

Reflections on plurilingualism and language education in the Brazilian Context

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Abstract

The publication of the new Common National Curricular Base on December 22, 2017, stimulated several discussions in the academia of the area of language education in additional languages regarding the change of the component “Modern Foreign Languages” in the Law of Directives and Bases of Education (LDB) (Brasil, 1996), which allowed states and cities to choose the language according to their specific contexts, to the curricular component “English Language”, as the only additional language of compulsory teaching in Basic Education. Such discussions, in turn, encourage national movements such as “Fica Espanhol” (Stay Spanish) and “Moveplu” (Movement in Support of Multilingual Education). At the same time, we see the emergence and expansion of initiatives such as the project of bilingual schools of the Municipal Department of Education of Rio de Janeiro, offering the teaching of English, Spanish, French and German in public schools in the city. Still, in favour of multilingualism, we also have 51 cities across the country that have achieved the co-officialization of several indigenous languages, in addition to German and Italian immigration languages. Considering all the factors above, this article discusses ways for a linguistic education that may promote the maintenance and development

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of plurilingualism in Brazil. To this end, the text revisits the literature on multilingualism and language education in the country, bringing to discussion the concept of intercultural language education and the proposal implemented in Rio de Janeiro, focusing more specifically on the teaching-learning of German in municipal bilingual schools.

Keywords: plurilingualism; language education; minority languages; German as an additional language.

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Resumo

A publicação da nova Base Nacional Comum Curricular, em 22 de dezembro de 2017, movimentou diversas discussões no meio acadêmico da área de educação linguística em línguas adicionais a respeito da mudança do componente “Línguas Estrangeiras Modernas”, na Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação (LDB) (Brasil, 1996), que facultava aos estados e municípios a escolha da língua de acordo com seus contextos específicos, para o componente curricular “Língua Inglesa”, como única língua adicional de ensino obrigatório na Educação Básica. Tais discussões, por sua vez, impulsionam movimentos nacionais como o “Fica Espanhol” e o “Moveplu” (Movimento a favor do Ensino Plurilíngue). Ao mesmo tempo, vemos surgir e expandirem-se iniciativas como o projeto de escolas bilíngues da Secretaria Municipal de Educação do Rio de Janeiro, com a oferta de ensino de inglês, espanhol, francês e alemão em escolas públicas do município. Ainda em favor do plurilinguismo, temos também os 51 municípios espalhados

pelo país que lograram a cooficialização de diversas línguas indígenas, além de línguas de imigração alemãs e italianas. Considerando todos os fatores expostos, este artigo tem como objetivo discutir caminhos para uma educação linguística que possa promover a manutenção e o desenvolvimento do plurilinguismo no Brasil. Para isso, o texto revisita a literatura que se debruça sobre o plurilinguismo e a educação linguística no país, trazendo à discussão o conceito de educação linguística intercultural e a proposta que vem sendo implementada no Rio de Janeiro, focando de forma mais específica, o ensino-aprendizado de alemão nas escolas bilíngues municipais.

Palavras-chave: plurilinguismo; educação linguística; línguas minoritárias; alemão como língua adicional.

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1 Initial considerations

In the Introduction chapter of the book “Bilingual Education”, Megale (2019) argues that since the “sharpening of globalization”, we have witnessed a significant increase in the number of bilingual schools with the teaching of languages recognised as prestigious, such as English, French, and German. Moreover, we see the empowerment of groups that claim for the maintenance and strengthening of the diversification of language teaching in the country, taking into account historical, social, cultural and regional issues, such as the movements “Fica Espanhol” and “Moveplu - Movimento pela Educação Plurilíngue” (these movements will be discussed in the next section). In the same way, we have followed since 2002 processes for the co-officialization of minority¹ languages in different Brazilian cities, as in the cases of São Gabriel da Cachoeira (Nheengatu, Baniwa and Tukanu), Santa Maria de Jeribá (Pomerano) and Serafina Correa (Talian²), where local communities fight for the linguistic rights of their citizens. Such rights, which come from broad social demands, are the main focus for the claims of these communities, as summarised by Morello (2012):

1. The establishment of the linguistic right as a confrontation with the linguistic prejudice that has plagued Brazil for a long time;
2. Qualifying local social and political relations represented at the municipal level;

1 The concept of minority languages is based in this paper on the following definition by Altenhofen (2013, p. 94): “modality of languages or varieties used on the margins or alongside a dominant (majority) language”.

