

Celpe-Bras and CELU proficiency exams: implementation, characteristics and impacts of the exams on Brazil-Argentina relations

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Abstract

This paper discusses the role of the Certificate of Proficiency in Portuguese as a Foreign Language (Celpe-Bras) and the Certificate of Proficiency in Spanish – Language and Use (CELU) as political acts in Brazil and Argentina and their impact on bilateral policies in the last five years. The exams were developed by the Ministries of Education of each country and assess the use of Portuguese or Spanish in communicative tasks that integrate reading, writing, listening and speaking. With similar theoretical frameworks and proficiency levels, both exams have contributed to change the teaching of Portuguese and Spanish as second or foreign languages in both countries and to the drawing of a definition of proficiency that has triggered a move from a structural teaching approach to an approach focused on the use of language. The exams have also promoted the use of Brazilian Portuguese and Argentinean Spanish in contexts of academic and economic exchanges between Brazil and Argentina.

1. Introduction

This paper discusses and evaluates the impact of two exams, the Certificate of Proficiency in Portuguese as a foreign language (Celpe-Bras) and the Certificate of Proficiency in Spanish as a foreign language (CELU). Both resulted from and promoted political acts in the realm of language policies in Brazil and Argentina. They also fostered bilateral agreements between the two countries in the last five years. The construct of the exams, which were developed by the Ministry of Education in each country, is the use of language, which is evaluated by means of tasks that simulate situations of everyday interaction with oral and written texts and integrate oral and written comprehension and production. Joint studies and bilateral agreements for the accreditation and equivalence of the two certificates have guided attempts to effect changes in teaching practices and to define proficiency parameters based on the use of language rather than on knowledge about the language. Moreover, they validate the use of the Brazilian and Argentinean varieties when evaluating Portuguese or Spanish proficiency in the context of academic and economic exchanges between Brazil and Argentina. One of the purposes of these exams is to eliminate the labelling of Argentinean Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese as 'singular' or 'peculiar' in teaching materials of Spanish (SFL) or Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL), and to show that both American Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese are independent and compatible with a larger linguistic community in which speakers who have been socialized to use them as their native, foreign or second language may feel represented.

We begin this study with a brief history of the implementation of the exams in Brazil, Argentina and other countries. After that, we present their underlying

constructs of language and proficiency and report on the evidence that the training of examiners, the preparation of teachers and the studies conducted jointly have contributed to changes in PFL and SFL teaching. In conclusion, the challenges and perspectives that lie ahead for Celpe-Bras and CELU are outlined, and the exams' impact on the parameters of teaching Portuguese and Spanish to speakers of other languages is discussed.

2. Celpe-Bras and CELU as political acts

Since Mercosurⁱ was established in 1991, one of the main objectives agreed on by its members was to promote actions to develop citizen integration and improve education standards (Plano Trienal de Educação [Triennial Educational Plan] 1998).

Despite an unfavourable prognosis for integration due to the economic and political problems faced by member countries, common interests and joint initiatives in the fields of education, culture and economy have led to actions and opportunities for a closer relationship among Latin American countries. Of the political actions to promote integration, language teaching and cultural exchanges have gained importance in the last ten years following the establishment of agreements between member countries. It is in this context that we assess the role of the Portuguese (Celpe-Bras) and Spanish (CELU) proficiency exams developed by the Ministries of Education of Brazil and Argentina.

Language policies address the relations between language and society (Calvet 1997); therefore, the several official agreements signed by the Brazilian and Argentinean governments and by a pool of universities from both countries are in fact

political actions that signal the development of a future Portuguese and Spanish bilingual Region. The development and administration of both exams and their reciprocal accreditation in Brazil and Argentina are among the first political acts concerning the two languages in the region.

A brief history of Celpe-Bras and CELU is presented below. After describing the characteristics of these exams, we discuss how their implementation favoured other independent or joint political and educational acts by Brazil and Argentina.

2.1 The implementation of Celpe-Bras

In response to the growing need for economic, cultural and scientific exchange with other countries and to the increasing number of foreign undergraduate and graduate students in the country, in 1993 the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) appointed a committee of PFL teachersⁱⁱ to prepare a Certificate of Proficiency in Portuguese for Foreigners (Celpe-Bras). The exam caters to any speaker of a language other than Portuguese with an educational level equivalent to the Brazilian elementary school who seeks certification of proficiency in Portuguese at intermediate, high intermediate, advanced or high advanced levels for educational, professional or other purposes. Differently from other language proficiency exams, Celpe-Bras evaluates six levels of proficiency and provides certificates at four levels in one single exam.

