’s National Bilingualism Plan (PNB)[4] and provided teacher training programs, textbooks, instructional materials, and proficiency tests; resources that are often costly and inaccessible to large segments of the population. In this regard, Soto-Molina and Méndez, and Torres-Rocha, as cited by Fandiño (2021), agree that:

> When it comes to English as a foreign language (EFL), colonial perspectives continue to prevail, circumscribing and limiting the nature of educational reforms and the scope of curricular projects. Therefore, it is necessary to take an epistemic turn that allows it to deconstruct discourses and practices that not only impose the thinking and culture of the Global North, but, above all, dominate the knowledge, power, and being of teachers, students, and institutions in the Global South (pg. 26).

[4]Retrieved from: https://www.britishcouncil.co/sobre/ingles-educacion-soluciones/historias-exitos/transformacion-sector-ensenanza-lengua-inglesa#:~:text=El%20Ministerio%20de%20Educación%20de%20Colombia%20y,del%20estado%20(Prueba%20Saber)%20desde%20el%202008.

Considering the above, English language instruction in Colombia extends beyond what is formally established in the paper, policies, or expected outcomes. Economic, ideological, and the dynamics of dominance rooted in historical processes of colonialism remain concealed. Among such mechanisms of dominance are international language proficiency exams and national tests such as *IELTS* or *Saber*, which are standardized and apply to everyone. These instruments define and regulate what counts as legitimate knowledge, reducing it to a single epistemological possibility while neglecting the power, being, and agency of all the major educational players. Moreover, these assessment tools and the policies that sustain them are rarely constructed with the voices of teachers, students, and institutions in mind.

Since English teaching in Colombia promotes colonial educational practices, it is important to analyze and reflect on the reasons behind the current educational policies governing this matter, as well as to recognize the significance and pertinence of considering decolonial pedagogical practices in the classroom. Therefore, this study aims to answer the question: *What historical conditions of possibility enabled the institutionalization of English-language education in Colombia to function as a mechanism for reproducing hegemonic forms of knowledge and neoliberal rationalities?* To frame this analysis, the following section presents the key concepts that are developed throughout the document.

Hegemonizing language practices in Colombia

Learning a second language in Colombia has been shaped not only by external agencies but also by a range of political, economic, and ideological interests. It dates to the nineteenth century, with the introduction of Latin and Greek in the missionary schools. Posteriorly, the growing ties between the old colonies and the Global North facilitated travel to England and France for children from the dominant elite, allowing, upon their return, the spread of these cultures and the teaching and learning of French as a symbol of that culture.

While the Second World War was being fought, an agreement between the British government and the Ministry of Education (MEN) in Colombia was signed in 1939, in which 5 teachers from the United Kingdom (UK) arrived in Bogotá Higher Normal Schools, to train and teach Colombian teachers English as a second language. “Since 1940, the British Council has been working in Colombia to promote educational and cultural relations to enhance the reputation of the UK in Colombia, running programs in the arts, education, governance, and English language.” (British Council Colombia, n. d). After the Second World War, the United States’ influence on economic, political, social, and technological development led to the prioritization of English teaching and learning over other languages. Consequently, teacher training programs gained popularity after the Idioms Electronic Institute (IEI) was founded in 1958, with support from the Ministry of Education, the British Council, and the French Embassy. In this context, education, and more specifically English language learning, emerged as a mechanism of domination through which notions of civilization and progress were imposed to legitimize particular mandates.

Considering Colombia’s historical political and educational backgrounds, this period, the second half of the twentieth century, was a period of transformation due to the partisan violence after Jorge Eliecer Gaitan’s murder in 1948 and the emergence of the National Front, an agreement that allowed the alternation of power between the main political parties from 1958 to 1974. Therefore, education became linked to the notion of development derived from economic theories and the incumbent government. As a result, education started to be understood as a means for training and improving the population (Galeano & Bastidas, 2016, p. 27). Consequently, Colombian educational authorities began to implement strategies and alliances to improve foreign language teaching and learning. Quintanilla (1971, as cited by Galeano & Bastidas, 2016) reports that:

> One of the strategies adopted by the Ministry of National Education (MEN) was to seek support from several organizations, such as the United States Information

> Service (USIS), the Fulbright Commission, and the Kellogg Foundation, to organize seminars for English teachers. To this end, these organizations invited American lecturers and consultants, who began to disseminate new linguistic and psychological trends derived from Structural Linguistics and Behaviorist Psychology. To provide official support for these activities. (…) In 1962, the Colombo-American Linguistic Institute (ILCA) was founded through an agreement between the Ministry of National Education (MEN) and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the United States. The institute was devoted to the following activities: training English teachers in topics related to applied linguistics, such as phonetics and phonology, morphology and syntax, contrastive analysis, the audiolingual method, and the use of audiovisual aids; offering English courses for teachers; and developing instructional guides for the teaching of English in secondary schools. (p. 28)

Since then, various laws and programs aimed at promoting the teaching and learning of English have been implemented, often aligned with international standards and neoliberal education reforms, such as the General Law of Education in 1994, which makes mandatory the teaching of at least one foreign language; the Colombian Framework of English (COFE) project (1991-1997), the result of an arrangement between the government of the UK and Colombia which goal was to improve the teaching of English in secondary schools in Colombia and English teacher training courses (Rubiano, Frodden & Cardona, 2000); the Curricular Guidelines for Foreign Languages in 1999, establishing methodologies, pedagogical approaches, and performance indicators to be achieved. Other programs with similar purposes were English Discoveries, Bilingual Bogota and Cundinamarca, National Bilingualism Program (2004 - 2019), and the Project for the Strengthening of Foreign Language Competence Development (2010 - 2014), aiming at strengthening the foreign language communicative competencies and the integration of human capital into the

knowledge economy and the labor market (MEN, 2013). There was also the establishment of the Bilingualism Law in 2013, *Colombia Very Well* (2014-2025), and the Bilingual Colombia policy (2014 – 2018). (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016).

It could be argued that the introduction of English as it is understood today has been influenced by foreign relationships aimed at promoting external culture, knowledge, systems, and the methodologies used to replicate them. Fandiño (2021) asserts that "foreign language teaching (FLT) is caught between subalternating policies and subjectivizing practices" (p. 25), as teachers are required to engage in guidelines and mechanisms that constrain their pedagogical practices. Considering Foucault's archaeology of knowledge (1983), a method proper to the analysis of local discursivities and genealogies, understanding history from a non-linear perspective is necessary to unveil hidden truths in what is known. Therefore, understanding Colombia's background in language teaching and learning, from this approach, and how it has been structured throughout history, is essential to this study for comprehending the relationships between power and hegemonic knowledge.

Knowledge as a mechanism of control

From a Foucauldian perspective, in *Society Must Be Defended* (1976), Foucault asserts that the problem of knowledge relies on its disciplinarization beginning in the eighteenth century. At that time, the relationship between power and individuals' rights was governed by the belief, or "ritual," of *public might*, which assumed that individuals possessed the will to act autonomously yet within socially expected norms. Foucault illustrates this idea through the ritualized nature of monarchical power:

> The court is basically a kind of permanent ritual operation that begins again every day and requalifies a man who gets up, goes for a walk, eats, has his loves and his passions, and who is at the same time —thanks to all that, because of all that, and

> because none of all that is eliminated— a sovereign. The specific operation of court ritual and court ceremonial is to make his love affairs sovereign, to make his food sovereign, to make his levee and his going-to-bed ritual sovereign. And while the court constantly requalifies his daily routine as sovereign in the person of a monarch who is the very substance of monarchy. (p. 175)

Subsequently, Foucault asserts that the state operates as an interventionist force that normalizes and homogenizes ways of being through power relations, with direct consequences for the construction of knowledge: “the genealogy of knowledge is located on (…) the discourse-power axis [*therefore*] knowledge must first —before it does anything else— outwit the problematic of the Enlightenment”. (1976, p. 178). In this sense, a tension emerges between what is considered legitimate knowledge, or, in Foucault’s words, a “multiple battle between knowledges”, and the role of power in determining which forms of knowledge are validated over others. To exemplify this, Foucault takes the so-called technical or technological knowledge and dismantles the idea that the eighteenth century marked the emergence of the Enlightenment. He argued that multiple forms of knowledge already existed worldwide; however, the Enlightenment began to marginalize experiential and local knowledges, which “were defined by local categories, education, and the wealth of their possessors.” As a result, access to these knowledges became a privilege and symbol of status and prestige, since owning the “secret of knowledge” functioned as a guarantee for independence and wealth. In other words, local knowledges were appropriated by those in positions of power and with economic capacity, enabling them to hierarchize, classify, and control knowledges. Foucault (1976, p. 181) refers to two key examples of this process. The first is the *Encyclopédie*, which he interprets as an attempt to homogenize *technical knowledges* while functioning simultaneously as a political and economic project to centralize knowledge. The second example concerns medical knowledge, which was progressively standardized through the imposition of homogeneous rules upon the

population, leading to the establishment of medical societies, hospitals, and public health policies. These cases illustrate what Foucault conceptualizes as disciplinary power and an interventionist state, characterized by four main goals: the elimination and discrediting of *false knowledges*; the normalization and homogenization of knowledge contents; the hierarchization of knowledge from the subordinated knowledges to general or formal ones; and the pyramidal centralization to regulate and control which knowledges can be transmitted (p. 183). This process of formalization and organization ultimately defined what came to be known as science or the progress of reason.

Following these developments, some key events occurred that help explain education as it is understood today. First, the establishment of the university in the nineteenth century consolidated it as an institution whose "primary function is one of selection, not so much of people (which is, after all, basically not very important) as of knowledges. (…) Its role is to homogenize knowledges by establishing a sort of scientific community with a recognized status" (Foucault, 1976, p. 183). Second, a shift toward dogmatism occurred. From a Foucauldian perspective, this shift involved moving away from the internal discipline of knowledge based on hierarchy and the *orthodoxy of the statements,* a system that was costly as it censored what could be said and hindered the advancement of knowledge. Under this new paradigm, regulation no longer focused on the truth or falsity of statements, but rather on who was authorized to speak and the level at which the statement was situated. Thus, orthodoxy was replaced by disciplinarization, or *orthology*, giving rise to a form of epistemic liberalism that enabled the emergence of new epistemologies and the constant renewal of knowledge. In brief, the control of knowledge shifted from the censorship of content to the regulation of the conditions for its production and circulation, resulting in a new dispositif, one that is apparently more flexible in terms of content, yet more extensive and rigorous in its control over discourse.

Similar to the previous section, these shifts and transformations in the evolution of knowledge, along with the consolidation of the university as the institution that validates knowledge, give rise to several inferences. The first concerns the dissemination and imposition of specific discourses. According to Foucault, as cited in Fandiño (2021, p. 27), discourse can be understood as the system through which socially dominant groups construct a universal notion of reality and truth by imposing particular forms of knowledge and values upon subordinated groups. In the context of English language teaching and learning in Colombia, discourses from the Global North have predominated in policy-making processes and curricular design. The references used to construct these policies do not necessarily reflect the country's social and educational realities; rather, they tend to reflect the economic and political agendas of the incumbent government, as well as its relationships and alliances with anglophone powers, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States. Related to this, the university, and its role in hierarchizing and legitimizing knowledge, functions as a mechanism for producing individuals whose skills and subjectivities align with the demands of capitalism and global markets. A second concern relates to the role of science. Within the scope of this study, applied linguistics is positioned as a scientific discipline that studies the acquisition and learning of languages and their use across diverse contexts. However, following a Foucauldian line, scientific knowledge is preferred as the only legitimate form of knowledge, thereby generating new demands for forms of knowledge that can be invested within the economic and political systems. In this sense, English language learning emerges as an imposed necessity that favors the expansion and maintenance of dominant global powers.

An approach to neoliberalism

Within the scope of this study, understanding neoliberalism and contemporary forms of capitalism is essential, as this research examines how hegemonizing forms of knowledge

have been shaped by neoliberal agendas and rationalities that influence the teaching and learning of English in Colombia. These processes have largely prioritized dominant social groups while marginalizing subordinated groups and minoritized populations. Cepeda Masmela (2019) alleges that neoliberalism can be defined from multiple theoretical frameworks, since its emergence cannot be traced to a single historical moment or geographical location. Rather, it was a response to specific political and socioeconomic conditions, as well as the expansion of free-market logic. Drawing on Wendy Brown's (2003, 2006) conceptualization, Cepeda explains that neoliberalism is best understood as a form of political rationality that governs the behavior of individuals and societies across all spheres of life, grounded in values such as efficiency, competitiveness, and individual success (p. 30). Similarly, Steger & Roy (2010, as cited in Cepeda, 2019) argue that neoliberalism can take different forms. First, it operates as an ideology, seeking to disseminate and normalize free-market ideas among actors such as transnational corporations, intellectuals, and politicians. Second, neoliberalism functions as a form of governmentality, characterized by values such as competitiveness, individual interest, and decentralization. Finally, a set of public policies aimed at economic deregulation and privatization processes. In this regard, Steger & Roy conceive neoliberalism as a phenomenon that permeates politics, the economy, social organization, and individuals' everyday lives (Cepeda, 2019, p. 51). Both definitions highlight that neoliberalism not only reshapes economic and political structures but also influences individuals' subjectivities and ways of being.

From a Foucauldian perspective, liberalism and neoliberalism can be understood through the concept of biopower. As explained by Foucault (as cited in Aguirre, 2023, p. 22), biopower is "understood as a dispositif that conditions and combines the entire space of human existence and history to reproduce and control society." From this standpoint, biopower can be identified in the Colombian educational system, where different institutions

intervene to regulate which languages should be learned and which contents should be taught. In this sense, and taking into consideration the elements mentioned by Steger & Roy, linguistics as a scientific discipline operates as an ideological state apparatus insofar as English is assumed to be a necessary language for improving individuals' opportunities regarding social mobility, employment, and education. This assumption is constantly promoted by the Ministry of Education and reinforced through language policies that align with international standards. Biopower, according to Foucault, constitutes a practice of knowledge and power that seeks to permeate individuals' lives in accordance with market demands (Andrada, 2024).

In Colombia, neoliberal policies have exhibited a strong ideological component, leading to serious consequences, including the privatization of public services, labor precarization, outsourcing, and repeated attempts to privatize public education (Botero Arango, 2021). The discourse of development has largely favored dominant classes. The neoliberal model was formally adopted in Colombia in 1991 under the administration of César Gaviria Trujillo, as part of an effort to address the country's long-standing history of violence. This shift was captured in Gaviria's slogan, "Welcome to the future" (Botero Arango, 2021). In this regard, Diaz (2009) claims that:

> The change in the economic model was directly related to the prevailing power relations in the country. As a result, not only were the principles of the Colombian economy established, but so were those of the State through the implementation of a neoliberal mode of thought. This implementation did not occur through democratic mechanisms, but rather through the exclusion of the other and the physical elimination of the opponent— that is, through the reinforcement of an authoritarian political culture (p. 226).