2 According to IPOL - Instituto de Investigação e Desenvolvimento em Política Linguística, the number of municipalities that have co-officialized languages is currently 51, for a total of 22 co-officialized languages. More information about the municipalities, the languages and the respective coofficialization laws can be found at: <http://ipol.org.br/lista-de-linguas-cooficiais-em-municipios-brasileiros>. Accessed on Feb. 10, 2023.

3. Creation of a new jurisprudence necessary for guaranteeing language rights, in line with the current agenda of democratic countries. (Morello, 2012, s/p).

Considering the aspects mentioned above, this article aims to discuss ways of confronting structural monolingualism based on initiatives that seek plurality, in the case of this study, more specifically, initiatives in the area of language education. For the purposes of this discussion, a project focussing on intercultural language education, implemented by the Municipal Department of Education in Rio de Janeiro, will be used as an example. The “Bilingual Schools Project” offers a greater diversity of additional languages. Thus, in addition to English, the only language that is compulsory in the Common Core National Curriculum (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular - BNCC*), there are schools with languages such as German, French and Spanish in their curricula, which can contribute to a more plural and interculturally sensitive language education. Thus, in this article, the perspective of plurilingualism to be discussed is centred on the idea of the linguistic diversity of the Brazilian context, shaped by its formation and history and by more recent processes such as the co-officialization of indigenous and immigration languages in many municipalities in the country over the last two decades.

Thus, the article is organised as follows: we begin the discussion by addressing the historical development that drove the myth of Brazilian monolingualism, based on the works of Oliveira (2008), Monteagudo (2012), Carboni *et al.* (2017), among other authors. Then, we propose a reflection on the teaching of additional languages in Brazil and the struggle for diversity and plurality in this teaching based on the research of Siqueira (2018) and Brossi, Silva and Freitas (2020). In

Section 4, we review the concept of intercultural language education, based mainly on the studies by Brossi, Silva and Freitas (2020) and Kawachi-Furlan and Malta (2020). Finally, we discuss the bilingual offer in municipal schools in Rio de Janeiro, focusing on the teaching of German as an additional language and the aspects pointed out in the framework of the project implementation in official documents (Rio de Janeiro, 2018). In the final considerations, we point out that the struggle for the recognition and guarantee of the linguistic rights of the population requires from the whole society, especially from us researchers and educators, attention and engagement so that a plural, interculturally sensitive language education that reaches the majority of Brazilian learners can be ensured.

2 Brazil - a plurilingual country

Not a few authors associate plurilingualism to the rule and monolingualism with an anomaly or invention (Cavalcanti, 1999; Orlandi, 2009; Monteagudo, 2012; Oliveira, 2008; Carboni *et al.*, 2017, among others). In Monteagudo's (2012, p. 44) argumentation, monolingualism has been constructed and elevated to the "normal situation" condition. Thus, in his words:

social monolingualism, far from being a spontaneous phenomenon, can be (and often is) the result of a series of more or less deliberate glotopolitical interventions to homogenise populations speaking several languages, a result that is, moreover artificially maintained by states through policies of exclusion of languages other than the 'officially' recognised one. In other words, against what common sense would indicate [...], monolingualism is not (or not always) the natural state of things. Still, it is the result of very complex processes, and to a large

extent, specific to our civilisation in the contemporary era. More concretely, it has a lot to do with creating European-shaped nation-states, which are artefacts of relatively recent invention.

The same author, evoking the beginning of this movement, which he calls the “invention” of the ideas of nation and linguistic identity, points out two important fronts adopted by the state as measures that would serve the process of linguistic homogenisation or standardisation. They are: the administrative use of the language and the use of the educational system. In addition, Monteagudo (2012) cites the interests of different social groups as also important agents in this process, such as the interests of different sectors of the bourgeoisie (industrial, commercial, and financial), sectors of the intellectuality, and the interests of groups, for example, connected to the media (Monteagudo, 2012, p. 49). The author certainly mentions such agents and interests, referring to the emergence and first steps towards monolingualism; however, it is easily possible to think of the same agents in different contexts and at different historical moments, such as the Brazilian context throughout its history.