Celpe-Bras is currently required for admission to Brazilian universities through the Graduate (Programa de Estudantes Convênio de Graduação - PEC-G) and Post-Graduate (Pós-Graduação - PEC-PG) Student Exchange Programmes; for admission of foreign students to some universities; and for validation of degrees earned

overseas for professionals who want to work in Brazil. Physicians who earned their degrees abroad and seek registration with the Regional Boards of Medicine (Conselhos Regionais de Medicina – CRM) have been asked since 2001 to obtain high intermediate level certification. Intermediate level certification is a requisite for foreign graduates in the areas of Statistics, Chemistry and Nursing. The exam is also required for foreign employees assigned to positions in multinational companies in Brazil (e.g. Honda, Mitsubishi, Samsung), and for Argentinean diplomats. These requirements indicate that exam results are used for different purposes; therefore, it is a high-stakes exam that contributes to establishing broad – rather than academic – language policies with a great potential for impact on many fields.

After the first round of discussions about its theoretical framework, the definition of exam format, the preparation of tests, the pilot trial with foreign and Brazilian students, and the analysis of results for the initial validation process, MEC appointed a Permanent Committee in December 1994 to complete exam standardization, manage its administration and rating, accredit institutions to give the test, and provide consultancy on all issues concerning the teaching of Portuguese to speakers of other languages.

The exam was first administered in 1998 to 127 candidates in five Brazilian universities (Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Universidade de Brasília, Universidade de Campinas) and in the Mercosur countries (Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay). In 1999, the exam was administered to 703 candidates on two different dates. In that same year, MEC established that applicants to the PEC-G and PEC-PG programmes should take the exam, and the number of applicants rose to 1,155 in 2000. In the same year, the exam was

administered in 14 locations in Brazil and 18 abroad. In 2001, the Federal Board of Medicine included Celpe-Bras as a requirement for the validation of medical school diplomas obtained in foreign countries. Since 2002, the exam has been administered twice a year, in April and October. Online application was made available in 2003, and the number of accredited centres rose to 18 in Brazil and 24 abroad. There are currently over 4,000 applications per year, and the exam is administered in 20 centres in Brazil and 39 in 28 other countries. For administration abroad, MEC has the support of the Brazilian Ministry of External Relations (MRE). The total number of applications for Celpe-Bras had reached 25,303 in October 2007.

Figure 1 shows the increase in the number of accredited centres since the exam was first administered in 1998. The number of Celpe-Bras candidates grew from 127 in 1998 to 4,141 in 2007.

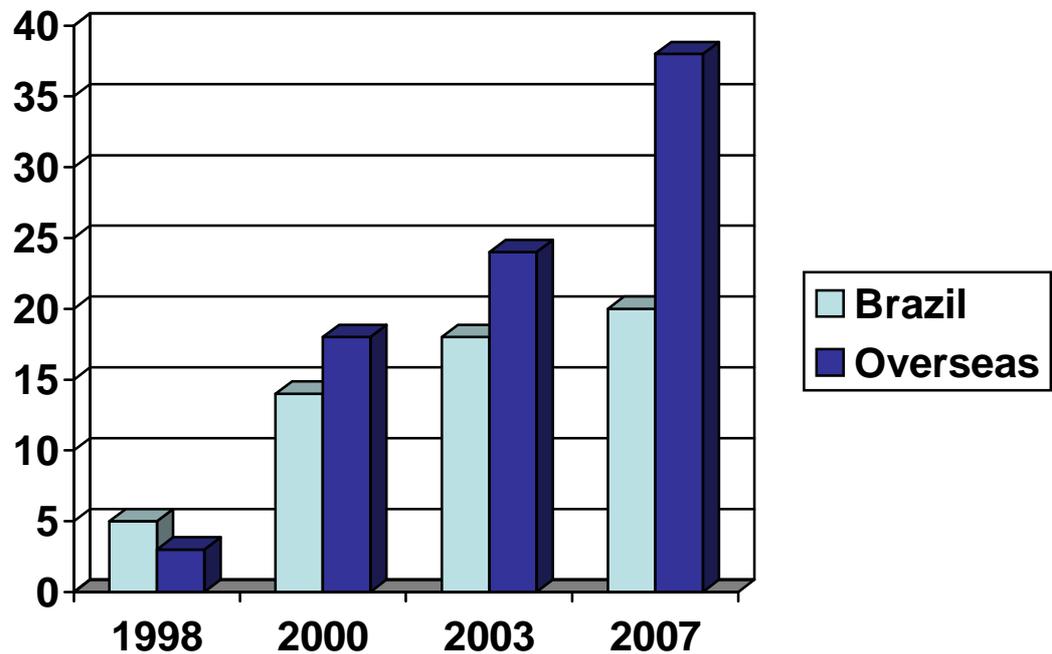


Figure 1 – Centres for the administration of the Celpe-Bras exam (1998–2007)

Rating is coordinated by a Technical Committee of language specialists responsible for exam preparation, including test construction, the coordination of rating, the training of examiners, the accreditation of centres, the advertising and training materials (candidate’s manual, administrator’s manual, training material for examiners); a coordinator and a team of examiners (teachers) in each accredited centre; and a team of raters, for a total of about 400 PFL teachers. MEC is in charge of making contact with accredited centres, providing the infrastructure for all the administration stages, printing the exam and support materials, sending the material to the centres, and issuing the certificates.