Consequently, neoliberalism has contributed to the deterioration of democracy, the economy, and human rights, while deeply shaping language policy-making processes in Colombia.

External debt and education policies

A large part of the discussion so far has focused on economic and political discourses that permeate education policies and create dispositifs of power. In this context, examining mechanisms such as the external debt is essential. External debt is a widely used instrument for developing countries to obtain the resources necessary to implement economic development plans and increase productive capacity (Banrepcultural, n. d.). According to this definition, external debt can help improve a country's administration by providing the resources necessary to ensure its proper functioning and development. However, as noted by Rubio, Ojeda & Montes[5], over-indebtedness has prevailed since the 1980s, adversely affecting social and economic development. Consequently, countries often need to increase taxes, which can make investment by private companies and international investors riskier and less profitable (Banrepcultural, n. d.). The major international creditors include the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, as well as private banks, foreign governments, and international investors. This is particularly relevant in Colombia, where most of the external debt resources have been allocated to mega-projects, military infrastructure, energy, and mining (Tobón, 1990). Within the framework of capitalism and neoliberal policies, the World Bank promotes economic development through capital investment, often privileging infrastructure over education (Torres, 2006, p. 69).

Torres (2006) explains that policymaking is shaped by two main elements: privatization and reduction in public expenditure:

[5] Retrieved from: https://enciclopedia.banrepcultural.org/index.php?title=Deuda_externa

> These policies (privatization policies) are crucial elements of market-oriented reforms and, as such, constitute an important political instrument of neoliberalism. On the one hand, privatization reduces fiscal expenditure pressures by transferring public sector enterprises to private ownership. On the other hand, privatization also serves as a powerful instrument for depoliticizing the State's regulatory practices, particularly in public education policy.

Such principles contrast with those outlined in the Colombian Ministry of Education's Public Education Policy (2022-2038), which emphasizes reducing social gaps and ensuring access to education for all people in Colombia. In this context, the World Bank promotes an instrumental perspective of knowledge, prioritizing market efficiency over social or contextual needs:

> Educational policies are directed not so much toward improving the use-value of human labor as toward enhancing its exchange-value. Stabilization policies, fiscal conditionalities, and economic measures subordinated to export-oriented policies emerge as political priorities applied in a relatively homogeneous manner globally, without regard for context-dependent conditions. These measures appear legitimate within the framework of the internationalization and globalization of capitalism, and are particularly fully compatible with notions of normal science and planning, as well as with positivism as the dominant mode of thought within international organizations (Torres, 2006).

Institutions like the World Bank operate under an instrumental logic that often overlooks the historical and social conditions of the nations in which they intervene. In Colombia, this instrumental perspective helps explain why English has been positioned as a necessary subject in most curricular designs. The promotion of bilingualism responds not only to global labor market demands but also to the structural pressures imposed by external debt and international financial institutions. In this sense, English-language education

functions as a neoliberal *dispositif*, shaping individual aspirations and behaviors in alignment with economic and political obligations.

The concepts discussed so far are essential for the development of the subsequent chapters, in which the methodological framework of this study will be presented. This framework is based on discourse analysis and draws on Michel Foucault's notions of the archaeology of knowledge and genealogy. These approaches are particularly useful, as they focus, on the one hand, on describing discourses and discursive formations, and on the other, on examining the power relations that emerge around knowledge.

Given that this study seeks to explore the historical conditions of possibility that enabled the institutionalization of English language education in Colombia to function as a mechanism for reproducing hegemonic forms of knowledge and neoliberal rationalities, a Foucauldian perspective proves especially relevant. Rather than approaching history as a linear progression, this perspective allows for an analysis grounded in discontinuities, making visible the conditions that enable the emergence, transformation, and persistence of discourses and discursive practices.

With this in mind, the following sections will first provide a detailed definition of archaeology and genealogy, along with the categories and subcategories that will later guide the analysis of these conditions of possibility. The analysis will focus on key geopolitical moments essential to addressing the research question.

CHAPTER II: A Foucauldian Approach to Discourse Analysis: Archaeology, Genealogy, and Method

Discourse and Discursive Practices

One of the issues raised by Foucault (1971) in *The Order of Discourse* is precisely that discourse presents certain tensions, as it appears, at first glance, to be something innocent; however, it is in fact "fearsome, perhaps even malevolent," and "not transparent or neutral," (p. 12) since access to speech is permeated and marginalized by the truth imposed by institutions and Western culture, which institutionalizes forms of knowledge and, therefore, controls what can be said. This phenomenon, in both oral and written expression, is nothing more than the consolidation of a scientific discourse that seeks to domesticate and maintain docile subjects who believe they think, but in reality, only say what they are allowed to say. In other words, there is a constant struggle between the desire to "let oneself be carried away" by intuition and the need to fit into a social order by following laws and what is canonically established, since the institution provides a kind of false security in which it states: "There is no reason to be afraid of beginning; we are all here to show you that discourse belongs to the order of laws (…) and that, if it has any power, it is from us, and from us alone, that it derives it." (p. 13)

From this point, Foucault argues that discourse is linked to desire and power, insofar as it "is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but that for which, and by means of which, one struggles, the power which one seeks to appropriate" (p. 15). Hence, the existence of internal and external mechanisms of control.

External mechanisms function as prohibitions that place power and desire in tension. First, they include the *forbidden speech*, or the extent to which one can speak about a given topic. This mechanism understands discourse as an object of desire, since speech is privileged, and therefore everyone seeks to appropriate it while simultaneously attempting

to universalize it. Secondly, there is the *separation of madness*, or the opposition between reason and madness. The former corresponds to a technified form of knowledge that "reveals hidden truths" (p. 16), often presented as unique; the latter, however, is associated with the genius or the mad person, whose discourse is considered incomprehensible, false, or null, and is therefore rejected by the institutionalized character of reason, even if it may contain truths. Finally, the *will to truth* operates as an external mechanism through which institutions define what is true and false, coercing truth and justifying forms of action and social control.

These external mechanisms are reflected in the formation of discourse societies in which access to knowledge is limited to certain groups and disciplines, such as medicine, economics, or politics. Thus, the *will to truth* or *volonté de savoir,* apart from being a mechanism through which institutions dictate what counts as true, it also prescribes who is allowed to speak that truth. Similarly, religious or philosophical doctrines recognize the same truths and rules approved by socially valid discourses; that is, if one adheres to a particular ideology, its truths cannot be contested, even when they contradict individual desire. In other words, some discourses are elevated, such as the scientific, and others that do not fit are suppressed even if they are true.

Up to this point, it can be argued that one of the institutions that has most influenced the configuration of discourse as a tool of order, surveillance, and social control is the school. Rather than serving exclusively as a space for human development and emancipation, it has become a center of domestication responding to political and economic interests aligned with Western modes of thought, in which, as Foucault (1992) suggests, "there should be as little space as possible between thought and speech" (p. 47). A clear example of this can be found in the teaching profession, where national assessment systems permeate both pedagogical practices and academic content. Ultimately, what is expected is that students perform well on standardized tests and achieve results that contribute to institutional

prestige. In this way, increasingly more tools of measurement and standardization are created to validate a dominant type of knowledge, hence Western knowledge. In Foucauldian terms, this reflects two tensions: on the one hand, a *logophilia*, in which an elevated discourse is that which complies with the will to truth and is therefore well-regarded; on the other hand, a *logophobia*, characterized by fear that "the richness of discourse might be diminished"(p. 51), leading to the rejection of different or non-elevated discourses.

In relation to these external mechanisms, if we consider the specific case of the inclusion of English as the preferred language, due to the supposed opportunities it provides for market expansion and access to opportunities, we observe a series of contradictions. Among these is the requirement of international language exams that follow Eurocentric, dominant, decontextualized, and exclusionary criteria, detached from local culture. Formal education alone is not considered sufficient. Evidently, these criteria have largely been established by institutions such as the British Council and the Council of Europe. From the perspective of the *separation of madness*, we observe a technified and rationalized character of knowledge in both form and content, as these exams and the textbooks used for teaching English must fit specific stylistic and content structures, while discourse must be comprehensible and accepted, that is, controlled, in this case by major publishers such as Cambridge or Oxford. Finally, the most dominant mechanism appears to be *the will to truth*, since it requires reliance on Western discourses for validation. Locally produced knowledge must be validated by external sources to be considered legitimate, making the production of new, autonomous knowledge nearly impossible. In Foucault's terms, this reflects a form of philistinism that adopts the control procedures of scientific discourse.

Turning now to *internal mechanisms* of control, Foucault argues that these refer to how discourse regulates and controls itself. The first of these is the *commentary*, which includes everyday discourse, narratives, their historical transmission, and, more importantly, their interpretation and reinterpretation over time. For instance, discourses that position

English as a key tool for globalization, economic competitiveness, and national development have been reproduced over time through language policies. Although these discourses are reformulated to address social changes (*National Bilingualism Program* and *Colombia Bilingüe*), they continue to reinforce the idea that English proficiency is necessary for participating in global markets and modern society by perpetuating foundational ideas, such as the requirement to know English:

> In Colombia, English has shifted from being an added value to becoming a requirement. A 2024 World Bank study indicates that seven out of ten international companies operating in the country require English proficiency in their recruitment processes (…). This context has increased the demand for educational programs that adapt to adult learners, who must balance learning with work and personal responsibilities (Portafolio, 2025).

These discourses do not create a new English narrative but rather rearticulate and legitimize existing discourses within the boundaries of the original discourse.

Secondly, the *author* functions as a figure that organizes, grants truth-value, and delimits discourse, ensuring its coherence and validity within a specific type of knowledge so that it becomes normalized. In the field of English education in Colombia, an example is institutions that establish and institutionalize frameworks and standards, such as the Council of Europe, through documents like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which contribute to defining what counts as legitimate knowledge about language learning, teaching, and assessment. As this framework is widely adopted by governments, educational institutions, and testing systems, it shapes and regulates the production and circulation of discourse about English language proficiency.

Finally, *disciplines* limit the way in which discourse can be produced and establish the rules it must follow to belong to a particular field. As Foucault (1971) states, “discipline is a principle of control over the production of discourse. It fixes its limits through the play of

an identity that takes the form of a permanent reactivation of the rules." (p. 38). In the field of English education in Colombia, it can be noted that the CEFR establishes dominant parameters in designing and planning curricula within schools, educational institutions, and national or international tests; therefore, it can be understood as a disciplinary mechanism because it defines the standards, proficiency levels, and assessment criteria through which language learning is conceptualized and evaluated. As a result, curricula, teaching practices, and assessment privilege a particular understanding of language, constraining, shaping, and privileging certain forms of knowledge.

After conceptualizing the internal mechanism, it can be said that *discipline* remains the most difficult internal mechanism to challenge. While the *author* function allows for some transformation of discourse, *discipline*, as Foucault (1971) asserts, ensures that "no one may enter the order of discourse unless he satisfies certain requirements or is qualified to do so" (p. 39). Thus, we return to the issue of standardized tests and imposed criteria for validating knowledge.

It can therefore be argued that the teaching and learning of English function as a monopolized, universal, and colonizing form of knowledge. Once again, this reinforces the idea that education and schooling, from a Western perspective, reproduce privileged structures of knowledge and power and regulate access to discourse. This recalls Umberto Eco and *The Name of the Rose*, where religious doctrine subjugates those who attempt to access hidden truths. The Church and religion more broadly take advantage of their social and political status to shape discourse in ways that serve their interests, illustrating how the modern order of discourse exerts control over life.

From a Foucauldian perspective, discourses can be understood as producers of subjectivity (Boticelli, 2011). In this sense, discourses become discursive practices insofar as they are shaped by historical and social tensions that structure knowledge and exercise power. Discursive practices involve both theoretical and institutional discourses, which may

even give rise to institutions themselves. According to Foucault (1975), cited in Boticelli (2011), practices are more important than discourse itself:

> Discursive practices are not simply ways of producing discourse. They also take shape in sets of techniques, institutions, behavioral schemes, modes of transmission and diffusion, and pedagogical forms that both impose and sustain them. (p. 121)

Thus, discursive practices are part of social life since human relationships imply rules or agreements that are socially accepted or not. Hence, they are mediated by power struggles and ideology and are not "separate from or external to power dynamics" (Boticelli, 2011, p. 119). What Foucault suggests is that although discourse is not neutral, it functions as a mechanism of control that determines what is considered true or false, thereby limiting access to speech. In brief, *discourse* is a practice that is constructed and reproduced in a social group by a dominant one; it also implies knowledge and power struggles. For instance, as previously mentioned, there is a widespread belief that English provides access to employment and opportunities. On the other hand, the discursive practices, which establish what is accepted and supported, are represented, in this case, by institutions such as the British Council and the Council of Europe, as well as by mechanisms such as exams, universities, and publishing houses that disseminate and reinforce them.

The following section further expands on discourse and discursive practices, drawing on Foucault's archaeological and genealogical methodology, to better understand how they operate in real life.

The Archeology of Knowledge and The Genealogy

It has been argued before that English-language education has become intertwined with the interests of international agencies, which, under discourses such as "breaking barriers" or "global integration", establish partnerships with public and private institutions to commercialize standardized materials or curricula that reproduce hegemonic cultural values.

In this sense, English-language public policies function as a neoliberal rationality that regulates knowledge and educational practices in alignment with global market demands rather than local needs.

Under these circumstances and considering that discursive practices act as a mechanism to exert power, it becomes necessary to historically examine the reasons behind them, and the position English has gained over the last few decades, as well as the spread of the belief that it grants access to “the wonders of the world” (Guerrero, 2010). From a Foucauldian perspective, however, history as traditionally conceived has been constructed on notions of rationality that have denied the identity of things or ascribed to them a distinct identity, due to an attachment to truth and the rigor of scientific methods (Foucault, 1983).

Approaching history from a Foucauldian perspective entails resorting to the methods of genealogy and the archaeology of knowledge. On the one hand, genealogy is defined as a method for investigating how supposedly timeless or universal ideas arise from specific cultural, social, and political circumstances and at particular historical moments (Bashovski, n.d.). According to Foucault (1983), genealogy is documentary in nature; it arises from the recognition that history is neither linear nor homogeneous and should not conceal ruptures, discontinuities, or contingencies. Genealogy does not seek ideal explanations but rather seeks to understand how history and events shape different moments across different places, thereby acquiring meaning within a particular configuration of power and knowledge. On the other hand, the archeology of knowledge is a historical approach whose purpose relies on the description of the language in which Foucault names discursive formations and statements (1972). This description, though, is not a linguistic analysis; it is, then, the understanding of discursive sequences that have been formulated following specific rules and forms of power in specific contexts and geopolitical formations, which can be legitimized or not, and allow us to trace the conditions in which these were formulated (Boticelli, 2011).

In brief, the historical conditions of the emergence of discourses can be understood through archaeology and the strategies and tactics of power and domination through genealogy.