In Brazil, the idea of the linguistic unity of Portuguese is widespread, as it is considered the only language spoken in the country. In this sense, it is of great importance (1) the unveiling of the fallacious idea that associates the “Brazilian identity” with the act of “speaking Portuguese” and (2) the unveiling of the political and ideological construction of a deliberate linguistic-cultural homogenisation of the country, from different mechanisms, many of them, the same ones cited by Monteagudo in the previous reference.

Thus, we may ask ourselves: how is the idea of

monolingualism possible in a country in which approximately 200 languages are spoken, according to Oliveira's studies (2008), among indigenous languages, sign languages and immigration languages? Among us, to the process of linguistic-cultural homogenization around the Portuguese language, the first law that imposes the Portuguese language to all inhabitants of the country, the so-called "Diretório dos Índios" (Indigenous Directive), dated 1758, is usually pointed out as an important milestone. According to different authors (Oliveira, 2008; Carboni *et al.*, 2017), this law marks the decline of the so-called "General Language", a linguistic variety originating mainly from the Tupi language, widely used by indigenous, white and black people in large portions of the Brazilian territory. Oliveira (2008) calls attention to the fact that no imposition happens peacefully and without resistance and, quoting historian José Honório Rodrigues, underlines the so-called "language wars". According to Rodrigues (1985, p. 42, *apud* Oliveira, 2008, p. 5):

In a society divided into castes, races, and classes, even when the process of language unification is evident, especially in a continent like Brazil, where for three centuries several indigenous and black languages fought against one white one, there was neither cultural peace nor linguistic peace. [...] The cultural process that imposed a victorious language over others was neither peaceful nor easy. It cost unprecedented efforts, the blood of rebels, suicides, and lives.

In another historical moment, more precisely the 1930s and 1940s, when nationalist ideologies prevailed during the Vargas administration, witnessed a violent linguistic and cultural repression of the immigrant populations in the country. Such repression had as its main instrument the creation of the legal

concept of “language crime”, which supported actions such as the occupation of community schools, the expropriation or closing of German and Italian printing presses and newspapers, and the persecution and imprisonment of thousands of citizens for speaking the German or Italian language “in public, or even privately, inside their homes.” (Oliveira, 2008, p. 6). According to Oliveira (2008, p.6), “these languages lost their written form and their place in cities, and their speakers started using them only orally and increasingly in rural areas, in more and more restricted communicational spheres”.

Despite this, as we saw in Rodrigues’ excerpt, there is resistance. Even with all the erasure and glotocide suffered, we have reached today where there are, according to Oliveira (2008), about 170 indigenous languages spoken by the various ethnic groups that populate Brazil, about 30 languages linked to communities formed by descendants of immigrants and two languages spoken by Brazilian deaf communities: the Urubu-Kaapor sign language and LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language).

At this point, it is important to mention that an important step has been taken towards recognising Brazilian plurilingualism: the movement of co-official languages through municipal laws. The co-official languages are, in fact, recognised at the municipal level as official languages, alongside Portuguese, which was established as the only national official language in the 1988 Constitution³. Researchers Mui Yu, Welter and Berger (2017), citing the work of Morello (2012), argue that several factors drive language co-officialization processes:

3 In 2002, through law 10.436, LIBRAS (Brazilian Sign Language) was recognized as a “legal means of communication and expression” throughout the national territory. Available at: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/2002/l10436.htm. Accessed on 09 Feb. 2023.

there are municipalities where a high density of inhabitants speak indigenous or immigrant languages, enabling these municipalities to be powerful political and administrative instances for the management of these languages and to take the initiative to conduct language co-officialization processes in the face of local communities' own demands. (Mui Yu; Welter; Berger, 2017, w/p).

These co-officialization processes open up several new possibilities for the activation of plurilingualism, as through the law, it is possible for speakers of the co-official language to express themselves freely in their language, in addition to being able to use it in different aspects of civil life. Above all, it is worth noting the inclusion of these co-official languages in spaces where Portuguese once had absolute hegemony. This is reflected in teaching and Education since the State needs to create and provide structures that guarantee the maintenance and exercise of the speech of these communities.