2.2 The implementation of CELU

In the 1990s, Argentina, like Brazil, sought to respond to the demand from university and private companies for certification of proficiency in Spanish. Since 1994, the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) has issued certificates based on exams that meet international criteria and formats (Association of Language Testers of Europe 1991), and has confirmed the positive impact of this proficiency exam on the development of its own courses (Acuña 1996).

In 2000, the Argentinean Ministry of Education decided to support the development and implementation of a national exam and to provide accreditation to a certificate of Spanish proficiency issued by national universities. In June 2001, based on the UBA's previous work on assessment, a new set of guidelines to assess proficiency in SFL was drafted by a team of linguists from three Argentinean universities appointed by the Ministry: Universidad de Buenos Aires, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC) and Universidad del Litoral (UNL). In 2002 pilot exams were administered for students in the UBA courses. In 2004, the *Consortio Interuniversitario para la Evaluación del Conocimiento y Uso del Español como Lengua Extranjera* ('Interuniversity Consortium for the Assessment of Knowledge and Use of Spanish as a Foreign Language') was created with the three national universities which had participated in the preparation of the Guidelines (see, for example, Resolutions 919 and 3164/2001 issued by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of External Affairs, and Resolution 180/04, MECyT, UBA, UNC and UNL). The participation of national universities ensured that CELU would play a role in the development and consolidation of the teaching of Spanish as a second (L2) and foreign (FL) language in Argentina. Moreover, the resolutions indicated that the

main purpose of CELU was the linguistic integration of the Region by means of reciprocal acknowledgement, cultural bridging, and academic exchanges.

Still in 2004 the academic committee modified the exam format (Prati 2007), revised its construct, prepared tests, piloted its administration with foreign students of different nationalities, and compared results and methods with members of the Celpe-Bras technical committee. Their purpose was to prepare an exam with potential for positive washback (Scaramucci 1995, 1999) on the teaching of SFL. Since November 2004, the exam has been administered eight times to a total of 1,178 candidates in six centres in Brazil and nine in Argentina. In November 2008, CELU will also be administered in Porto Alegre (Brazil), Berlin (Germany) and Paris (France). Since 2004, the Academic Committee has coordinated actions to prepare and pre-test tasks, prepare examiners, administer the exam, rate tests and provide certificates. Several seminars, courses and workshops have been carried out to prepare examiners and SFL/SSL teachers and to clarify and discuss CELU theoretical constructs and practical issues.

Figure 2 shows the growth in the number of centres since the implementation of the exam.

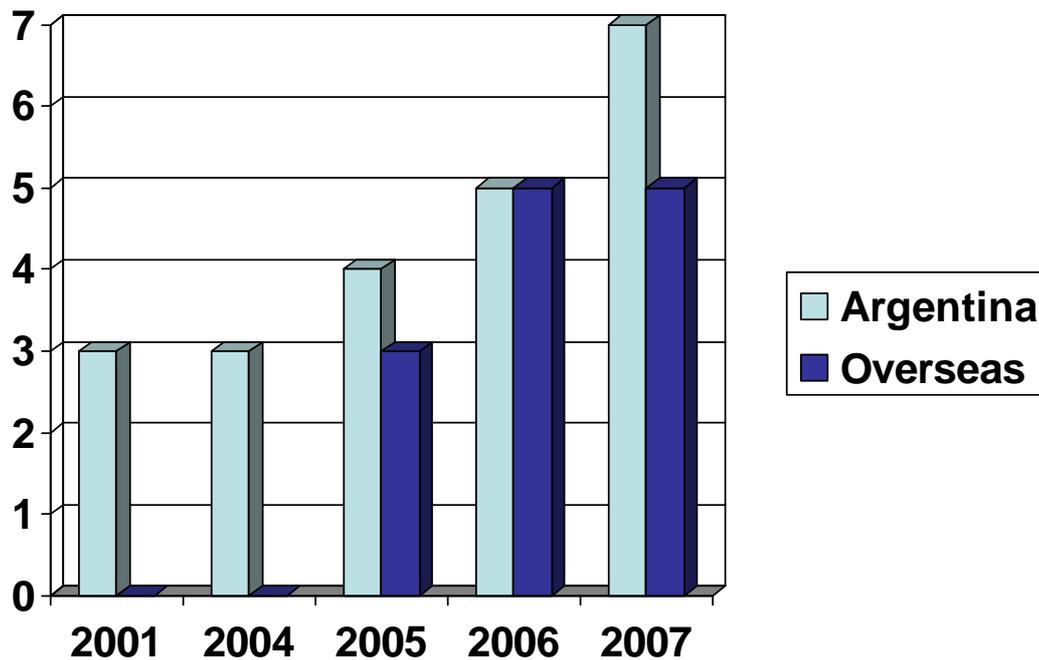


Figure 2 – CELU exam administration centres (2001–2008)