This approach will help this study analyze the conditions of possibility that enabled English as a foreign language to function as a mechanism for reproducing hegemonic forms of knowledge and neoliberal rationalities in Colombia. In this regard, Fandiño (2021) asserts that from a Foucauldian perspective, discourse operates as a system through which dominant social groups construct reality and truth by imposing certain knowledge and values on dominated groups. “Dominated dominators, some men dominate others, and thus the differentiation of values is born; (…) some men seize the things they need to live, impose on them a duration that they do not have.” (Foucault, 1983, p. 38). For instance, bilingualism in Colombia has been understood as the learning and speaking of English. Guerrero (2008) argues that “bilingualism means speaking English; bilingualism is a packed, monolithic and homogeneous concept” (p. 31) since “the promoters of the project oversimplified the number of languages that could be learned in a bilingual program and reduced it to one” (p. 35). Such a reduction obscures Colombia’s linguistic diversity.

Colombia is a plurilingual nation in which 65 out of the 70 languages spoken are indigenous. This represents about 600,000 Colombians whose mother tongue is not Spanish. These, like all other languages, are not only instruments that allow communication but also create links, articulate social relations, inherit cultural practices and traditions, and structure the thinking of communities. (Pesquisa Javeriana, 2023). Why, then, is bilingualism currently associated almost exclusively with the learning of English? Why is Colombia, historically a multilingual nation, represented as becoming “bilingual” only through the incorporation of English into the educational system? Colombia has never been a monolingual country. In fact, it is officially recognized as a multilingual and pluriethnic nation, with more than 65 Indigenous languages still spoken, in addition to two Creole languages and Romani. This linguistic diversity precedes the institutionalization of English by centuries.

Consequently, the contemporary discourse that frames bilingualism as synonymous with English proficiency does not simply describe a linguistic reality; it actively constructs one.

Foucault, throughout his proposal of discourse analysis, wants to show that discursive practices have implications and consequences of power (Nuñez, 2013); therefore, the purpose of the discourse analysis is not the content itself but rather its conditions of emergence, its rules, strategies, and effects in a specific place and time (Boticelli, 2011).

For this study, the analysis focuses on four key historical moments in which discourses surrounding language policy and English language education emerged or were reconfigured. These moments are examined through genealogical and archaeological lenses to identify the conditions of possibility that enabled the institutionalization of English in Colombia. The first period to be analyzed spans the second half of the 20th century, since, after the Second World War, a new international order emerged, with institutions such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe that established new initiatives related to education and language policies. The second moment corresponds to the Cold War and the expansion of Western cultural influence until the fall of the Berlin Wall, and to the reconfiguration of global power relations, in which English became the most widely spoken language and different discourses on multiculturalism emerged (Pennycook, 1994). The third encompasses the institutionalization of the European Language Policy from the 90s until 2001, with the creation of the Common European Framework of Reference, in which English language teaching and learning were standardized. Finally, the last moment will cover the period from 2004 to 2025, since the institutionalization of bilingual policies in Colombia began and the National Bilingualism Program was established, with the notion of English-language education as a priority.

The following table presents the chronological periodization that guides this study. Each period corresponds to a key historical moment when discourses on language, power,

and education were produced or transformed, thereby enabling the institutionalization of English-language education in Colombia.

Period	Time Frame	Historical Context	Key Discourses	Relevance for the Study
Post–World War II International Order	Second half of the 20th century (Up 1945)	Emergence of a new international order after the Second World War, with institutions such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe promoting cooperation in education, culture, and language policies.	Peace, cooperation, human rights, and internationalization	Establishes the global institutional framework that later enables the development of language policies and the positioning of English within international agendas.
Cold War and Western Cultural Expansion	Late 1950s to 1991.	Geopolitical tensions between ideological blocs and the expansion of Western influence, ending with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reconfiguration of global power relations.	Development, modernization, globalization, multiculturalism	English consolidates as a dominant global language linked to power, science, and international communication, shaping future educational and linguistic policies.
Institutionalization of European Language Policy	1990s to 2001	Development of European frameworks to regulate language teaching and learning, culminating in the creation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).	Standardization, mobility, comparability, linguistic competence	Establishes norms and standards that influence global language education, including the teaching, assessment, and certification of English.
Institutionalization of English language teaching and learning in Colombia	2004 to 2025	Implementation of national policies such as the National Bilingualism Program, positioning English as a priority within the educational system.	Competitiveness, global integration, economic development	Consolidates English as a central component of educational policy in Colombia, reinforcing its role in shaping knowledge, subjectivities, and opportunities.

Table 1- Periodization of the study

These four historical spans were considered in this study to understand how English has been prioritized in Colombia over other languages, such as Uitoto, Wayuunaiki, or Nasa Yuwe, since this reflects broader geopolitical hierarchies in which languages associated with economic power and global markets are positioned as more valuable. In this sense, English is not promoted solely as a communicative tool but as a marker of modernity, competitiveness, and global belonging. Thus, the discourse of bilingualism in Colombia can be understood as a strategic redefinition that obscures the country's longstanding multilingual condition while aligning educational policy with neoliberal rationalities. By equating bilingualism with English, alternative epistemologies, linguistic traditions, and local knowledges are rendered peripheral or invisible. What is at stake, therefore, is not merely language instruction, but the reconfiguration of knowledge, identity, and power within the national educational framework.

In the following sections, the components of this method will be explained in detail.

The Archeological Approach

As previously mentioned, archeology seeks to trace the historical conditions that make possible the emergence of certain discourses and discursive practices within particular contexts, thereby calling into question their universality. Under Foucault's approach, history is neither linear nor continuous; rather, it focuses on analyzing the conditions under which both discourses and practices emerge, transform, and become intelligible. In this sense, archeology focuses not only on the circumstances that enable the existence of a discourse, but also on the processes through which it is legitimized and consolidated as hegemonic. Thus, "archeology considers the discourse as an intertwined multiplicity that cannot be reduced to a closed or unchanging field (…) *insofar as* discourse participates in the construction of reality" (Núñez, 2013).

To understand the archaeology of knowledge, it is necessary to revisit the notions of power and knowledge. According to Foucault, as cited by Hernández (2010) in Aguire (2023), knowledge (*savoir*) is constituted by a network of implicit statements that permeate culture and can be identified through four interrelated dimensions: first, *what can be spoken about* within a given discursive practice; second, the *positions* from which subjects are authorized to speak; third, the *field* of coordination and subordination of statements that enables the emergence and transformation of concepts; and finally, the *possibilities* of use and the strategies made available by discourse. From this perspective, archaeology does not aim to reconstruct history, nor to analyze discourse in terms of linguistic or grammatical structures. Rather, it seeks to trace the conditions of existence of discursive formations and to examine how certain statements become institutionalized and sedimented as truth within specific historical moments (Espinel & Pulido, 2020).

In turn, power can be understood as a set of mechanisms through which subjectivities are produced. Each historical moment inscribes particular forms of experience upon individuals, reinforced by instruments associated with rationality; consequently, power is rarely exercised through overt violence (Foucault, 1971). From a Foucauldian perspective, power is not centralized or possessed, but rather diffuse and omnipresent, emerging from the multiplicity of social relations. It is not something that can be acquired or held; instead, it is continuously exercised through dynamic and asymmetrical interactions. Power relations are inherent to social structures, as they both produce and are shaped by existing inequalities. Furthermore, wherever power operates, forms of resistance inevitably arise. However, such resistance is neither unified nor centralized; instead, it is dispersed across the social field, forming a complex network that permeates institutions and practices without being confined to them (Núñez, 2013).

Given that archaeology is a method for analyzing the conditions of possibility of a given discourse, its application requires identifying regularities within discursive formations.

In this regard, Foucault (1971) proposes four guiding principles for archaeological analysis. First, the principle of *reversal* (*principe de renversement*), which consists of suspending the assumption of an underlying will to truth to attend to what is actually said, for example, ways of resistance that might arise to fight or subvert certain forms of dominant power. In the case of this study, we can think of language teachers who disagree with decontextualized criteria imposed by the CEFR. The second principle is the one of *discontinuity*, which recognizes discourses as events and, therefore, as discontinuous practices rather than continuous developments. This principle recognizes that knowledge and history are not accumulated or linear; instead, they are full of ruptures, therefore, there is not just one valid form of knowledge. For the scope of this study, it is necessary to understand that English language teaching should not be rooted in colonial discourses, for instance. Thirdly, the principle of *specificity*, according to which discourse should be understood as a practice that imposes itself upon things, rather than as a system of meanings to be decoded. This principle calls for contextualized pedagogical practices as it intends not to reduce the discourse to universal ideas. Finally, the principle of *exteriority* refers to the external conditions that make discourse possible, emphasizing that discourse must be analyzed in relation to its conditions of emergence rather than its supposed internal essence. From this perspective, the discourse that positions English as a necessary language for globalization and economic development in Colombia can be examined through the political, economic, and social processes that enabled its emergence. These include neoliberal reforms, globalization, international educational agendas, and language policies that have contributed to legitimizing English as a strategic resource for national competitiveness.

How does the archeology work?

Through archeology, it is expected to find the evidence that allowed society to establish its own regime of truth, or in Foucault's words, "the types of discourse it accepts

and makes function as truth" (1971). To this end, the archaeology of knowledge analyzes the discourse through *statements* and *discursive formations* present in a specific place and time. Foucault defines *discursive formation* as "a set of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in time and space, that have defined, for a given period and a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions governing the exercise of the enunciative function" (Castro, 2011). By *statement*, on the other hand, it is necessary to understand the mode of existence of a set of signs to refer to objects and subjects, to enter into relations with other formulations, and to be repeatable (Foucault, 1972). In other words, statements constitute discursive and historical units of the discourse, defined by their conditions of existence.

In this sense, Castro (1995) asserts that the methodology of the archeology of knowledge follows two stages. The first, which Foucault calls "negative", implies calling into question the dominant categories that had historically been taught or believed about the continuity of an idea or notion by establishing common or continuous categories and "putting them in parentheses". After parenthesizing, the second stage corresponds to the "description of the discursive events" or "événements", creating new categories or rules that enable the description of discourse and discursive practices. To this end, Foucault proposes four hypotheses of research: *objects*, *enunciative modalities*, *concepts*, and *strategies*.

The objects

The objects are defined as "what is said". The formation of objects, for Foucault, is a construction that is shaped and transformed permanently, even if there are discourses that refer to the same object; each one describes it in its own way (Nuñez, 2013). Foucault, as cited by Castro (1995), notes that, due to the variety of objects, it is necessary to establish the rules that determine where objects are transformed and outlined. For this purpose, Foucault (1972) focuses on three strategies:

a) First, it is necessary to identify the *surfaces of emergence*, which "show where these individual differences, which, according to the degrees of rationalization, conceptual codes, and types of theory, will be accorded the status (...) alienation, anomaly, (…), degeneration, etc., may emerge, and then be designated and analyzed". This category of analysis is relevant to this study, as it allows us to understand how concepts such as bilingualism and English language proficiency have emerged within educational and policy discourses. Through the identification of these *surfaces of emergence*, such as international organizations, national educational policies, and institutional programs, it becomes possible to trace how English has been constructed as a necessary and desirable form of knowledge.

b) Second, describing the *authorities of delimitation* is important to trace how institutions in charge of establishing the rules and knowledge "became the major authority in society that delimited, designated, named, and established (…) an object." In this case, the identification of the institutions that have played a central role in defining and regulating English language education, such as the British Council, as well as national entities like the Ministry of Education, have contributed to establishing the standards, policies, and frameworks through which English is constructed as a necessary competence. Through these authorities, specific forms of knowledge are legitimized, while alternative linguistic practices and local epistemologies are often marginalized or excluded.

c) Lastly, it is necessary to examine the *grids of specification*, which refer to the systems through which objects are differentiated, classified, and organized within discourse. As Foucault (1972) explains, these are the frameworks according to which objects are "divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, and derived from one another." This category is particularly useful for the present study, as it enables

analysis of how English language education and bilingualism are structured by specific classificatory systems. For instance, frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) establish proficiency levels (e.g., A1, A2, B1, B2), which categorize learners and define what constitutes legitimate linguistic competence. These classifications not only organize knowledge but also produce hierarchies among speakers, positioning certain levels, accents, and forms of language use as more desirable or valid than others. In this sense, *the grids of specification* contribute to the normalization of particular ways of learning and using English, while marginalizing alternative linguistic practices and reinforcing broader structures of inequality within the educational system.

According to Castro (1995), in establishing the *surfaces of emergence*, the *authorities of delimitation*, and the *grips of specification*, “the discourses, the assembly of statements, are considered as a *practice,* meaning, somehow they create their own objects”. In this sense, discursive relations are not only internal to discourse; they are also external, delimiting it and imposing certain forms of enunciation; in sum, they reveal the discourse itself as a social practice (Nuñez, 2013).

Enunciative modalities

Enunciative modalities have to do with the authorized subjects to emit discourses as well as the rules that have made possible their existence. The rules that define who says or writes a statement, the institutions that circumscribe them, and the relationships that are created around a subject (Castro, 1995; Nuñez, 2013). The subject constitutes the part of the enunciative formations that is determined by the set of rules that define who or what must be pronounced and under what circumstances (Castro, 1995). To carry out the analysis of this category, Foucault (1972) poses the following strategies:

a) *The enunciation subject*: “First question: who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language? Who is qualified to do so?”, and also, who owns the qualities or prestige to be listened to? In this sense, Foucault asserts that not every discourse must be pronounced by anybody. The subject who emits the discourse, or the enunciating subject, establishes power–knowledge relations with other individuals or groups that possess the same status, and validates their position of dominance over those who do not (Nuñez, 2013). This category enables the identification of actors legitimized to speak on English-language education, such as policymakers, international organizations, and academic experts, whose voices shape the dominant discourse on bilingualism in Colombia.

b) Second, it is also necessary to describe the *institutional sites* from where discourses are made, and “from which this discourse derives its legitimate source and point of application (its specific objects and instruments of verification)” (1972). Basically, institutions in which discourses are hierarchized and transmitted are considered reliable. These *sites* make it possible to understand how institutions contribute to the construction and circulation of discourses that position English as a necessary competence, while reinforcing particular norms, standards, and practices within the educational system.

c) Finally, the *positions of the subject* refers to the place that a subject occupies among different dominants or group of objects: “according to a certain grid of explicit or implicit interrogations, he is the questioning subject and, according to a certain program of information, he is the listening subject; according to a table of characteristic features, he is the seeing subject, and, according to a descriptive type, the observing subject; he is situated at an optimal perceptual distance whose boundaries delimit the wheat of relevant information”. In the field of

English language education, these positions can be observed in the roles assigned to teachers, students, policymakers, and institutions. For instance, teachers may be positioned as policy implementers, students as measurable subjects within standardized frameworks, and institutions as authorities that define and regulate knowledge. These positions reflect and reproduce broader power relations within the educational system.