Therefore, from these processes and the exponential growth of bilingual education in various regions of the country, as is the case that we will address in Section 5 of this article (“Language education in the city of Rio de Janeiro”), we have seen the emergence of a scenario conducive to the strengthening of policies and practices that seek to foster plurilingualism in the context of Brazilian education. In the wake of this scenario and in response to recent language policies, which, since the publication of the National Common Curricular Base (Brasil, 2017b) restricts the curricular component “Foreign Languages” to “English Language”, movements such as “Fica Espanhol” (Stay Spanish)⁴ and “Moveplu – National Movement for a

⁴ Movement created to claim for the permanence of the teaching of Spanish Language, according to the Law 11.161 (2005) that guaranteed the mandatory offer of this language in Elementary II and High School in the Brazilian educational system. Available at: <https://profemarli.com/movimento-fica-espanhol> Accessed on: Feb. 10, 2023.

Plurilingual Education”⁵, come into play. These movements aim to claim greater diversification in providing additional language teaching in the public sphere of teaching in basic education, guaranteeing the legitimate linguistic right of plural language education to students in the country.

In order to better understand where we are today, next we intend to do a brief theoretical review of historical milestones, especially regarding the educational laws and guidelines for language teaching in Brazil.

3 Language Teaching in Brazil – a brief history

According to Leffa (1999), Brazil has a great tradition in language teaching, initially of classical languages, such as Greek and Latin, and later of modern languages, such as French, English, German, Italian and, very recently, Spanish; and this, according to the author, without considering the first schools founded by the Jesuits for the catechization of indigenous people.

During the colonial period, Greek and Latin were the predominant subjects as far as language teaching was concerned. Only with the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family in 1808, the creation of Pedro II School in 1837, and later with the reform of 1855⁶, modern foreign languages began to have space in the secondary school curriculum (Leffa, 1999).

5 Moveplu was created in 2021 with the objective of claiming for the permanence guarantee and strengthening of the diversification of minority languages (for example, French, Italian and German), especially in contexts where this offer is already present, considering the geolinguistic characteristics of Brazil. Available at: http://fbpf.org.br/arquivos/Proposta_MOVEPLU_3849-2019.pdf. Accessed on Oct. 2, 2023.

6 The educational reform of 1855, proposed by Minister Couto Ferraz, changed the syllabus of the Pedro II College, instituting two cycles: First and Second Class Studies. The first cycle, consisting of four years, gave students a certificate of completion, which allowed them to enter a technical training institute, without the need for exams. The second cycle, which lasted three years, gave the student the title of Bachelor of Arts, which gave them access to any higher education institution (Lorenz; Vechia, 1988).

Language teaching during the empire already began to show signs that it would suffer from administrative decisions, including those related to the curriculum, because, according to Leffa (1999, p. 4), they were centralized “in the congregations of the colleges, apparently with too much power and too little competence to manage the growing complexity of language teaching”. For Leffa (1999), it was during the imperial period that language teaching began to decline, along with secondary schooling, which had fallen into disfavor because of its focus on exam preparation (such as the “maturity exams”, for example). Leffa also points out that although “we do not have exact statistics on important aspects of language teaching in this period, [...] what we have, through laws, decrees and ordinances, shows a gradual decline in the prestige of foreign languages in school”. (Leffa, 1999, p. 5). While the number of foreign language subjects had remained the same (Latin, Greek, French, English, German and Italian), their workload was declining, so that by the end of the empire it was a little more than half of what was offered in its early days.

The republican period (1889 to 1930) was also marked by a history of decreasing diversified language offerings: with the exception of Fernando Lobo’s reform in 1892 and Epiácio Pessoa’s in 1900, which made the teaching of English and German compulsory, these subjects were offered in an optional (Vidotti; Dornelas, 2007) or exclusive way, that is, the student studied one or the other, but not both concomitantly (Leffa, 1999); the Greek language was no longer offered from 1915, with C. Maximiliano, as well as the Italian language, which had a brief respite in 1925, with the reform of J. L. Alves-Rocha Vaz, becoming optional (Vidotti; Dornelas, 2007). Moreover, for Leffa (1999, p. 6), the

free attendance of these subjects also contributed, in his words, to the “de-officialization” of their teaching.