The accreditation of a new administration centre requires that a team of teachers take part in a preparation workshop for the written and oral parts of the exam. This team works under the supervision of experienced examiners when the exam is administered for the first time at that centre. Over 60 teachers are currently prepared to administer the CELU exam. The rating of written tests and the review of all the results are conducted in one of the centres in Argentina by a team of raters selected for that purpose. To validate and develop studies about the exam, annual colloquiums are held, and data of studies under development by students and researchers are discussed with guest language and evaluation specialists.

Since July 2007, 15 Argentinean universities have participated in the consortium, and all have contributed to Spanish teaching and language research: the national

universities of Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Litoral (Santa Fe), Mar del Plata, La Plata, San Martin, Rio Cuarto, San Luis, Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, La Pampa, Catamarca, Quilmes, Villa María, Comahue and Lomas de Zamora.

Other universities are currently following the procedures for acceptance into the consortium. Therefore, the purpose of the Consortium was expanded 'to promote the investigation, teaching and knowledge transfer of teaching, preparation and evaluation of Spanish as a second or foreign language (Art. 1 of the new statute) and the potential impact of the exam on SFL/SSL teaching in the country'.

3. Characteristics of the Celpe-Bras and CELU exams

As general proficiency exams, the main objective of Celpe-Bras (<www.mec.gov.br/celpebras>) and CELU (<www.celu.edu.ar>) is to evaluate the proficiency of those who need to use Portuguese or Spanish mainly to study or work in Brazil, Argentina or abroad.

3.1 Exam constructs

Large-scale evaluations have social impacts, and one of the major purposes of both exams is to (re)orient and (re)direct Portuguese and Spanish as L1, L2 or FL teaching practices in each country and abroad. Language teaching in those contexts has been described as traditional and based on materials whose primary focus is on grammar and vocabulary exercises and whose reading and writing activities are limited (Scaramucci 2008).

As mentioned above, Celpe-Bras and CELU evaluate skills to use Portuguese and Spanish by means of tasks that are similar to situations that may occur in

everyday life. They define as proficiency *the adequate use of the language to perform actions in the world* (Brazil 2006a, 2006b:4, CELU Manual 2007:3), and both exams evaluate oral and written comprehension and production in an integrated manner. The purpose of the exam tasks is to create opportunities for action in different social situations, in agreement with the concept that language use has social purposes and is locally and situationally co-constructed by the participants (Clark 1996) and with the notion of discourse genre (Bakhtin 2003).ⁱⁱⁱ Such criteria are used to design communicative situations. Although not explicit in the manuals, the exam specifications and task format, as well as the rating guidelines, are compatible with a Bakhtinian view that 'each utterance is unique and individual, but each domain of language use creates its *relatively stable types* of utterances, which are called *discourse genres*' (Bakhtin 2003:262). That is, utterances, differently from sentences, are produced in a specific communicative situation by someone with a specific role in this situation, and are addressed to interlocutors with specific purposes, produced in a context that also produces meaning. Therefore, the adequacy of actions produced by language use is, and should be, evaluated according to criteria that constitute and construct the communicative context created by the task itself (thematic domain, text comprehension and production purposes, enunciative position, interlocutor, format, support).

To evaluate different proficiency levels (see Scaramucci 2000 for a discussion on the concept of proficiency) using one single exam is possible because it is understood that individuals engage in different activities with different resources, which would result in a more or less adequate performance. The difference between levels mirrors the quality of the candidate's performance in oral and written text

comprehension and production tasks in three aspects: *Adequacy to context* – meeting the objectives of comprehension and production in the task taking into account the discourse genre; *discourse adequacy* – cohesion and coherence; and *linguistic adequacy* – adequate use of lexical and grammar resources (Brazil 2006a, 2006b:5; see also Scaramucci 1998, and Schlatter, Scaramucci, Judice and Dell’Isola 2003). The exam’s underlying concept of language development is the Vygotskian view that human learning and development are inherently linked to social practice (Lantolf 2000, Schlatter, Garcez and Scaramucci 2004, Vygotsky 1984); this means that the evaluation of performance should take into account the collective, co-constructed nature of the use of language that takes shape in social interactions.