Formation of concepts

According to Foucault, as cited by Castro (1995), the unity of a discourse is based on the continuity and persistence of certain concepts. In this, archeology seeks to describe how statements are arranged, related, and structured to produce specific systems of knowledge. This category requires three strategies:

a) *Forms of succession* refer to the way in which the enunciative series are organized and to the multiple rhetorical schemes that form concepts (Nuñez, 2013). Forms of succession make it possible to trace how certain concepts are progressively constructed and reinforced across policy documents and institutional discourses.

b) *Forms of coexistence*: “these outline (…) all statements formulated elsewhere and taken up in a discourse, acknowledged to be truthful, involving exact description, well-founded reasoning, or necessary presupposition; *as well as* those that are criticized, discussed, and judged, (…) rejected or excluded” (Foucault, 1972). It reveals which forms of knowledge are legitimized and which are marginalized.

c) *Procedures of intervention*: these are mechanisms used to rewrite, transcribe, translate, and transfer the statement from one field to another. In Nuñez’s (2013) words, these techniques and methods are used to transfer and import discourses

that help the validity of a specific knowledge. These procedures are evident in the way international frameworks, such as standardized language assessment systems, are adopted and adapted. Through these processes, global discourses on language learning are incorporated into national policies, contributing to the consolidation of English as a dominant form of knowledge.

The elements proposed by Foucault can function as a toolbox that serves as a methodological and analytical instrument to understand how knowledge and discursive practices construct reality: “It is this group of relations that constitutes a system of conceptual formation” (Foucault, 1972)

Formation of strategies

Themes and theories derived from the variety of discourses, which “give rise to certain organizations of concepts, certain regroupings of objects, certain types of enunciation, which form, according to their degree of coherence, rigor, and stability” (Foucault, 1972). The formation of strategies involves three aspects:

a) Points of *diffraction* of discourse: These refer to moments of tension within a discursive formation, where different objects or types of enunciation appear that do not belong to the same series and may even seem incompatible. As Foucault (1972) and Castro (1995) explain, these points can initially emerge as points of incompatibility, but may later be reconfigured as points of equivalence, since they are produced under similar rules. Ultimately, they can become points of articulation, where a coherent system of concepts and objects is constructed from these tensions. These points are where the different possibilities of the same discourse appear, such as tensions, contradictions, and alternatives. Global discourses on English language education can be understood as dominant frameworks that shape and organize national policies

b) The *economy of the discourse constellation*: it accounts for the role a discourse plays in relation to other discourses. “It may, in fact, play the role of a formal system of which other discourses are applications with various semantic fields; it may, on the other hand, be that of a concrete model that must be applied to other discourses at a higher level of abstraction” (Foucault, 1972). These discourses serve as models adopted and adapted within the Colombian context, shaping how language education is conceptualized and implemented.

c) *Practical function of discourses*: it “is characterized first by the *function* that the discourse under study must carry out in *a field of non-discursive practices* (…) also involves the rules and processes of appropriation of discourse (…) the property of discourse (…), and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions, or practices (…) to a particular group of individuals”. The practical function of discourse can be observed in the implementation of language policies, educational programs, and assessment systems that operationalize English as a necessary competence.

The analytical categories presented above, namely the *formation of objects*, *enunciative modalities*, formation of concepts, and *formation of strategies*, constitute the archaeological framework through which this study examines the discourse of English language education in Colombia. Together, these dimensions make it possible to identify not only what is said about bilingualism and English but also who is authorized to speak, how knowledge is organized, and how discourses are strategically articulated within broader systems of power. The next table summarizes the mentioned categories:

CATEGORIES	**LEVEL OF CATEGORICAL ANALYSIS**
Objects	- Surfaces of emergence - Instances of delimitation - Grids of specification
Enunciative modalities	- Enunciating subject - Institutional context

	- Subject positions
Concepts	- Forms of succession - Forms of coexistence - Procedures of intervention
Strategies	- Points of diffraction - Economy of the discursive constellation - Practical function of discourse

Table 2 – Archeological Categories of Analysis. 1 – Adapted from Castro, 1995; Nuñez, 2013.

The Genealogical Approach

Genealogy is a method developed by Foucault as a complement to the archeology of knowledge. While archeology focuses on the analysis of discourses, genealogy accounts for the "provenance of the discursive practices within the contingent movements of struggles, victories and defeats, that is, the dynamics of power" (Boticelli, 2011).

For Foucault (1983), genealogy does not seek to provide ideal or essential explanations; rather, it aims to understand how specific events impact different contexts and produce particular effects. For this reason, Foucault undertakes a critical analysis detached from a linear history of reason, arguing that such a perspective obscures the conditions of existence of what precedes it. In this sense, "genealogy opposes the search for origins," since "to search for the origin is to attempt to find what was already there." For Foucault, history as a rational science has often erased or transformed the identity of things, as it fails to "locate the singularity of events outside any monotonous finality" or to "recognize the different scenes in which they have played different roles." Therefore, "to do genealogy (…) is never to set out in search of origins, disregarding as inaccessible all the episodes of history; on the contrary, it is (…) to be prepared to see them emerge, finally without masks, bearing the face of the other; to seek them where they are, 'in the depths'" (Foucault, 1983).

In this sense, genealogy seeks to recognize the multiplicity of knowledges, understanding that knowledge is not universal but produced within the framework of struggle. It therefore opposes the "suprahistorical sense of history", which has been

established as absolute truth. Conventional history, understood as universal truth, tends to homogenize reality, overlooking the heterogeneity and fluctuation of lived experience.

According to Núñez (2013), “genealogy brings to light the struggles and conflicts among forms of knowledge; that is, it shows that scientific discourse is a local knowledge that has been institutionalized as universal over other knowledges.” In this regard, Foucault (1983) asserts that “words have always been invented by the ruling classes; they do not indicate a meaning, they impose an interpretation.” Despite its seemingly “anti-scientific” character, genealogy does not promote ignorance; on the contrary, it enables the insurrection of subjugated knowledges against the centralizing effects of scientific discourse.

Given that genealogy focuses on the analysis of power relations and their articulation with both discursive and non-discursive practices involved in the formation of knowledge and social practices, it challenges the notion of “truth” upheld by history as a rational science. Consequently, it becomes necessary to analyze the struggles and strategies that question universally accepted truths to better understand the constitution of subjects and the emergence of new forms or objects of knowledge:

> The formation of discourses and the genealogy of knowledge must be analyzed not in terms of types of consciousness, modes of perception, or forms of ideology, but in terms of tactics and strategies of power—tactics and strategies deployed through distributions, divisions, territorial controls, and the organization of domains, which could constitute a kind of geopolitics. (Foucault, 1983)

In the context of this study, the genealogical approach enables analysis of how English-language education in Colombia has been shaped by historical struggles, institutional forces, and global power dynamics. Rather than assuming English as a neutral or inevitable component of education, this study examines how it has been constructed as a dominant form of knowledge through specific discursive and non-discursive practices.

How does the genealogy work?

The analysis through genealogy is not limited to identifying what is said about English language education in Colombia but also seeks to understand how these discourses have been produced, legitimized, and sustained over time. To achieve this, the study examines a set of institutional and policy documents corresponding to key historical moments previously defined in the study's periodization.

To carry out the genealogical analysis, according to Foucault (1983), it is necessary to trace the conditions of possibility that have allowed these discourses to emerge and become dominant. The genealogical analysis in this study is structured around three main categories: *power struggles*, *historical conditions of possibility*, and *discontinuities*; each of which is further operationalized through specific subcategories that allow for the identification of actors, institutional mechanisms, discursive transformations, and forms of exclusion. Additionally, the analysis considers the role of *technologies of power* as mechanisms through which discourse has materialized and been enacted in educational practices.

The power struggles

This category concerns the analysis of the dynamics by which power is exercised, negotiated, and contested within discursive formations. From a Foucauldian perspective, power is not possessed but exercised through relations, producing effects on knowledge, subjects, and practices (Foucault, 2019). This category considers the following aspects:

a) *Actors and agents of power*: This subcategory focuses on identifying the individuals, institutions, and organizations that are authorized to produce and legitimize discourse. It examines who can define English language education and whose voices are prioritized or excluded. Examples include governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Education, international organizations,

language assessment agencies, and educational consultants whose recommendations shape language policy decisions. This subcategory also considers whether teachers, students, local communities, and indigenous groups are represented in policy-making processes or remain absent from official discourse. Questions guiding the analysis include: Who is speaking? Who is authorized to define educational goals? Whose perspectives are legitimized or marginalized?

b) *Forms of domination and resistance***:** This subcategory examines how power operates through mechanisms of control, regulation, and normalization, as well as the forms of resistance that emerge within these dynamics. It highlights the tensions between imposed policies and alternative perspectives or practices. According to Foucault, as cited by Morey (2019), the notion of power implies the property postulate (according to which power is something that the ruling class possesses): “power is not possessed; it is exercised. It's not a property, it's a strategy: something that's at stake”. Examples of domination include the establishment of standardized proficiency levels, mandatory testing systems, and curriculum requirements aligned with international standards. Forms of resistance may appear when teachers adapt official curricula to local realities, question the relevance of imported models, or advocate for multilingual and intercultural approaches that challenge dominant assumptions about English language education.

c) *Knowledge hierarchies***:** This subcategory analyzes how certain forms of knowledge are privileged over others. It focuses on the hierarchical positioning of English in relation to other languages and epistemologies, as well as the valorization of “native” norms over local forms of knowledge. This hierarchy may be reflected in policies that present English as the language of progress,

innovation, and global participation, while giving less value to indigenous languages, local linguistic practices, or alternative understandings of language learning. It also examines how particular pedagogical models, methodologies, and standards are constructed as universally valid and superior.

Historical conditions of possibility

This category refers to the set of historical, social, political, and economic conditions that have enabled the emergence and consolidation of specific discourses. Rather than searching for origins, it seeks to understand the contingent processes that made these discourses possible. The following aspects are considered for the analysis:

a) *Geopolitical context*: examines the broader global dynamics that influence discourse formation, such as post-war reconfigurations, globalization, and the expansion of Western influence.

b) *Institutional developments*: focuses on the role of institutions in shaping and legitimizing discourse. It analyzes how organizations, policies, and frameworks contribute to the establishment of English as a dominant language.

c) *Economic rationalities*: explores how discourse is linked to economic logics, particularly those associated with neoliberalism, such as competitiveness, productivity, and employability.

d) *Discursive shifts*: analyzes transformations in the way phenomena are framed and understood over time. It focuses on changes in key concepts and narratives, such as the shift from language learning as education to language learning as a marketable skill.

Discontinuities

This category refers to ruptures, breaks, and transformations that challenge the idea of a linear, continuous history. From a Foucauldian perspective, discontinuities reveal the contingent and unstable nature of discourse. The analysis will be developed through:

a) *Ruptures*: This subcategory identifies moments of significant change in discourse in which previous frameworks are replaced or redefined. It highlights shifts in dominant languages, policies, or ideologies.

b) *Contradictions*: This subcategory examines internal tensions within discourse in which different statements or practices coexist despite being incompatible. It reveals discrepancies between what is stated and what is produced in practice.

c) *Silences and exclusions*: This subcategory focuses on what is omitted or marginalized within discourse. It analyzes how certain voices, languages, or forms of knowledge are rendered invisible or irrelevant.

d) *Re-significations*: This subcategory examines how meanings are transformed over time. It focuses on the redefinition of key concepts, such as bilingualism, which may take on new meanings across different discursive contexts.

Technologies of power

This category refers to the mechanisms, instruments, and practices through which discourse has materialized, operationalized, and enforced within institutions. Drawing on Foucault, these technologies function as tools that regulate behavior, produce subjects, and normalize specific forms of knowledge.

a) *Standardization mechanisms*: examines frameworks and systems that establish norms and benchmarks, such as language proficiency standards that define what counts as valid knowledge.

b) *Evaluation and assessment systems*: on testing practices and certification processes that measure, classify, and regulate individuals according to predefined criteria.

c) *Policy instruments*: analyzes official programs, plans, and regulations that implement and institutionalize discourse within the educational system.

In sum, the genealogical categories outlined above provide an analytical framework for a comprehensive examination of the institutionalization of English-language education in Colombia as a historically situated and power-laden process.

By analyzing *power struggles*, *historical conditions of possibility*, *discontinuities*, and *technologies of power*, this study reveals the complex network of relations through which English has been constructed, legitimized, and normalized as a dominant form of knowledge. This approach makes it possible to uncover not only the actors, institutions, and discourses involved, but also the tensions, exclusions, and material practices that sustain them. Consequently, the genealogical analysis contributes to a critical understanding of how language education policies are embedded within broader dynamics of power, shaping both the production of knowledge and the formation of subjects within the Colombian context. The next table summarizes the categories for the analysis

CATEGORIES	LEVEL OF CATEGORICAL ANALYSIS
Power struggles	-Actors and agents -Domination and resistance -Knowledge hierarchies
Historical conditions of possibility	-Geopolitical context -Institutional developments -Economic rationalities -Discursive shifts
Discontinuities	- Ruptures - Contradictions - Silences - Re-significations
Technologies of power	- Standardization mechanism - Evaluation systems - Policy instruments

Table 3- Genealogical Categories 1

CHAPTER III: Tracing the Conditions of Possibility of English Language Education in Colombia: A Foucauldian Analysis of Discourse and Discursive Formations

Historical context: reconfiguration of the world order (1945 -1949)

Postwar consequences

World War II was characterized as “the greatest military conflict in human history.[6]” This armed conflict, which took place between 1939 and 1945, pitted the major world powers against each other: on one side, Germany, Italy, and Japan; and on the other, primarily the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Russia. The end of this conflict had political, economic, social, and cultural repercussions worldwide, as the war allowed some countries to gain more power or greater freedom, while for others it marked the beginning of new suffering and challenges[7]. Among the most significant political, economic, and sociocultural consequences, we could highlight the emergence of new global powers such as the United States and Russia, the creation of institutions like the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), the strengthening of American capitalism, shifts in mindset and worldview, and significant technological and scientific development.

Creation of international institutions and the Cold War as a condition of possibility

Since the United States emerged as the most benefited power from the war, new institutions were designed, mostly financed by this country, to regulate the international economy through the IMF and the WB, and to guarantee world order, human rights, and peace. The UN was created. "The IMF and the World Bank were far from being isolated

[6] Retrieved from: https://humanidades.com/segunda-guerra-mundial/
[7] Retrieved from: https://e1.portalacademico.cch.unam.mx/alumno/historiauniversal2/unidad2/segundaGuerraMundial/introduccion

initiatives; rather, they were conceived as a set of instruments and mechanisms to create a new international order, both politically, economically, and socially" (Vélez, 2002, p. 19). This generated tensions between the United States and Russia, as Russia opposed the United States' desire to impose its will, leading to the Cold War. Similarly, the creation of the UN to ensure peace in Europe "could not in any way be democratic, (...), on the contrary, each member's opinion would be taken into account depending on its contribution to the institution's funding" (Pineda, 2023). In summary, "the most important aspect of American intervention was not only contributing to the reconstruction of shattered Europe but, above all, determining the course of its subsequent economic and political development in the face of the Cold War" (Pineda, 2023).