The 1931 reform by Francisco de Campos, in addition to extinguishing free attendance, gave more focus to modern languages, not by increasing their workload, but by reducing the workload of the Latin language. However, the most significant change was in the methodology for teaching modern languages:

For the first time, what had been done in France in 1901 was officially introduced in Brazil: methodological instructions for the use of the direct method, that is, the teaching of language through language itself.

The great figure of the time was Professor Carneiro Leão who, in the spirit of the reform, introduced the direct method at the Pedro II School in Rio de Janeiro in 1931, an experience reported in detail in the book he published in 1935, *O ensino das línguas vivas*. (Leffa, 1999, p. 8)

In 1942, the Capanema reform, like Francisco de Campos’ reform of 1931, also recommended the use of the direct method for language teaching, considering not only instrumental objectives, but also educational ones, such as “contributing to the formation of mentality, developing habits of observation and reflection,” and cultural ones, such as “knowledge of foreign civilization” and the “ability to understand traditions and ideals of other peoples”. (Leffa, 1999, p. 10). “Seen from a historical perspective, the 1940s and 1950s, under the Reforma Capanema, form the golden years of foreign languages in Brazil”. (Leffa, 1999, p. 12).

On December 20, 1961, Law number 4,024 was promulgated, establishing the Directives and Bases of National Education (Brasil, 1961). According to Leffa (1999), the “end of the golden years of foreign languages” started with this LDB:

“Latin, with rare exceptions, was removed from the curriculum, French, when not removed, had its weekly load reduced, and English, in general, remained without major changes” (Leffa, 1999, p. 13).

On August 11, 1971, the second LDB was promulgated, law 5.692. According to Leffa (1999, p. 14),

the reduction of one year of schooling and the need to introduce professional qualification caused a drastic reduction in the hours of foreign language teaching, further aggravated by a later opinion of the Federal Council that the foreign language would be ‘given by addition’ within the conditions of each establishment. Many schools took foreign language out of 1st grade, and in high school, offered no more than one hour a week, sometimes for only one year. Countless students, especially in high school, went through 1st and 2nd grade without ever having seen a foreign language.

In 1996, a third LDB was promulgated, law 9.394, which brought a new impetus to multilingual education. It continues to assist a “common national base”, but it is established that this should be “complemented, in each educational system and school, by a diversified part, required by the regional and local characteristics of the society, culture, economy and clientele”. (Brasil, 1996, Art. 26).

In this law, foreign language teaching is already in focus in elementary school, in the diversified part of the curriculum: “starting in the fifth grade, the teaching of at least one modern foreign language is compulsory, the choice of which will be up to the school community, within the possibilities of the institution”. (Brasil, 1996, Art. 26, § 5o). In secondary education, besides the inclusion of “one modern foreign language, as a compulsory subject, chosen by the school community”, there

will be included in the curriculum “a second optional language, within the possibilities of the institution”. (Brasil, 1996, Art. 36, Paragraph III). It is worth emphasizing here the possibility of “choice” that is conferred to the school community, thus contributing not to linguistic diversity and plurilingual teaching, but to the specificities and interests of that target audience (or that “clientele” as recorded in the document). As Leffa (1999, p. 15) says, “the idea of a single right method is finally abandoned, since teaching will be based on the principle of ‘pluralism of ideas and pedagogical conceptions’ (Article 3, Section III)”.

In 2017, we could observe a new setback regarding the diversity of foreign language offerings in the school context. Law 13.415 changed § 5 of Art. 26 of the 1996 LDB, which guaranteed the offer of at least one modern foreign language by the school community, even if within the possibilities of the institution. With the new wording, the following is now in effect: “In the curriculum of elementary school, from the sixth grade on, the English language will be offered”. (Brasil, 2017, Art. 26, § 5º). Despite the word “offer” used in the document, it can be stated, according to Silva (2010, p. 16), that “privileging one type of knowledge is an operation of power”. And being so, such “offer” can quickly become “imposition”, once it is promulgated by force of law.

In the wake of the setback in the field of foreign languages studies, on December 20, 2017, the Common Core National Curriculum (BNCC) was ratified for the stages of Kindergarten and Elementary School (Brasil, 2017b), by the then Minister of Education Mendonça Filho, and December 14, 2018, the BNCC was ratified for the High School stage (Brasil 2018) by Rossieli Soares, then Minister of Education. Both normative documents,

which establish the knowledge, skills and abilities that students are expected to develop throughout basic education, include English as the only additional language to be included in school curricula.