Based on the concepts that language use and learning are primarily social, as well as on the objectives of the Celpe-Bras and CELU exams described above, the tasks provide opportunities for the candidates to use language to act and interact in several contexts using their skills to communicate in everyday situations, read and write texts, interact orally and interact in writing. This perspective is in line with the notion of linguistic education (Bagno and Rangel 2005, Garcez 2003; see also Secretaria de Educação Básica 2006), according to which the objective of teaching languages should be to create conditions so that ‘an individual or group should read and write to be fully inserted and participant in a typical literate society, such as our society (...)’ (Bagno and Rangel 2005:69). If we define literacy as the ‘state or condition of those who not only know how to read and write, but also perform the social reading and writing practices that circulate in society (...) and jointly use them with the social practices of oral interaction’ (Soares 1999:3), the characteristics of the Celpe-Bras and CELU exams can be associated with an evaluation whose purpose is

to analyze how much the candidate participates in different oral and written contexts to act as a citizen in complex activities of the contemporary world (Garcez in press:2, Schlatter in press:2).

3.2 Exam format

The Celpe-Bras exam has two modules. Module 1 is administered collectively; it lasts two hours and thirty minutes and includes four tasks, two that integrate oral comprehension and written production and two that integrate reading and written production. In Module 2, the Individual Part, individual candidates and the examiner interact face-to-face for 20 minutes, starting with an interview about topics in the candidate's everyday life and topics of general interests, such as education, tourism, food, habits, etc., and elicited by visual prompts such as short texts, photos, cartoons. This module is audio recorded (or video recorded) for future reference, if necessary, and for analyses of the evaluation process, which are conducted by sampling. In this section of the exam, although there is a list of questions suggested by the evaluators, examiners are instructed to conduct the interview in the format of everyday conversation, that is, reacting to the answers given, promoting participation and following the thread of the answers provided by the interviewee (Brazil 2006a:28). This part is evaluated holistically by the interviewer and analytically by an examiner that uses a grade scheme with the following items: comprehension, interactional competence, fluency, lexical adequacy, grammar adequacy and pronunciation.

CELU is also composed of two modules to evaluate the candidate's written and oral performances. Both sections have authentic texts that are either heard or

read, and instructions to perform the activities as if in real life, that is, assuming, as in the Celpe-Bras, the existence of a purpose, an interlocutor, and a text format, which make up a certain discourse genre.

In module 1, or Written Part, the candidate constructs four texts to responding to demands of different situations. The texts are rated according to the following criteria: context adequacy – comprehension and production adequate to the demands of the task; discourse adequacy – production of coherent and focused texts; grammar and lexical adequacy – linguistic resources adequate to the communicative situation.

In module 2, or Oral Part, the candidate holds a conversation with the examiner, who uses a brief authentic text, such as an ad, a piece of news, a poster presented on a transparency, as a prompt for the conversation. The conversation may have the format of an interview or a dialog, and may include, for example, the presentation of ideas or data, narration of personal events experienced by the candidate or other people, discussion of opinions. After that, instructions suggest the simulation of everyday situations between the examiner and the candidate based on topics presented on a slide. The Oral Part is evaluated holistically by the interlocutor and analytically by an examiner according to the following criteria: interaction, fluency, pronunciation and intonation, grammar and vocabulary.

CELU certifies two proficiency levels: intermediate and advanced.^{iv} Candidates at the intermediate level can communicate orally and in writing with some fluency and ease in familiar social and work situations, and are able to start university studies. They may have some difficulty to deal with unknown contexts or to adapt and specify their utterances to the demands of the communicative context. The advanced

candidate can communicate orally and in writing adequately and deftly in a large variety of familiar and social contexts, both in academic and work situations (CELU 2008:3).^v

	Module 1	Module 2	Levels certified
Celpe-Bras	150-minute exam with four tasks: two tasks integrate oral comprehension (video and audio) and written production; and two tasks integrate reading and writing.	20-minute face-to-face interaction: 5-minute interview about candidate's interests and activities; and 15-minute conversation about different topics elicited by visual prompts.	High advanced, advanced, high intermediate, intermediate
CELU	180-minute exam with four tasks: One task integrates oral comprehension and writing; and three tasks integrate reading and writing.	15-minute face-to-face interaction: Conversation about different topics elicited by visual prompts; and one simulation of everyday situation.	Advanced and intermediate

Table 3. Format of Celpe-Bras and CELU and proficiency levels

Celpe-Bras and CELU share a language concept that prioritizes the needs of speakers. The purpose of direct exams, which evaluate the level of performance by means of qualitative evaluations, is to certify that a speaker is capable to 'act in the world in several contexts of language use', which is compatible with an educational policy whose aim is to prepare educated bilingual citizens according to their needs and to participate in different social practices deftly and with intercultural flexibility, which will promote the integration of the region.

4. Impact of the exams on Brazil-Argentina relations and on the definition of parameters for the teaching of Portuguese and Spanish to speakers of other languages.

4.1 The status of exams in bilateral agreements

In the 1990s, the need to develop exams to certify the use of Portuguese and Spanish as a L1, L2 or FL, tools for academic mobility and integration, was already acknowledged in meetings and conferences of agents in the field of education promoted by the Mercosur Educativo, the Association of Universities of the Montevideo Group (AUGM) and other organizations (e.g. Latin Union). Together with such an acknowledgement, documents reveal two priorities in terms of language policies: to make a sociolinguistic and educational diagnosis of the region; and to promote the integration of the region with the support of the Ministries of Education and under the guidance of universities.