Another created institution that influenced the new world order is the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe was established on May 5, 1949, in London by leaders such as Winston Churchill, Konrad Adenauer, and Robert Schuman, in the post-World War II context. Its origin dates back to Churchill's speech in Zurich (1946), in which he proposed an organization to promote European cooperation to prevent future conflicts. Since its creation, the Council's main objectives have been the defense of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, as well as the strengthening of a common European identity, in response to the USSR's refusal to join these institutions. During the Cold War, the organization mainly expanded in Western Europe and, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, incorporated countries from the former Soviet bloc, establishing itself as a key player in ensuring democratic stability in Europe (EOM, 2024)[8].

The creation of the Council of Europe took place amid tensions between the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain, as the allies recognized that the USSR did not share their ideal of nationhood or capitalism as the ideal economic system after the war. As

[8] Retrieved from: https://elordenmundial.com/tag/guerra-fria/

a result, the USSR refused to join the World Bank and the IMF. During the so-called Iron Curtain speech in March 1946, Churchill called the USSR a “danger”, describing it as a tyranny that controls “ordinary people through various types of police states that encompass everything” (Mercado, 2015, p. 95). Similarly, Churchill called for “the fraternal association of English-speaking peoples”, considering that the USSR posed a communist threat because, according to Kennan’s Long Telegram as cited by Mercado (2015, p. 94), it represented “the fundamental hostility to Western democracy, capitalism, liberalism, social democracy, and all groups and elements that are not completely under the Kremlin’s control.” This was a clear response to the USSR’s refusal to join the Allied Nations and its denial of any economic, political, or ideological model other than the one it proposed. This would later lead to the start of the Cold War.

The reconfiguration of new relationships among these powers after World War II, as well as the creation of international organizations such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, was not merely a response to the need for peace but also part of a broader geopolitical reorganization in which knowledge, language, and culture became objects of governance. Within this context, English gradually emerged not as a neutral means of communication but as a language associated with economic power, scientific production, and global mobility.

From a Foucauldian perspective, these institutions function as *authorities of delimitation* (archaeological level), insofar as they establish which discourses are legitimate, what forms of knowledge circulate, and under what conditions they can be enunciated. Thus, discourses such as “democracy”, “human rights”, or “international cooperation” are not neutral but are part of a discursive regime that organizes the production of truth in the postwar context.

Additionally, the creation of these institutions under the pretext of contributing to peace by preventing new conflicts and to the reparation of nations after World War II are

discourses, as Foucault mentions in *The Order of Discourse* (1971), that appear to be innocent at first glance but are actually neither transparent nor neutral because they are laden with an ideology, in this case, Western. These institutions are responsible for institutionalizing ways of knowing to exercise control over the discourses that can circulate, meaning they validate some discourses over others behind a facade of security. In this regard, Foucault (1971) explains the actions of institutions:

> "'You should not be afraid of beginnings; we are all here in order to show you that discourse belongs to the order of laws, that we have long been looking after its appearances; that a place has been made ready for it, a place which honours it but disarms it; and that if discourse may sometimes have some power, nevertheless it is from us and us alone that it gets it.' But perhaps this institution and this desire are nothing but two contrary replies to the same anxiety: anxiety about what discourse is in its material reality as a thing pronounced or written; anxiety about this transitory existence which admittedly is destined to be effaced, but according to a time-scale which is not ours; anxiety at feeling beneath this activity (despite its greyness and ordinariness) powers and dangers that are hard to imagine; anxiety at suspecting the struggles, victories, injuries, dominations and enslavements, through so many words even though long usage has worn away their roughness. (p.3)

From this perspective, discourse is not free, as it is regulated by institutions; therefore, not just anyone can speak about anything, at any time, or in any place. From the archaeology of knowledge, *enunciative modalities* reveal that not just any actor can produce these discourses. International organizations, states, and experts are established as authorized *enunciating subjects*, while other knowledge remains displaced or subordinated. In this way, access to legitimate discourse is mediated by both the institution and the language through which it circulates. Consequently, institutions such as academia, the state, or international organizations ensure that they "protect" but also control, as they legitimize

certain discourses, making them valid, while at the same time neutralizing them, making them safe and controlled, meaning they do not eliminate the power of the discourse but manage it. An example is the motive that initiated the Cold War, the ideological tensions between the USSR and the U.S. Thus, it is clear that discourse is intertwined with power.

Foucault speaks of “power and dangers” and “struggles, victories, dominations,” which implies that language is not innocent, as it produces realities, legitimizes hierarchies, and organizes the world, precisely what happened after World War II: discourses that end up becoming discursive practices, as they regulate and define historical conditions.

In summary, discourse is frightening and perhaps malevolent (p. 3) because it exerts power; that is why societies create systems to control, organize, and limit it. On the other hand, institutions like the UN and the Council of Europe create spaces where discourse is legitimate, as they speak of human rights, democracy, and international cooperation, but following Foucault, they also control what can be said and how it can be said. In this sense, discourse is indeed controlled, and access to it passes through language, thereby making language itself a mechanism of control. English in the post-World War II context and during the Cold War is not just a tool for communication; it is the medium through which certain discourses circulate, and others are excluded.

From a genealogical perspective, *power struggles* are evident among the *actors and agents of power*, in this case, the organizations created after the war that aim to establish a new world order. There are also *forms of domination and resistance*, such as the ideological tensions between the U.S., Great Britain, and the USSR. From this same perspective, it is possible to identify the *historical conditions of possibility* that allowed the consolidation of new discourses, considering genealogical aspects like the *geopolitical* context, here, through a discourse spread by the new powers under the pretext of peace and the prevention of future conflicts. It also reflects the *development of institutions* such as the UN and the Council of Europe, which are responsible for shaping new discourses and policies.

These postwar geopolitical dynamics contributed to the construction of English as a promise of development and progress in the Colombian educational context, mainly due to what we know as “globalization”. According to Usma (2009), after World War II, the consolidation of English as the most taught language in Colombia was brought about due to political, economic, and cultural processes associated with this phenomenon:

> During these decades, the national government attempted to introduce these languages into the school system through isolated and, to a big extent, improvised policies as part of international political and economic agendas (Zuluaga, 1996, as cited by de Mejía, 2004). For instance, “in 1979, after a visit by the Colombian president to France, a decree was issued, making English compulsory for Grades 6 and 7 and French mandatory for Grades 10 and 11, with a free choice of either English or French in Grades 8 and 9” (de Mejía, 2004, p. 386). That is how foreign languages such as English and French continued to become consolidated in secondary schools in Colombia, while minority languages were not given importance in national policy.

This shows that English education in Colombia started to grow to become an instrument of progress and openness to the globalized world, promoted by binational institutions such as the British Council. As mentioned in previous sections, the British Council has been working in Colombia since 1940 to promote educational and cultural relations, running programs in the arts, education, governance, and the English language. Besides, the influence of the United States after the Second World War in prioritizing English teaching and learning over other languages has led to teacher foreign training programs, with support from the Ministry of Education and the British Council. In this context, English language learning emerged as a mechanism of domination through which notions of civilization and progress were imposed to legitimize particular mandates.

Production and regulation of discourse in the postwar period

After World War II, “English was the language of the victors” (Fernández, 2009, p. 63), which led to a profound transformation in the organization of science worldwide, marked by the consolidation of the American scientific system and the emergence of English as the dominant language of scientific communication. According to Fernández (2009), “the rise of the English language was largely an elitist phenomenon, as its use was limited to an auxiliary function in the commercial and administrative spheres, as well as a vehicle for accessing new political and scientific ideas” (p. 63).

This is where English takes on a central role. More than a communication tool, it is established as a means of access to the discursive order, especially in fields such as diplomacy, economics, and science. In archaeological terms, English can be understood as part of the *grids of specification*, *organizing and hierarchizing knowledge* through systems like international standards or levels of linguistic competence.

During the conflict, governments, especially that of the United States, allocated unprecedented resources to scientific research, integrating scientists, engineers, and universities into large-scale strategic projects, such as the development of the atomic bomb and advanced military technologies (Barsky, 2014, pp. 152-154). This process not only strengthened the scientific infrastructure but also positioned the United States as a global leader in knowledge production. This was mainly due to the intervention of the United States after World War II, as it solidified its status as a superpower, which in its process of geopolitical expansion, "was also interested in promoting its national language as an international lingua franca within the framework of a 'neocolonialism'" (Fernández, 2009, p. 63). For this reason, among others, after Nazi Germany, English was established as a subject taught in schools (Ibid., p. 64).

From a genealogical perspective, this process reveals power relations in which actors such as the United States and its associated institutions play a central role in the

production and legitimization of knowledge. The consolidation of English as a lingua franca is not solely due to its utility but also its integration into a web of *power struggles*, *hierarchies of knowledge, and historical conditions of possibility*.

Truchot (1994), cited by Fernández (2009), identifies two key moments in the process of English expansion since the end of World War II. The first spans from 1945 to the late 1960s: “English became the dominant language in international politics, trade exchanges, science, information, film and television productions, and popular songs” (p. 63). This also led to a strong presence of North American culture in Europe. The second period includes the years from the 1980s onward, during which, along with political changes, English expanded as a lingua franca in Western, Central, and Eastern Europe.

In this sense, the *geopolitical* context of the Cold War is a key condition, as it drives the expansion of Western economic, political, and cultural models. The promotion of English is linked to these dynamics as part of a broader project of cultural hegemony.

In the postwar period, this trend intensified through state policies aimed at funding research, expanding higher education, and promoting the dissemination of scientific knowledge. The 1945 report *Science the Endless Frontier* solidified the idea of science as a driver of national development, encouraging public investment, training researchers, and expanding universities and research centers (Barsky, 2014, pp. 155-157). As a result, scientific production grew exponentially and became concentrated in English-speaking institutions, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Meanwhile, as Barsky (2014) asserts, the weakening of German science after the war and the migration of European scientists to the United States helped reshape the international scientific landscape. This was complemented by the expansion of the Anglo-Saxon academic publishing industry, with major American and British publishers dominating the publication and circulation of scientific knowledge worldwide (pp. 158–159). In this

context, English gradually established itself as the lingua franca of science, displacing other traditional languages such as German and French.

Thus, the development of the Anglo-American scientific system demonstrates how English has become the language of knowledge production and validation. This phenomenon can be genealogically analyzed as a *hierarchy of knowledge*, in which Anglo-American science presents itself as universal, obscuring its situated nature. At the same time, it operates through *technologies of power*, such as academic publishing systems, evaluation standards, and the institutionalization of scientific practices that regulate who can produce knowledge and in what language.

As a result, although in the mid-20th century scientific publications were still distributed in various languages, the growing dominance of the Anglo-American scientific system led to English becoming the privileged language for the production and validation of knowledge. This process was not only driven by academic dynamics but also by economic, political, and cultural power relations that favored the universalization of a dominant scientific and linguistic model (Barsky, 2014, pp. 158-159).

As Fernández (2009) states:

> This trend toward the use of English can also be observed in other international organizations, mainly European, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and, to a greater extent, the Council of Europe. The latter organization established English and French as the official languages from the beginning for deliberation and for archiving official documents (…). This is understandable considering which ten countries signed the London Treaty on May 5, 1949. The Council of Europe, however, accepts the use of other languages, but such use must usually be financially supported (p. 66).”

In this sense, World War II facilitated the expansion of English by establishing the United States as a leading global power, thereby bringing it into use in areas such as politics,

culture, knowledge, and international relations. This occurred through the gradual introduction of English-language study in educational institutions across countries, leading to a decline in the prominence of French and German, which had until then held leadership roles in this field (Fernández, 2009, p. 67). All these processes ultimately shaped an international market dominated by the English language, which came to be regarded as the language of scientific communication (Barsky, 2014, p. 158).

Consequently, the expansion of English should not be understood as a linear or natural process but as the result of multiple discontinuities, tensions, and exclusions. The historical reconfiguration of the hegemony of other scientific languages, such as German or French, as well as the invisibility of local knowledge, demonstrates how this process involves not only inclusion but also exclusion.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the consolidation of English as the lingua franca of science after World War II cannot be understood solely as a result of its communicative utility but as the effect of a set of *power relations* that shape what is recognized as valid knowledge. In this sense, the strengthening of the American scientific system, massive government funding, and the expansion of English-speaking academic and publishing institutions not only boosted scientific production but also established a regime of truth in which English became the privileged medium for the circulation of knowledge.

Following Foucault, scientific discourse is not neutral, but a practice that produces and regulates truth; therefore, the hegemony of English can be read as the result of control mechanisms, both external, such as the institutionalization of international standards and editorial centralization, and internal, through disciplines that legitimize certain forms of enunciation and delimit who can speak, from where, and under what conditions. Thus, the dominance of English reflects not only linguistic supremacy but also the imposition of a discursive order that excludes other knowledges and languages, consolidating a global *hierarchy of knowledge* in which the Anglophone is presented as universal.

From a genealogical perspective, this process reveals how a localized form of knowledge, Anglo-American science, manages to impose itself as global truth, invisibilizing its historical, contingent, and situated character.

It could be concluded, on the one hand, that between 1945 and 1949, not only was the international system reorganized through institutions such as the UN and the Council of Europe, but also the conditions for the expansion of English as a lingua franca were established. This process does not respond to a direct imposition but to the consolidation of a new regime of power/knowledge in which English becomes the language of international cooperation, economic reconstruction, and knowledge production. From a Foucauldian perspective, English operates as a dispositif that articulates practices, institutions, and discourses, facilitating the cultural hegemony of the Western bloc during the Cold War.

On the other hand, international institutions not only organize global cooperation but also produce and regulate legitimate discourse. Within this framework, from an archaeological and genealogical perspective, English does not emerge solely as a language of communication but as a dispositif that conditions access to discourse itself. Following Foucault, it is not that English has power in itself but that it is embedded in a regime of practices and institutions that confer that power, while also regulating, distributing, and limiting what can be said.

Expansion (1950 - 1991): Consolidation of English as a Global Language

Within the context of the Cold War and the expansion of Western influence, the consolidation of English as the dominant language did not occur solely through political and scientific institutions but also through a series of discursive practices materialized in educational reforms, international programs, and pedagogical models. These practices operated as concrete mechanisms for the production, circulation, and legitimation of English in educational systems worldwide.

Amidst tensions between the USSR and the U.S., as Dorn and Ghodsee (2012) note, literacy shifted from being an educational goal to becoming a political tool during the Cold War because international organizations like UNESCO promoted education as a means to alleviate poverty and achieve world peace; in contrast, the World Bank, which initially had little interest in supporting education due to its perceived low profitability, changed its focus by considering that literacy could help combat communism and promote capitalism, thereby influencing the development of third-world countries. However, literacy programs in countries like Cuba showed a different outcome, revealing the political potential of education: “the Cuban literacy campaign offered a testimony to the power of revolutionary political will and the liberatory potential of mass education” (p. 386).