Thus, we observe an educational policy that disfavors multilingual education, silencing several linguistic communities and depriving them of their specificities and interests. On the other hand, we are witnessing in parallel a growing interest in language education, in which different languages are more or less encompassed. We will therefore discuss in the next sections some of the challenges and perspectives surrounding language education and the offer of plurilingual education in the Brazilian context.

4 Intercultural language education

The significant increase in the offer of additional languages in early childhood education and basic education in recent years in Brazil consequently drives the need for the practices involved in the teaching-learning of these languages to be investigated (Freitas *et al.*, 2020, p. 134). In this way, it has been observed in many proposals, studies and academic works the search for perspectives that go beyond the traditional approaches to language teaching that are generally still very focused on structural and systemic aspects of the target language. In this sense, we have seen the defence of teaching concepts that can go beyond the focus on lexical and grammatical aspects of the language and beyond a tight and isolated understanding of language. The precepts of language education are thus gaining strength as a more holistic and integrative perspective of the

language practices which take place in the mother tongue or additional language classroom.

It is important to note that some paradigm shifts are involved in this process. One of them is the role of the teacher specialised in a foreign language⁷, who need to understand that when teaching languages, they are, in fact, involved in an educational process (Siqueira, 2018). For Brossi, Silva and Freitas (2020), one of the objectives of language teachers understood as linguistic educators is to provide learners with a perception of their ability to act, that is, their agency⁸ (Lantolf; Thorne, 2006; Liberali, 2020) to intervene in the world. In the authors' words (Brossi; Silva; Freitas, 2020, p.176), it is the teacher's role to promote

consciousness, reflection and action through language and insertion in the world. It is important to think about the linguistic repertoire in action in the discourse so that this will contribute to children recognise themselves as active subjects, involved in decisions, in situations to which they will be exposed, able to defend their point of view, seeking social welfare for the majority, thinking of themselves as part of a whole.

In this way, the perception of language as a social practice gains centrality in a constant process of production of meanings, being essential among the tasks of the educator to create opportunities for learners to expand their points of view, reflecting on their role in society and their ability to construct meanings (Kawachi-Furlan; Malta, 2020, p.156).

Here we observe another paradigm shift: the focus on the present moment and on how language classes can be centred on

⁷ The use of the term "foreign language" at this point is due to the nomenclature of most of the higher education courses that train language teachers, as well as the denomination of the area in institutional platforms such as CAPES or CNPQ "Modern Foreign Languages".

⁸ According to Lantolf and Thorne, the concept of agency is linked to the individual's ability to act in a socioculturally relevant way, but it is not an individual property of human beings, but a relationship of exchange and negotiation between subjective beings and the society in which they live (Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p.238).

practices that foster the meaningful experience of learners with activities that involve language now, despite a broad discourse that projects to the future the importance of language learning in childhood. Investigating the beliefs that populate the imagination of parents and teachers who work in early childhood education and elementary school, Kawachi-Furlan and Rosa (2020), when analysing the speeches of many participants in their research, identified the trend named by Lordelo and Carvalho (2003) as the “myth of futurism”. In their article on Early Childhood Education, the authors point out that

[...] in this view, the importance attributed to childhood is the fact that it prefigures the future, the true target of development and education efforts that a child makes in daycare it is not considered in terms of their current well-being but rather what it can bring to the child’s future, such as a better start in literacy and, at any level, higher academic achievement, which would result in more success in life as an adult (Lordelo; Carvalho, 2003, p. 15).

One of the major gains in this paradigm shift is the understanding that the practices involving languages need to make sense to the child in the present, which refers to the educational philosophy of Anísio Teixeira [1936](1997), who, when conceiving a project for a comprehensive and expanded education, rejected the idea of a school that prepared for life, defending the perspective that school is life now. In other words, this means that the learning and experiences students have at school need to make sense to them in the present moment, rather than just projecting a future perspective. Therefore, the approaches for working with languages are also transforming, losing focus on the accumulation of contents such as vocabulary and linguistic structures and, on the other hand, the work

that seeks to promote language education as a possibility for transformation is gaining more presence and strength, which can contribute to the reflection on different identities and cultures.