Celpe-Bras was first administered in 1998 in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. In June 2004, after the establishment of an interuniversity consortium and the development of CELU, the Ministries of Education of Brazil and Argentina signed an agreement for the reciprocal accreditation of their proficiency exams, to promote Latin American linguistic policies based on reciprocity and cooperation with Brazilian Universities. As mentioned above, CELU was first administered in Brazilian institutions in November 2004.

A fundamental language policy for the mutual promotion of Portuguese and Spanish is the teaching of these languages in regular schools in both countries. Although already an option in the curriculum of several Brazilian schools, SFL

became compulsory in secondary school education after the Brazilian Law 11,161 was passed in 2005. 'Spanish teaching, compulsorily offered in schools and optional for students, shall be gradually implemented in the full curricula of secondary education' (Brazil, 2005: 1). Portuguese teaching in Argentinean schools started in 1994. A bill has been recently approved (December 2008) by the Argentinean Congress to make Portuguese teaching compulsory in the secondary schools all over the country and also in primary schools at the Brazilian border, as a reciprocal measure to the law passed in Brazil (see Carvalho 2007, Oliveira 2004, Diniz 2008 for a discussion of PFL linguistic policies).

4.2 Teaching implications: teaching materials and teaching and learning practices

Some results of these political acts, together with the implementation of the two exams, are already visible in educational contexts in Brazil and Argentina, as well as in other countries where the Celpe-Bras exam is administered. One of the fundamental principles of all Brazil-Argentina bilateral agreements is the integration of the region and the preparation of citizens with bilingual abilities. Therefore, the exams provide parameters for the development of curricula and promote the use of the Brazilian and Argentinean language and culture variations. However, the influence of exams in published textbooks is still weak, particularly in Spanish textbooks prepared according to the CELU theoretical framework because of its recent implementation. Few PFL and SFL teaching materials adopt an approach to language use and interactive oral, reading and writing practice in contexts (discourse genres) that may give students the opportunity to experience a larger variety of social

interactions. Few teaching materials are concerned with the construction of bilingual and intercultural understanding. Moreover, the development of materials that take into account the specificities of typologically similar languages is only beginning and is still restricted to private institutions.

In addition to promoting teaching parameters, these exams also affect the growing demand for teacher development. The administration of the two exams involves a large number of teachers of Portuguese and Spanish to speakers of other languages: in the case of Celpe-Bras, this number is over 400, and in the case of CELU, over 60. Therefore, evaluation procedures alone contribute to teacher preparation and development that are more focused and coherent in view of a contemporary language definition. In agreement with the systems required for large-scale exams, several measures are necessary to ensure reliability and validity:

To keep the uniformity of administration conditions, train administrators and raters, prepare grade schemes with detailed rubrics, have two independent raters score each text and interview, monitor rating to resolve discrepant scores, evaluate the performance of administrators and raters (...) (Schlatter, 2006:174)

As mentioned above, several seminars, workshops and teacher education courses have been held parallel to exam administrations; their purpose is to discuss teaching and testing experiences that are conducted in accordance with to the principles laid out in the exams. The reports of the visits of the Celpe-Bras Technical Committee to the accredited centres describe the need and the demand for

preparation and development of the teachers in graduate programmes and in short courses, such as the training courses offered by several administration centres with the support of the Brazilian Ministry of External Relations.

One of the major factors to motivate the characteristics and format of these exams has been their potential to impact the teaching of Portuguese and Spanish to speakers of other languages. For several years, the teaching of these languages was restricted to the use of grammar-based teaching material and classroom practices, vocabulary practice, and fill-in-the blanks exercises. Studies about the washback effects of Celpe-Bras on PFL teaching have shown a gradual, although partial, change in teaching methods towards creating more opportunities for the use of language and the practice of several oral and written genres (see Scaramucci 2004a, 2004b for results in contexts of Spanish speakers; see also Scaramucci & Rodrigues 2004 for an analysis of reading and writing). In addition, teaching materials have been prepared with audio and video texts that are found in everyday situations in Brazil and Argentina.

Data about the perceptions of teachers of Portuguese as a FL/L2 collected in administration centres in Brazil and abroad (Scaramucci 2004b, 2006, 2008) indicate that, although the exam has affected some more than others, there is a general positive attitude towards the exam and an acknowledgement of the exam's impact on their practices. However, many changes 'perceived' by teachers are still not effectively practiced in the classroom. Classroom data still show superficial changes in the practice of teachers, which leads to the conclusion that the exam has not yet had an impact on teaching (Scaramucci 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2008). Other forces in society and, mainly, in the contexts of education, such as teacher preparation and

experience, should be taken into consideration to improve joint actions for continued education.