This unexpected turn led the Bank to question whether promoting mass literacy was the most effective approach to challenge the growing appeal of communism in the developing world (Dorn and Ghodsee, 2012, p. 375). With Robert McNamara’s arrival as President of the World Bank in 1968, a new approach was consolidated that questioned the effectiveness of literacy as a central strategy against communism, favoring instead policies of “redistribution with growth” aimed at reducing structural poverty. In this sense, literacy shifted from a universal right to a functional instrument subordinate to economic and geopolitical objectives, revealing, from a critical perspective, the transformation of education into a *technology* of governance that serves the international order.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the transformation of literacy during the Cold War can be analyzed, in archaeological terms, as a reconfiguration of *discursive formations* that, within organizations like UNESCO and the World Bank, progressively redefine literacy. While immediately post-war literacy was embedded in a humanist discursive regime linking it to peace, moral formation of the subject, and overcoming ignorance, from the 1950s onward, there was a shift toward a rationality in which education was seen as a component of economic development, social modernization, and political stability, as Dorn & Ghodsee

(2012) point out. This shift is not merely a change of emphasis but a transformation of *enunciative modalities* within institutional contexts, making it possible to conceive literacy in terms of productivity, efficiency, and development management.

From a genealogical perspective, this shift can be understood as the contingent effect of *power struggles* inscribed in the confrontation between ideological blocs during the Cold War, or as the effect *of actors and agents*. In this context, literacy becomes a strategic intervention field over populations, where different political regimes produce educational technologies of power aimed at shaping specific subjectivities. Thus, while socialist literacy programs aimed to produce subjects aligned with specific political ideologies, literacy policies promoted by Western agencies, particularly the World Bank, have increasingly framed education as a tool for developing human capital, supporting economic growth, and preventing social instability.

In this way, Cold War educational discourses not only reflect political transformations but also actively participate in constituting the *historical conditions of possibility* for a regime of truth in which learning to read and write is directly linked to the *geopolitical* context and *institutional developments*, leading in subsequent years to the implementation of reforms and educational programs. For the purposes of this study, we will focus on the Threshold Level program for teaching English.

Educational programs of the Council of Europe (1960s - 1970s)

By 1954, the Council of Europe had already considered the study of the languages, history, and culture of European peoples fundamental and deemed it important to adapt educational systems to facilitate mobility and exchange among them (Diestro, 2015). This responds to *historical conditions of possibility* (genealogy) in *geopolitical* terms (post-war Europe and the need for integration) and *economic terms* (labor mobility and cooperation), as well as *discontinuities*, since language was once part of culture and has become a

measurable skill through programs like The Threshold Level (T-level), published by the Council of Europe in 1975 and developed by Jan van Ek, who defined the parameters for teaching English in Europe. Following this document, equivalents began to be published in other European languages, such as Spanish, French, German, and Italian. This creates *contradictions* (genealogy) at the level of *discourse and practice*, because, on the one hand, there is talk of linguistic diversity, and, on the other, of language as a measurable skill.

At first glance, it seems that the T-level is a useful tool for promoting culture and multiculturalism in Europe, as well as mobility; however, from the archaeology of knowledge, the publication of the Threshold Level marks a shift in which English language teaching begins to be constructed as a technical and standardizable object, defined through specific parameters and levels. On the other hand, the *presence of authoritative delimiters* is also clear, since this language program is defined by credible institutions and experts such as the Council of Europe and Jan van Ek, so knowledge is no longer defined in the classroom but by the international expert elite. Additionally, from the perspective of *strategy formation*, it is argued that this discourse facilitates mobility and unifies teaching, which, in Foucauldian terms, could be seen as a mechanism of control that makes language and subjects governable, insofar as it defines what is learned and how.

From a genealogical perspective, *actors* such as the Council of Europe and educational experts begin to consolidate a linguistic monopoly by defining what it means to know English, how it is taught, and how it is evaluated. *Hierarchies of knowledge* are also established: “While this work deals with English, the same analytical procedure could be used for other languages” (van Ek, 1975), not only positioning English as the central language but also showing that other languages follow the same model, so instead of diversity, the T-level consolidates more as the expansion of a model.

Threshold Level (1975)

The preface of *The Threshold Level* reveals the emergence of language learning as a governable domain shaped by institutional authority and standardization, as it states that “the overall aim of the Project is to make the free movement of men and ideas in the European area easier by increasing the scale and effectiveness of language learning” “with the active (…) co-operation of linguists, experts in language teaching and testing, as well as educational administrators all over Europe, (…) to create the conditions for the development of large-scale language learning” (p. 7) by controlling “certain vocabulary and grammar, an indeterminately large set of utterances, partly remembered, largely specially put together for the purpose.” (p. 8). “To some extent then, the threshold level is a kind of standard reference level” (p. 8).

From an archaeological perspective, language is constructed as a *technical object* defined by communicative functions, vocabulary, and grammar, while the Council of Europe, together with experts and administrators, serves as *the authority for delimitation* that legitimizes this knowledge. The emphasis on creating conditions for “large-scale language learning” and facilitating “the free movement of men and ideas” reflects a strategic reconfiguration of language as a tool for mobility and integration. Genealogically, this discourse is rooted in post-war conditions that prioritize cooperation and circulation, while establishing knowledge hierarchies through expert control. The notion of a “standard reference level” introduces an early *technology of power,* enabling the classification and measurement of learners across contexts. Although presented as flexible and adaptable, the framework produces a shared norm that normalizes linguistic competence, revealing tensions between communicative diversity and standardization, as well as the gradual consolidation of mechanisms for governing both language and subjects.

Next, the most relevant components that this program formulated will be described, as well as Foucault's reading of each of them.

Objectives in a Unit/Credit System

The T-level establishes a credit system, stating that “the promotion of efficient learning is a major aim of educational systems” (p. 11). This system mainly aims to:

> 1) investigating and analyzing learners' needs; 2) grouping learners into categories with similar needs; 3). defining learning objectives to meet the needs of each category in such a way as to form an integrated system of objectives; 4) providing learning facilities so as to enable learners to reach various objectives in the most direct way possible. (p. 12)

These principles mainly respond to the need, according to van Ek (1975), to “reconcile the variety of individual learners' needs with an economical use of available resources (…) in educational planning.” (p. 11), since the education system cannot create a course for each person and needs to optimize resources. Therefore, the question arises: How to balance individual needs with economic efficiency? The proposed solution is to divide learning into units or components, which involves breaking learning into parts, grouping students according to needs, and teaching only what is necessary to each group.

In this sense, the T-level consolidates itself as a technology of power (genealogy) by turning learning into something divisible, measurable, and controllable. The emphasis on explicit learning objectives, defined in terms of what learners are able to do, enables the comparability and standardization of knowledge across contexts. At the same time, concern for economic viability and system efficiency shows that education is viewed as an economic problem, insofar as power and knowledge relations are configured, with authorities defining units, objectives, progressions, what is considered learning and teaching, and who can access this knowledge.

Language-Learning Objectives

The document states that the main goal is not to master grammar as an end in itself, but to use the language to fulfill specific communicative functions.

> Our model for the definition of language-learning objectives specifies the following components: 1. the situations in which the foreign language will be used, including the topics which will be dealt with; 2. the language activities in which the learner will engage, 3. the language functions which the learner will fulfil; 4. what the learner will be able to do with respect to each topic; 5. the general notions which the learner will be able to handle; 6. the specific (topic-related) notions which the learner will be able to handle; 7. the language forms which the learner will be able to use; 8. The degree of skill with which the learner will be able to perform. (p. 14)

The concept of language is being redefined; it is no longer just a structure but a functional instrument, meaning there is a *formation of concepts* (archaeology). This change does not eliminate the control exercised by authorities but reorganizes it; now, knowledge is measured in terms of performance. The focus shifts, but the possibility of evaluating, normalizing, and comparing subjects (genealogy) remains.

What is the Threshold Level or T-level?

Chapter 4 introduces the Threshold Level (T-level) as “the lowest level of general foreign-language ability to be recognized” (p. 17), thereby establishing a normative boundary between those who “know” a language and those who do not: “various types and degrees of ability below T-level may be sufficient for the needs of certain learners in certain situations” (p. 17). General skills are defined as those that

> will allow learners to maintain themselves in most everyday situations, including situations for which they have not been specifically trained. (…) As a learner has not mastered the ability to transfer what he has learned to new or partially new situations,

> his communication possibilities will be severely limited. In such a case, he/will not be regarded as having reached a level of general language-ability. (p. 17)

From an archaeological perspective, this chapter contributes to the *discursive formation* of "general language ability" as a definable and measurable object. Genealogically, the T-level operates as a mechanism of *normalization*, enabling the classification and regulation of learners across contexts, since it defines the minimum acceptable. Moreover, by targeting specific user profiles, such as tourists and non-professional speakers, the framework produces particular subjectivities aligned with mobility and functional communication:

> The class of learners for which the present specification has been developed has the following characteristics: 1. they will be temporary visitors to the foreign country (especially tourists); 2. they will have temporary contacts with foreigners in their own country; 3. their contacts with foreign-language speakers will, on the whole, be of a superficial, non-professional type; 4. they will primarily need only a basic level of command of the foreign language. (p. 18)

In this sense, the Threshold Level not only organizes language learning (what to learn, at what level, in what moment) but also establishes a standard or "truth" (what it means to learn English and what is acceptable) through which individuals are evaluated and compared, as it states that "a learning-objective must be defined in such a way that it unambiguously means one and the same thing to anyone for whom it is meant." (p. 12). This standard serves as a tool for regulating access to opportunities, as individuals are judged by their level of proficiency.

Threshold level structure and content

In chapter 5, the T-level defines *situations of specification* as "extra-linguistic conditions which determine the nature of a language-act" (p. 19). It also acknowledges that

although “situations are strictly personal and unique” it is necessary to “ignore strictly individual conditions and (…) concentrate on four components of situations, which, together, provide a sufficient basis for the further steps in *the* procedure” (p.19). In this sense, although the text acknowledges that the situations are unique, these will be ignored; in archaeological terms, this *formation of objects* (defining which situations) not only leads to eliminating individuality but also to homogenization.

Within this framework of *specification situations*, components such as *social roles, psychological roles, settings,* and *topics* define the specific content to be taught and learned. On the surface, the program suggests situations where the language should be used, but in reality, it defines how the subjects, interactions, and the world in which the language is used should be. This process establishes the *rules of formation* that determine what counts as a valid communicative context. In terms of *enunciative modalities*, the authority to define these categories rests with expert knowledge (linguists, educators, and institutions), thereby legitimizing a particular way of organizing language use. Let's take as an example the roles it proposes: “the principal social roles for which T-level learners have to be prepared are: 1. stranger /stranger, and 2. friend/friend.” (p. 19). On the other hand, psychological roles are neutrality, equality, sympathy, and antipathy since “these roles are the more ‘neutral’ roles and they are appropriate in a large variety of types of linguistic interaction” (p. 20).

This shift reveals a process of standardization in which the complexity of individual experiences is reduced to predefined categories. Learners are positioned within specific roles, such as “stranger” or “friend,” and are expected to operate within controlled psychological attitudes, such as neutrality or sympathy.

Regarding the *settings* and *topics*, places such as banks, airports, hotels, restaurants, and activities like shopping or traveling are prioritized (pp. 20-22). It then becomes evident how certain activities and realities are favored, while local contexts and non-Western realities are left out, in addition to promoting a discourse focused on the

usefulness of learning specific content. From an analytical perspective, this chapter illustrates how language learning is not only organized but also socially framed: it constructs a particular type of subject and defines the legitimate contexts of communication. What could be defined from the archaeology of knowledge as the *formation of concepts* (classification and systematization of everyday life into teachable units), and the *formation of strategies* (a transferable and unified model of language competence that can be applied across contexts).

From a genealogical perspective, these discursive formations can be understood as part of broader *power relations* that seek to make language learning and subjects more manageable. By reducing individual differences and organizing learners into predefined roles, the document contributes to the *normalization and homogenization* of communicative behavior. The selection of settings and topics, which prioritizes spaces such as airports, banks, and workplaces, reflects specific *historical conditions* linked to mobility, tourism, and economic exchange in the post-war period. At the same time, this reveals a *discontinuity* in which language is no longer primarily tied to cultural or local practices but to functional participation in a globalized system. Finally, the chapter can also be read in terms of *technologies of power*, as it provides practical tools (classification systems, learning objectives, structured situations) that allow institutions to guide, evaluate, and regulate learners' behavior. In this sense, the Threshold Level does not simply describe how language is used; it establishes mechanisms of standardization and assigns subjects specific roles within them.

Threshold level Language activities

Chapter 6 of the Threshold Level illustrates how language competence is constructed through specific *discursive formations* and *power relations*. It states that "the members of the target-group do not actually need a general ability to read and to write the

foreign language" since "the most important language activity for T-level learners is carrying on a conversation. This involves two skills: speaking and understanding." (p. 26). Besides, "oral communication may be one-sided, for instance, when one addresses an audience or listens to the radio" (p.26). From an archaeological perspective, the document participates in the *formation of objects* by defining language ability primarily as oral communication, thereby privileging speaking and understanding over reading and writing. This establishes the *rules of formation* that determine what counts as valid knowledge of a foreign language:

> learners will be expected to understand only those utterances which are spoken in the standard dialect with either the standard accent or accents which have a slight regional, foreign, and/or socio-economic colouring and at a speech-rate which lies in the lower range of what is considered normal. (p. 26)

In terms of *the formation of concepts*, language is reduced to functional units linked to specific tasks, such as making reservations or understanding public announcements. *Enunciative modalities* are also evident, as expert knowledge holds that learners "do not actually need a general ability to read and to write," thereby legitimizing a particular hierarchy of skills (genealogy-knowledge hierarchies). Finally, the *formation of strategies* is reflected in the promotion of a communicative model aimed at efficiency and transferability across standardized situations (*points of diffraction* and *economy of the discourse*)

From a genealogical perspective, these choices can be understood as part of broader *power relations* that shape the learner as a functional subject within a globalized context. The emphasis on oral interaction, particularly in predictable and institutional settings such as airports or service encounters, reflects specific *conditions of possibility* linked to mobility, tourism, and economic exchange. Moreover, the asymmetry established between receptive and productive skills: "learners will be expected to understand only those utterances which are spoken in the standard dialect", where learners are expected to understand more than they can produce, reveals a *knowledge hierarchy* that positions them

in a dependent communicative role. This contributes to a *standardization mechanism* subscribed to *technologies of power*, as learners are trained to operate within predefined limits of interaction. Additionally, the restriction of writing to prescribed tasks, such as completing forms or making reservations:

> the objective for writing a T-level is extremely limited. It is assumed that for this skill the actual needs of the majority of the members of the target-group do not go beyond the ability to write letters of one particular type and to fill in certain forms. This means, in fact, that no general ability to write is required but only a strictly limited formulaic manner of expression (p. 26)

Can be interpreted as part of a *technology of power* that simplifies and regulates communication for administrative and economic purposes. In this sense, the chapter not only describes language activities but also produces a subject suited to specific social functions, reinforcing a utilitarian and instrumental view of language that aligns with broader neoliberal rationalities.