4.3 Implications for future studies

The Celpe-Bras and CELU exams have triggered collaborative studies about evaluation and other themes, such as teaching and learning practices and teacher education. The definition of levels of proficiency, evaluation grade schemes that put into operation the construct of language use, the consequences of use of evaluations, studies about the oral and written performances of speakers of different languages, literacy, and cultural issues, for example, are some of the topics investigated in studies about Celpe-Bras.^{vi}

According to Schlatter (2006:174),

The results of these studies have provided data for the improvement of the exams, such as: a better grade scheme, clearer instruction for administrators, better materials to train examiners, greater investment in the preparation and production of tests and support materials.

Studies about teaching and evaluation presented during the annual CELU Colloquium showed a gradual change in the teaching perspective of the teaching community. Based on studies and discussions by participants and lecturers, advances were seen in comparison with studies in previous colloquiums. A clearer understanding of the CELU focus on the use of language, the possibility of organizing teaching and evaluation based on discourse genres, linguistic variations and how to

deal with them in the classroom, and evaluation were some of the aspects found in current studies (as referred to in the changes of placement tests and proficiency exams of USAL and UNC in Argentina, Conclusiones del III Coloquio CELU, www.celu.edu.ar).

In a meeting with the participation of some members of the Technical Committees of the Celpe-Bras (2006 Committee members) and CELU exams, common development issues were discussed, and joint actions and studies were planned in the area of foreign language evaluation. These studies were conducted and discussed in conferences and presentations during the CELU Colloquiums.

4.4 The search for more specific preparation and parameters for other evaluations

The increase in the number of students enrolled in Portuguese and Spanish classes in the accredited centres has also been linked to the implementation of the exams. For example, the number of Portuguese students in the Instituto de Cultura Brasil Colombia (IBRACO) increased from 262 in 2000 to 1,074 in 2003.^{vii} In the Language Laboratory of UBA, the number of Spanish students increased from 440 in 2003 to 1,987 in 2007.^{viii} According to management reports and information in these centres, this increase may be explained by the need for better preparation created by the exams. Moreover, the results obtained by their students in the Celpe-Bras exam are used by several institutions as an index of the quality of their courses, and the growing number of preparation courses for the exam in most accredited centres in Brazil and abroad confirm the importance of the Celpe-Bras in these contexts (see sites of administration centres).

The exams have also been used as reference for other evaluation processes. Celpe-Bras, for example, was used as a guideline for the preparation of the LIBRAS proficiency exam (Regulatory Decree no. 5626/2005 for Law no. 10,436 that regulates the use of the *Lingua Brasileira de Sinais* (Brazilian Sign Language, LIBRAS) and for the development of achievement and placement tests in some institution that administer the exam (IBEC, ICBV, UFRGS, for example; see Costa 2005, Ohlweiler 2006, Santos 2004, 2007). CELU was used as a guideline for the evaluation of Spanish proficiency of Italian students in an exam prepared by the Ministry of Education in Argentina, the preparation of achievement and placement tests in institutions that administer the exam, and the evaluation of the academic performance of bilingual teachers (CIFMA, Provincia del Chaco).

5. Perspectives and challenges

The Celpe-Bras and CELU evaluation systems are expected to deal with an increasing number of applicants and to continue preparing language teachers. For this purpose, the partnership between Brazil and Argentina shall consolidate joint actions to establish an equivalence of exam levels and to conduct studies about the teaching and evaluation of typologically similar languages. We believe that the Celpe-Bras and CELU evaluation systems are political acts carried out by the Ministries of Education in both countries with the support of the Ministry of External Relations, and their importance for the region and the Brazil-Argentina bilateral relations is tremendous. These acts have contributed to the dissemination of Brazilian Portuguese and of Spanish in the countries where the exams are administered (see Figures 1 and 2 above). In educational terms, they have been an

important investment in the continued education of workers in the area of teaching Portuguese, Spanish and other foreign languages in general, as well as in teaching Portuguese and Spanish as L1.

Beyond the results associated with the implementation of the exams discussed above, which indicate a relative impact of Celpe-Bras and CELU on the participants and on the tools used in educational contexts, in studies, and in other social contexts, more intense collaboration on the following aspects should be expected:

- improvement and harmonization of teacher education in bilingual contexts
- improvement of educational standards for FL in Brazil and Argentina
- research on teaching and assessment practices based on the socially accomplished practices;
- research on teaching and assessment practices in typologically related languages
- debate on social responsibilities and professional ethics in language assessment
- improvement of literacy assessment
- promotion of ethical and ecological linguistic planning
- promotion of exchange programmes for Portuguese and Spanish teachers
- publication of teaching materials for different domains and purposes

- and above all, education of citizens with integrative and intercultural attitudes, who are critical, flexible, and prepared to act in multiple and diverse contexts.