Institutionalization of European Language Policy (1990s - 2001)

The publication of the Threshold Level in 1975 marked a crucial step toward the systematization of language teaching in Europe, as it introduced a practical and needs-based approach to defining what learners should be able to do with a language. While the Threshold Level focused primarily on identifying minimum communicative abilities, later developments expanded this logic into a broader, more structured framework. In this sense, the emergence of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe in 2001, can be understood as both a continuation and a consolidation of these earlier initiatives. The CEFR not only systematized the principles introduced in the Threshold Level but also extended them into a unified model that enabled

the classification, comparison, and evaluation of language proficiency on a broader international scale.

For the scope of this study, I will analyze two main components: the way linguistic knowledge is standardized through levels of competence and the evaluation and certification of the language.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.

Standardization of linguistic knowledge

The scale of common reference levels proposed in Chapter 3 of the CEFR represents a key moment in the standardization of language competence, as it establishes a unified system to classify learners into hierarchical categories ranging from A1 to C2. While presented as a neutral, technical tool designed to ensure transparency and comparability across educational systems, this scale functions as a mechanism that transforms language proficiency into a measurable, universally applicable object of knowledge. From an archaeological perspective, this scale contributes to the *formation of objects*, insofar as "language proficiency" is constructed as a measurable and comparable entity, and to the *formation of concepts*, through the establishment of levels such as "basic," "independent," and "proficient" users. In this sense, the CEFR levels function as a *technology of knowledge* and governance that enables institutions to evaluate, regulate, and manage populations according to standardized criteria. As stated in the document, "the Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc*."* (p. 1). According to the document, "the provision of objective criteria for describing language proficiency will facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts" (p. 1)

From the starting point, these statements are not simply descriptive but are organized through specific *grids of specification* that divide, classify, and relate learners according to standardized criteria. Likewise, the CEFR defines what counts as language knowledge by stating that it "describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively*"* (p. 1). In doing so, it delimits what can be considered as legitimate knowledge, insofar as the use of the language is defined in terms of its functionality in communicative situations; in other words, more than describing what a language is, the CEFR prescribes it. This is reinforced through the establishment of common reference levels:

> One of the aims of the Framework is to help partners to describe the levels of proficiency required by existing standards, tests and examinations in order to facilitate comparisons between different systems of qualifications. For this purpose, the Descriptive Scheme and the Common Reference Levels have been developed. Between them, they provide a conceptual grid which users can exploit to describe their system. (p. 21)

As a result, language ability is transformed into a measurable and comparable construct, enabling the classification of learners across different contexts. The framework reflects particular *enunciative modalities*, as the authority to define and legitimize these levels is attributed to institutions and experts, whose discourse acquires scientific and universal validity.

From a genealogical perspective, this standardization through levels should not be understood as a neutral pedagogical advancement but as a *technology of power* since the proposed levels categorize and normalize individuals. By creating a "common basis," the CEFR normalizes a specific way of understanding language and learning, while disregarding alternative epistemologies and linguistic practices, functioning as a dispositif that produces

a regime of truth. Moreover, the emergence of these levels can be understood as part of the *historical conditions* of post-war European integration and globalization. Although the framework presents itself as neutral and universal, it ignores the unequal conditions under which people learn languages, which shows *discontinuities* that shape access to language learning. Applying the same scale to everyone hides social inequalities. Therefore, the CEFR is not just a technical tool, but a dispositif that produces knowledge about language and classifies individuals.

Assessment: Evaluation and certification

The chapter on assessment in the CEFR establishes a system for evaluating language proficiency through standardized descriptors, levels, and performance-based criteria:

> There are three concepts that are traditionally seen as fundamental to any discusión of assessment: validity, reliability and feasibility. (…). *Validity* is the concept with which the Framework is concerned. A test or assessment procedure can be said to have validity to the degree that it can be demonstrated that what is actually assessed (the construct) is what, in the context concerned, should be assessed, and that the information gained is an accurate representation of the proficiency of the candidates(s) concerned. *Reliability*, on the other hand, is a technical term. It is basically the extent to which the same rank order of candidates is replicated in two separate (real or simulated) administrations of the same assessment. What is in fact more important than reliability is the *accuracy* of decisions made in relation to a standard. If the assessment reports results as pass/fail or Levels A2+/B1/B1+, how accurate are these decisions? The accuracy of the decisions will depend on the validity of the particular standard (e.g. Level B1) for the context. It will also depend

> on the validity of the criteria used to reach the decision and the validity of the procedures with which those criteria were developed. (p. 177)

Far from being a neutral pedagogical tool, this system can be understood, through a Foucauldian lens, on the one hand, as a discursive formation since it states a way to understand the language, and on the other, as a non-discursive formation through practices such as tests, in both cases, specific forms of knowledge, subjects, and power relations are constructed.

The CEFR also configures specific *enunciative modalities*, particularly regarding who is authorized to define, assess, and validate language competence. The framework establishes that assessment is based "not only on what the learners can do but also how well they can do it" (p. 39). This formulation positions the learner as an *object of evaluation*, whose abilities must be demonstrated according to predefined criteria. At the same time, institutions, such as examination boards, ministries of education, and international certification bodies, emerge as *authorities of delimitation*, responsible for legitimizing and certifying proficiency.

In this sense, not everyone can speak about language competence with equal authority. The CEFR centralizes evaluative power in institutional actors, who define: What counts as proficiency, how it should be measured, and who is qualified. Consequently, the learner becomes a *subject constituted through assessment*, whose identity is shaped by their position within the scale (A1, B2, C1, etc.). This reflects a clear *power–knowledge relation*, where being recognized as "competent" depends on alignment with institutionalized norms: "Framework cannot confine itself to the knowledge, skills and attitudes learners will need to develop in order to act as competent language users but must also deal with the processes of language acquisition and learning, as well as with the teaching methodology." (p. 18)

In addition, the CEFR's assessment system reflects a broader *formation of strategies*, particularly through its emphasis on comparability and standardization. The document highlights that: "*it* provides a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications" (p. 5), "gained in different learning contexts, and accordingly will aid European mobility". (p. 1). This reveals a strategic objective: to create a *shared linguistic currency* that facilitates mobility, certification, and institutional coordination across countries. Assessment is not only about measuring ability; it is about ensuring that different systems can *recognize and exchange value.*

From an archaeological perspective, this concerns the *economy of discourse*, in which the CEFR functions as a central reference system that organizes other discourses (curricula, exams, policies). From a genealogical perspective, it reflects a strategy aligned with broader socio-political goals such as labor mobility, educational standardization, and economic integration. On the same standpoint, the assessment framework can be understood as a technology of power that regulates individuals and populations. The CEFR states that

> the existence of fixed points of common reference offers transparency and coherence, a tool for future planning and a basis for further development. The intention of providing a concrete illustrative set of descriptors, together with criteria and methodologies for the further development of descriptors, is to help decision-makers design applications to suit their contexts. (p. 36)

This enables the monitoring of performance and eventually, the regulation of access to opportunities, since the document mentions that one of its functions is the application "for the specification of the content of tests and examinations, for stating the criteria for (…) a learning objective, (…), and for describing the levels of proficiency in existing tests and examinations thus enabling comparisons to be made across different systems of qualifications. (p. 19). Language proficiency levels, then, become *mechanisms of inclusion*

and exclusion, determining who can access higher education, obtain employment, and participate in international mobility, as described in the statistics shown at the beginning of this study.

In this sense, assessment operates within what Foucault (as cited in Aguirre, 2023, & Sanchez, 2018) conceptualizes as *governmentality* (a control mechanism within the biopolitical sphere, that is, as a mechanism for controlling the life of an entire population), where power is exercised not through coercion but through the management of capacities and behaviors. Individuals are encouraged to improve their level, align with standards, and become more competitive. According to Castro-Gomez, cited by Rojas (2015), governmentality does not compel others to behave in a certain way, but rather makes that behavior seen by the governed as good, as their own, and originating from their freedom. In The Birth of Biopolitics, Foucault will define it as the liberal art. Thus, the CEFR contributes to the production of *self-regulating subjects* who internalize evaluation criteria and strive to optimize their performance.

In sum, the assessment chapter of the CEFR does not merely provide tools for evaluating language proficiency; it also constructs the object of knowledge, defines legitimate subjects, and establishes strategies that align language learning with broader systems of governance. Through the integration of archaeological and genealogical perspectives, it becomes evident that assessment serves as a key mechanism for the production and regulation of linguistic competence in contemporary neoliberal contexts.

Institutionalization of English language teaching and learning in Colombia (2004 - 2025)

The global configuration of education and language policies cannot be understood in isolation from the development of European language policy instruments, particularly those promoted by the Council of Europe. As previously analyzed, documents such as the

Threshold Level (1975) and later the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) established standardized models for defining, teaching, and assessing language proficiency through functional descriptors, levels, and measurable outcomes. Although originally designed within a European context to facilitate mobility and cooperation, these frameworks have been progressively adopted and adapted in non-European contexts, including Colombia. Through international cooperation agreements, educational reforms, and the influence of multilateral organizations such as the ONU, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, these models have shaped national language policies by introducing standardized curricula, performance-based evaluation systems, and proficiency benchmarks aligned with global standards. Consequently, Colombian language policies do not emerge solely from local needs but are embedded within a wider international system of discourses and practices that regulate language learning, define legitimate knowledge, and construct subjects in line with global market demands.

Bearing this in mind, in this section, I will focus mainly on analyzing how the National Bilingualism Plan (PNB) standardizes English in Colombia through the CEFR, using technologies of power like tests, and how these mechanisms create a neoliberal discourse by the implementation of strategies like the *Programa Nacional de Inglés Colombia Very Well* (2015-2025), aimed at improving English language skills throughout the education system and in the workforce.[9]

National Bilingualism Program - PNB (2004 - 2019)

The National Bilingualism Program (PNB), implemented by Colombia's Ministry of National Education (MEN), marks a key moment in the institutionalization of English-language education in Colombia. Far from being a neutral educational initiative, the PNB

[9] Retrieve from: https://rectoria.utp.edu.co/colombia-very-well/#:~:text=Ministra%20de%20Educación%20Nacional%20presentó,en%20la%20misma%20fuerza%20laboral.

can be understood as a discursive and political formation that redefines language learning within a framework of global competitiveness, standardization, and measurable outcomes.

Construction of English as an Object of Knowledge

This policy adopts the Common European Framework of Reference as a guiding framework, establishing standardized proficiency levels that define what learners must achieve at different stages of their education. To begin with, the PNB socialization document refers to the “English as a Foreign Language: A Strategy for Competitiveness” (p. 2). In subsequent documents, the MEN emphasizes the importance of mastering English as a foreign language, stating that "communicating in a foreign language is an indispensable skill in today's world. Not only does it make possible the academic and labor mobility of people; it is one of the bases on which the competitive capacity of a society is built" so that "mastering a foreign language represents for people a comparative advantage, an attribute of their competence and competitiveness". In addition, as it is "the most widespread language in the world (...) and because it is the lingua franca of science and technology and international business, the program has focused primarily on promoting its teaching in educational institutions at all levels." (2019, p. 61)[10]

In this sense, English is constructed as an *object of knowledge*, since from the archaeology of knowledge, the PNB participates in the formation of a specific object: English as a measurable, standardized, and economically valuable competence. The policy explicitly states its objective as to “achieve citizens able to communicate in English, in such a way that they can insert the country into the processes of universal communication, in the global economy and in cultural openness, with internationally comparable standards” (MEN, 2006, p. 6), thereby establishing comparability as a central principle. English is not framed as a

[10] Visión 2019 – Educación: Proposal for discussion. Ministry of National Education. http://historico.presidencia.gov.co/prensa_new/sne/2006/octubre/18/vision_2019.pdf

cultural or communicative practice but as a quantifiable skill that can be evaluated, classified, and aligned with international benchmarks, as stated in the Program's complementary documents, such as the *Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés (2006)* and *Visión: 2019.* In both documents, it is mentioned that

> To give coherence to this plan, it was necessary to adopt a common language that established the goals for the level of performance in the language across the different stages of the educational process. For this reason, the Ministry of Education chose the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment", a document developed by the Council of Europe, which describes the scale of performance levels (MEN, 2006, p. 6).

In addition, the MEN validates these standards by ensuring that:

> These measurements were made using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages *(CEFR)* proficiency scale as a reference point. This framework, the result of more than 10 years of research, privileges the development of the ability to communicate orally and in writing in different contexts and establishes the levels of competence *[(A1 – C1)]* that the different users of the language must achieve (2019, p. 62).

From an archeological standpoint, this so-called adaptation conforms to the *authorities of delimitation***,** since the authority to define what counts as valid language knowledge is not located within the national context but rather in international frameworks such as those promoted by the Council of Europe. By aligning its standards with CEFR, the PNB adopts externally defined criteria for proficiency, thereby delegating epistemic authority to supranational institutions. Likewise, *surfaces of emergence* are created due to the rise of this *object* (English as a measurable, standardized, and economically valuable competence), which is closely linked to discourses of globalization and economic

integration. The PNB asserts that "Being bilingual is essential in the globalized world (...) not only the development of the mother tongue (...), but also (...) the learning of foreign languages, as is the case with the English language" (2006, p. 5). These *surfaces of emergence* reveal how language learning becomes tied to external demands rather than local needs, reflecting global pressures for competitiveness and productivity.

Finally, the PNB adoption classification of learners into levels (A1–C1) exemplifies the operation of *grids of specification*. These levels organize language ability into hierarchical categories that allow for comparison, measurement, and regulation. Through this system, linguistic competence is fragmented into units that can be assessed independently, reinforcing a technocratic view of education.

The authorized subjects to speak: Who Can Speak and Under What Conditions

The PNB also establishes specific *enunciative modalities* by defining who is authorized to produce legitimate discourse about language learning. Experts in linguistics, policymakers, and international organizations emerge as privileged subjects whose knowledge is considered valid and authoritative. As mentioned so far, some credible authorities constitute the Council of Europe, the World Bank, and the Ministry of National Education. According to Gimeno-Sacristán (2009, p. 9), pedagogical models replicated and reproduced in Colombian classrooms conceive schools and curricula as instruments designed to produce outcomes demanded by society and systems of production at a given historical moment, rather than addressing the actual educational or social challenges. Consequently, education becomes technified and validated through applied sciences, while its political and ideological dimensions are arbitrarily concealed.

Therefore, not all *actors* have equal authority within this discursive field; the *enunciation of subjects* is predetermined: "The English standards are a fundamental guide

for English teachers, principals, and parents to have clarity about the communicative skills that children are expected to develop" (MEN, 2006, p. 3). Teachers and students are positioned primarily as recipients and implementers of predefined knowledge, rather than as producers of it. This creates an asymmetrical relationship in which expertise is centralized and institutionalized.