Several of the aspects listed above are the focus of studies and discussions currently conducted by educational agents in different contexts in Brazil and Argentina. Education plays a strategic role in integration, and the Celpe-Bras and CELU evaluation systems are political acts in the realm of education and language policies. Therefore, we expect these exams to contribute to the teaching of Spanish and Portuguese at different levels and modalities in institutions of our educational systems to improve the communication between the Mercosur countries. To adopt literacy parameters in the evaluation of language proficiency requires that Spanish and Portuguese teaching expand the possibilities of approximation and understanding between the participants of intercultural encounters, so that they can face the challenges of integration and preparation of critical and flexible citizens willing to act in multiple contexts.

Both exams play a major role, for example, in projects to harmonize the educational systems of the Mercosur countries, one of the objectives of the Educational Sector of Mercosur (SEM), and in the selection of teachers for Spanish and Portuguese. One of the projects that will require specific certification is the Border Schools Project (see http://www.sic.inep.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=270&Itemid=96). This project relies on 'a common teaching model based on the development of a programme for intercultural education that assigns priority to the teaching of

Portuguese and Spanish'. Another project that may demand certification is the Federal University of Latin American Integration (Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana - UNILA), whose creation is under discussion in the Brazilian National Congress (see http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/Projetos/PL/2007/msg961-071212.htm).

There have also been advances in the agreements signed between Brazil and Argentina to promote Portuguese and Spanish education: exchange programs for language assistants and teachers, in the form of online courses, cooperation in the design of teaching materials, and agreements for joint publications in both countries (Protocol 2005, see endnote 2).

However, it is the Universities in the Region, particularly those that developed and implemented Celpe-Bras and CELU, and the Brazilian universities that have prestigious research departments and offer Spanish teacher education that have contributed to clearly defining the need for a Regional linguistic policy. On 29 and 30 November 2007 the Brazilian Ministry of Education held a conference to 'discuss the Celpe-Bras and CELU evaluation systems and the experience of teaching Portuguese and Spanish as second or foreign languages (PSSFL), to establish priorities for joint actions, and to provide subsidies for governmental decision concerning the funding of PSSFL programmes'. The following conclusions were reached:

The actions discussed and presented by Universities in the Region follow a vision of generalized Portuguese and Spanish bilingualism in Mercosur and South America

according to the needs of speakers followed by policies to promote other languages used by the citizens in all countries. The construction of bilingualism should promote the general improvement of educational results in our countries. It is fundamental that Universities are appointed to formulate and put into practice the actions to reach linguistic integration (Minute of the Brazil – Argentina Conference on Teaching and Certification of Portuguese and Spanish as second languages, held in celebration of the Brazil-Argentina Friendship Day, 29 and 30 November 2007).

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ⁱ Mercosur is the free trade zone and common market in South America created by the Asuncion Treaty in 1991 between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay (the original member countries). After its creation, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru also became members. The latest country to join was Venezuela, who did so in 2006. Although its original purposes were economic, Mercosur has played a substantial role in cultural and educational issues. In 1992 the Educational Mercosur Committee was created to coordinate the actions of the Ministries of Education of the member countries.

ⁱⁱ The names of those who have participated in the committees can be found in Directives published in the Diário Oficial da União (Official Brazilian Gazette), available at

www.mec.gov.br/celpebras

ⁱⁱⁱ The definition of discourse genre is not explicit in the Celpe-Bras (nor CELU) exam manuals, but the exam specification lists different ‘discourse genres’ and the characteristics of the Group Part of the exam indicate the use of this concept.

^{iv} The exam team is currently conducting a study with performance samples to evaluate the possible use of different descriptions for an intermediate and a high intermediate level. If validated by the Academic Committee, different certifications will be issued for these level definitions. The certificates of proficiency at intermediate and advanced levels currently state whether the performance of the candidate in the different tasks was good, very good or excellent.

^v Comisión Académica, Presentación del examen CELU, definiciones de Nivel, 2004. (Academic Committee, Presentation of the CELU exam, level definitions, 2004).

^{vi} Seven Master’s theses about the Celpe-Bras exam have been completed and about 10 studies (undergraduate, graduate, doctorate) are underway. The following are some of the theses and dissertations about the exam: Varela (2001), Sidi (2002), Schoffen (2003), Rodrigues (2006), Sakamori (2006), Rodrigues da Silva (2007), Nascimento (2008). The studies completed about CELU were presented at the Colloquiums.

^{vii} Information retrieved from the report of the Instituto de Cultura Brasil Colombia (IBRACO) and presented at a meeting of Centros de Estudos Brasileiros in Buenos Aires, March 2004.

^{viii} The increase in the number of students in the two institutions is not necessarily directly associated with the exams. The growing relations between Brazil and Argentina and between these countries and others together with the consequent demand for knowledge of both languages are some of the other possible explanations for the increased demand for Spanish and Portuguese courses.