In consequence, the subject is positioned in a specific role. The learner is constructed as a subject who must achieve specific competencies and demonstrate measurable progress. This subject is simultaneously evaluated, classified, and governed through institutional mechanisms, occupying a position defined by performance and proficiency levels.

Standardization, Competence, and Measurement

The unity of the PNB discourse is sustained by the repetition and stabilization of key concepts such as “competence”, “standards”, and “evaluation”. These concepts structure the way language learning is understood and operationalized. *Formation of concepts* creates *forms of succession* as concepts are organized in a linear progression (beginner, basic, pre-intermediate, intermediate, pre-advanced, advanced), where learners move from lower to higher levels of proficiency, as observed in the next illustration:

Niveles según el Marco Común Europeo	Nombre común del nivel en Colombia	Nivel educativo en el que se espera desarrollar cada nivel de lengua	Metas para el sector educativo a 2019
A1	Principiante	Grados 1 a 3	
A2	Básico	Grados 4 a 7	
B1	Pre intermedio	Grados 8 a 11	•Nivel mínimo para el 100% de los egresados de Educación Media.
B2	Intermedio	Educación Superior	•Nivel mínimo para docentes de inglés. •Nivel mínimo para profesionales de otras carreras.
C1	Pre avanzado		•Nivel mínimo para los nuevos egresados de licenciaturas en idiomas.
C2	Avanzado		

Illustration 1- The standards in the context of the PNB[11]

[11] Retrieved from: Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés. MEN, 2006

This progression suggests a continuous and cumulative development of competence, concealing the discontinuities and inequalities inherent in the learning process.

Another concept that is created corresponds to *forms of coexistence*, since the PNB integrates multiple discourses, including pedagogical, economic, and political ones. While it draws on educational theories, it also incorporates economic rationalities that emphasize efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness. At the same time, alternative perspectives that prioritize cultural or critical dimensions of language learning are marginalized: "Given its importance as a universal language, the Ministry of Education has established within its policy to improve the quality of English teaching, allowing better levels of performance in this language" (MEN, 2006, p. 5)

Finally, *the intervention procedures* are evident in the adoption of international standards, such as the CEFR, which illustrates how discourses are transferred and recontextualized. These procedures enable not just the importation of external models, which are then adapted to the national context, often without a critical examination of their relevance, but also international rationalities, such as the ones of the *Estándares Básicos de Competencia* (2006) of the PNB, which acknowledges that some of the worthy reasons to learn English include:

> It is the most widely spoken international language and is a strategic communication tool in various areas of human development. (…) It provides access to scholarships and internships abroad. It is very important that young Colombians can take advantage of educational opportunities offered abroad, which require specific levels of English proficiency. Offers more and better job opportunities. (p. 9)

Power, Technologies, and the Regulation of Subjects

From a genealogical perspective, in the PNB, power operates through a series of technologies that regulate individuals and institutions. On the one hand, the emergence of the PNB is situated within the broader context of neoliberal globalization, where education is increasingly aligned with market demands. International organizations, national governments, and private actors compete to define the objectives of education, resulting in policies that prioritize economic outcomes over social or cultural ones, which constitute *power struggles* and *historical conditions***.** According to Gomez-Arias (2019), since the 1980s, multiple instruments of power have been consolidated under a neoliberal rationality within the framework of globalization and the free market. In this context, public policies emerge as a political mechanism developed in the first half of the twentieth century, comprising guidelines issued by the State to address matters of public interest. However, their implementation is biased by particular interests and contradicts the discourse of neutrality and collective benefit they promote: “Unlike the aim of the official discourse, the public policies are not always decisions made in favor of public interests, rather they are changeable expressions of social conflicts between antagonistic groups fighting for their own benefit” (p. 194 - 196).

Public policies also reveal specific *enunciative modalities* that determine who is authorized to speak about education and language. Ministries, international organizations, and policy experts emerge as legitimate subjects of enunciation, whose discourse is validated as objective and scientific. This excludes alternative voices, such as teachers, local communities, and non-dominant linguistic groups, reinforcing asymmetrical power–knowledge relations.

In this context, public policies function as *technologies of power* that regulate educational practices and subjectivities. Through mechanisms such as standardized curricula, evaluation systems, and proficiency benchmarks, individuals are classified,

measured, and governed according to predefined norms. These technologies not only organize education but also shape the ways individuals understand themselves as learners and citizens. In this regard, the PNB in one of its core principles includes standardized tests to measure proficiency levels and determine access to educational and professional opportunities,

> the evaluation is proposed from two perspectives, one aimed at the evaluation of the language level of English teachers in all official educational institutions, for decision-making on teacher training and development, and the other focuses on redefining the National Evaluation System, to align the English component of the ICFES state tests with the Basic Standards of Competence in Foreign Languages designed and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. These strategies are used to systematically measure Colombians' English-language performance throughout basic and professional training. It should be noted that these tests are taken by all students in the third, fifth, ninth, and eleventh grades, and at the end of their technical, technological, and professional training (Diaz & Santana, 2020, p. 247)

In this sense, evaluation functions as a disciplinary mechanism that normalizes certain forms of knowledge and behavior, thereby producing inequality**.** Although the PNB presents English as a pathway to opportunity, it simultaneously creates new forms of exclusion. Individuals who do not meet the required standards are deemed deficient, which limits their access to resources and opportunities. As a result, bilingual (English) education programs in Colombia are often disconnected from local linguistic, social, and cultural realities, contributing to pedagogical inefficiency, student disengagement, and the reproduction of inequalities. In this sense, English language public policies function as a neoliberal dispositif that regulates knowledge, subjects, and educational practices in alignment with global market demands rather than local needs.

By integrating the elements discussed above, it becomes evident that the PNB constructs a specific type of *subject*: a measurable, comparable, and economically productive individual. This subject is expected to acquire linguistic competence not as an end in itself but as a means of participating in global markets. The emphasis on standardized levels and evaluation systems transforms the learner into a unit of measurement, whose value is determined by their position within a hierarchical scale. This process reflects what Foucault describes as the production of subjects through power–knowledge relations, where individuals internalize norms and regulate their own behavior accordingly.

It can be concluded from the analysis of the PNB that English language education in Colombia is not merely an educational endeavor but a complex dispositif that integrates discourses, institutions, and practices. Through the adoption of international standards, the implementation of evaluation systems, and the construction of measurable subjects, the PNB functions as a mechanism for governing individuals and regulating access to opportunities. From a Foucauldian perspective, this policy reveals how language learning is rooted in broader dynamics of power, contributing to the reproduction of hegemonic forms of knowledge and neoliberal rationalities under discourses such as “breaking barriers” or “global integration”.

Consolidation and Intensification of the Dispositif: Programa Nacional de Inglés Colombia Very Well (2015 - 2025)

As a continuation of the National Bilingualism Program, the Ministry of National Education implemented the *Programa Nacional de Inglés Colombia Very Well! (2015–2025),* which reaffirms and deepens the orientation towards standardization, measurement, and global competitiveness. According to the MEN, cited in El Heraldo (2014), "the Program is a state policy that will focus on strengthening basic education, increasing the number of students with upper-intermediate English, and training the Colombian workforce in the public

and private sectors.". In discursive terms, the program reproduces the construction of English as a strategic tool for economic development. The Ministry of National Education points out that strengthening English aims to "develop communicative skills (...) in such a way that the processes of insertion of Colombian human capital into the knowledge economy and the globalized labor market are favored" (2015, p. 36). Similarly, it is established as a goal for students to reach specific CEFR levels (mainly B1 and B2), reinforcing the logic of classification, measurement, and comparability already present in the PNB.

In this way, this program maintains as its central axis the alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which consolidates the dependence on international frameworks to define the levels of linguistic competence in the Colombian context.

From an archaeological perspective, the stability of the "English" *object* as a measurable and standardized competence, as well as the permanence of the same *authorities of delimitation* (international organizations and European frameworks): "This process began through the construction of a joint work team between experts from the Ministry of Education and the international consulting firm McKinsey & Co" (MEN, 2015, p. 43). At the genealogical level, the program confirms the continuity of *power technologies,* grounded in standardized evaluation and in the articulation between education and the labor market.

However, despite these sustained efforts, various reports indicate that English proficiency levels in Colombia have changed little over the last decade. Evaluations such as the Saber 11 tests and international studies continue to place the country at low levels of language proficiency, highlighting a gap between the proposed goals and the actual conditions of the education system (MEN, 2019; EF Education First, 2025).

In this sense, *Colombia Very Well!* does not represent a rupture, but rather the consolidation of the same regime of truth on the teaching of English, in which tensions

persist between global standardization and local realities. Thus, the program serves as recent evidence of how language policies continue to operate as devices that regulate knowledge, subjects, and access to opportunities, without substantially transforming the structural inequalities of the Colombian context.

From the Threshold Level to the CEFR, and from the PNB to *Colombia Very Well*, English language education in Colombia reveals a progressive consolidation of a global dispositif that standardizes knowledge, governs subjects, and aligns education with neoliberal forms of power.

CONCLUSIONS

This archeological and genealogical analysis has gone back eight decades in specific historical periods in both Europe and Colombia with the aim of analyzing, tracing, and questioning the historical conditions of possibility that enabled the institutionalization of English as a foreign language in Colombian education, which has led to the reproduction of hegemonic forms of knowledge and neoliberal rationalities through the dissemination of English language as scientific discourse consolidated and reinforced through practices and institution attach to historical conditions. Although the analysis drew upon history, policies, institutions, and discursive practices that later consolidated into institutions or hegemonic discourses, common trends could be observed across these historical events, from the end of the Second World War in Europe in 1945 to the implementation of the PNB in Colombia in 2004.

Drawing on the archeology of knowledge, an important trend is the strong continuity in the way English is described. Even though the documents come from different periods, they use very similar ideas: competence, standards, evaluation, efficiency, mobility, and competitiveness. This shows that there has not been a major change in how language learning is understood. Instead, the same way of thinking has been repeated and reinforced over time, creating a stable framework that defines what counts as “valid” knowledge about language. Concerning authorities, it was evident that the authority to define this knowledge comes from outside Colombia. By adopting international frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference, national policies rely on external models to decide what students should learn and how their progress should be measured. This means that local realities are often secondary, while international standards are treated as neutral and universal. As a result, there is a strong dependence on global models that may not fully fit the Colombian context. In addition, the documents tend to present learners as if they were

all the same. Although they mention diversity, they usually assume a general student type who follows a linear path from beginner to advanced levels or from A1 to C2 levels. This simplified view ignores the differences in access, resources, and learning conditions that exist in reality. As a result, policies are designed for an “average” learner that does not truly reflect the diversity of the population.

From a genealogical perspective, these ways of thinking about English are closely linked to power. English works as a tool for organizing and regulating people. Through systems of levels, tests, and standards, individuals are classified and compared. Their language ability becomes something that can affect their educational and professional opportunities. In this way, English is not just something people learn; it is also something that helps structure their position in society. This is strongly connected to the relationship between education and the economy. The documents consistently present English as a way to improve employability, competitiveness, and access to global markets. Learning English is framed as an investment in one’s future, which reflects a broader neoliberal view of education. In this context, education is less about personal or social development and more about preparing individuals to compete in the labor market. At the same time, these policies shape how people see themselves. Students are expected to measure their progress, compare themselves to others, and move through levels of proficiency. Therefore, people’s value is seen in terms of performance and results. This reflects what Foucault describes as the productive nature of power: it not only controls people but also influences how they think and act.

One important finding of this study, though not surprising, is that despite the efforts made by the authorities of delimitation, the results regarding English performance under the expected outcomes have not changed significantly. English proficiency levels in Colombia have remained relatively low, even after years of policies and programs. This suggests that the problem lies not only in how the policies are implemented but also in the assumptions

behind them. Standardized international models do not fully address the inequalities and conditions of the Colombian education system. Because of this, the study argues that these policies can actually reproduce inequality. While they promise better opportunities for everyone, they also create new forms of exclusion. Students who do not reach the expected levels are seen as less capable, even if their conditions are very different. In this way, the idea of equal opportunity is not fully achieved, as Guerrero asserts.

Taken together, this study shows that English-language education in Colombia is not neutral. It is shaped by historical processes, global influences, and power relations that affect how knowledge is defined, how people are evaluated, and how opportunities are distributed. Understanding this allows us to question current policies and consider alternative approaches that are more connected to local realities and social needs.

Reflections from the teachers' doing

Beyond the analysis presented, it is important to reflect on what these findings mean for teaching practice. Following Foucault, it becomes necessary to continue questioning the discourses that shape education, especially those that present themselves as neutral, objective, or inevitable. As this research has shown, many of the structures that organize English-language education today are historically produced and deeply embedded in systems of power. For this reason, they are not easy to challenge; in fact, as Foucault suggests, we are often inclined to reproduce them without questioning.

In this sense, three reflections become particularly relevant. First, it is necessary to rethink what Foucault calls the "will to truth". This means recognizing that what we consider valid knowledge is not universal but historically constructed. Understanding this allows teachers to question why certain forms of knowledge are privileged over others, and to open space for alternative perspectives. As Ortega y Gasset suggests in *Crítica de la razón latinoamericana,* historical awareness can serve as a means of understanding ourselves

and our cultural position, making it possible to imagine different futures rather than simply reproducing the past. Second, discourse should be understood as something dynamic rather than fixed. Educational policies, standards, and frameworks are not closed systems; they can be interpreted, adapted, and even resisted. Recognizing discourse as something that can change and engage in dialogue with other fields and perspectives helps reduce its rigid and sometimes exclusionary effects. Finally, it is important to recognize that discourse is not singular, but multiple. There are always different ways of understanding language, learning, and education. This implies that teachers should not see themselves as mere implementers of policies or methods, but as critical agents capable of interpreting, questioning, and transforming their practice.

From a pedagogical perspective, these reflections also resonate with Paulo Freire's ideas, which argue that education is never neutral. Teaching and learning are not simply technical processes, but social and political practices shaped by specific contexts. However, modern educational systems have increasingly reduced education to processes of measurement, classification, and efficiency. As a result, students are often treated as numbers, and learning is evaluated mainly through standardized outcomes. In contrast, a critical approach to teaching requires recognizing students as individuals with histories, cultures, and lived experiences. It also involves questioning the idea that success in education should be defined only in terms of performance, productivity, or competitiveness. Instead, education can be understood as a space for reflection, dialogue, and transformation.

In light of this, the role of the teacher becomes crucial. Rather than acting as instrumental subjects who simply apply external standards, teachers can position themselves as intellectuals who engage critically with the knowledge they teach and the systems in which they work. This does not mean rejecting all policies or frameworks, but

rather using them thoughtfully, adapting them to local realities, and remaining aware of their limitations.

Ultimately, while English-language education in Colombia is shaped by powerful global discourses, there is still space for critical action within the classroom. It is precisely in everyday teaching practices where these broader structures can be questioned, negotiated, and, at least partially, transformed.

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