In this sense, it is also important in language teaching to provide opportunities for children and young people to become aware of the existence of other languages and cultures. Consequently, it can promote a space for comparisons between these different languages/cultures in a plurilingual perspective, favouring a greater openness and awareness of other ways of talking about and experiencing life events and the world. In other words, in the conception of language education, beyond “teaching a language”, we perceive a broader focus when we think about developing linguistic awareness in learners. Thus, according to Broch (2014, p. 52), being bilingual/plurilingual is directly linked to a plurilinguistic education, that is, to an “education for LD [linguistic diversity] not only with the aim of including minorities, nor of an isolated FL [foreign language] teaching, but of promoting plurilingualism, through linguistic and cultural awareness approaches”. As such, we must recognise that as teachers, therefore educators, we are not simply “teaching German, Spanish, English or French”; we are “educating”. We do this when we seek to engage the learners in discursive practices, when we problematise issues such as identity, diversity, and respect, or seek to sensitise them to ethnic-racial relations, among other topics.

Another important aspect is the promotion in the classroom of linguistic experiences that consider the origin, the culture, and the social place from which one speaks, besides the encounter with other languages and cultures. Regarding the importance of interculturality in language education, Brossi, Silva and Freitas

(2020) point out that

we need to teach the learner to deal with differences, heterogeneity, the other, the unique, the singular, the multiple, with the whole, but also with himself. Thus, we defend the urgent need to think of new ways of acting so that teaching and learning are effective and integral (Brossi; Silva; Freitas., 2020, p. 178).

It is in this sense that an intercultural linguistic education, from a broader and more integrative perspective, can contribute to the promotion of a culture of welcoming and valuing differences, a goal that gains even greater importance if we consider our historical moment marked by discourses that are still conservative and projects that try to devalue minority voices, promoting intolerance and disrespect.

Next, we will focus specifically on the context of the city of Rio de Janeiro, briefly presenting the context of the emergence and implementation of a plurilingual proposal of language teaching within the scope of the so-called “Bilingual Schools Program”, developed by the municipal secretary of education.

5 Language education in the city of Rio de Janeiro

The year 2009 can be considered the milestone of the project to establish the so-called “bilingual” schools in the city of Rio de Janeiro, with the enactment of Decree No. 31187, signed on October 6 by the then mayor Eduardo Paes. This Decree established the “Rio Criança Global Program” (PRCG) in the scope of the Municipal Secretariat of Education (SME), which aimed to “expand, for all years of elementary school, the teaching of English Language in schools of the Municipal Public

Education Network, focusing on conversation” (Rio de Janeiro, 2009). The Program would be implemented starting in 2010, so that gradually, by the year 2016, all grades of elementary school would cover the teaching of English.

The background for the creation of the PRCG, according to the Decree of creation of the Program, was the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which would be hosted in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. For this reason, the city would receive “tourists from all over the world”, which would provide its citizens “the coexistence with diverse cultures” (Rio de Janeiro, 2009). The PRCG conceives that the “Foreign Language is not only the domain of skills from an inventory of linguistic structures” and, in this way, language is considered “a way of appropriating discursive practices in the Foreign Language” (Rio de Janeiro, 2009).

The experience with the PRCG led the municipality of Rio de Janeiro to implement since the year 2013 the teaching of an additional language in its schools (Rio de Janeiro, 2018). By 2017, there were nine bilingual schools for English and one for Spanish in the municipal school system.

One year later, in 2018, recognizing the benefits of learning an additional language in early childhood, the Secretariat of Municipal Education expanded the project in the number of schools served, the number of years of study to be covered, and the number of languages available, including German and French, according to data from SME-RJ. That year a total of 25 bilingual schools⁹ were created in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, with 9 schools offering English, 12 Spanish, 3 German and 1 French, serving a total of 7,605 students. It is

⁹ See in ANNEX the list of school units attended by the Bilingual Schools Project in Rio de Janeiro.

also noteworthy that “the reports from the professionals who participate in the project speak of the decrease in school drop-outs and the increase in the interest of students and guardians, as well as higher self-esteem due to the possibility of acquiring differentiated learning”, according to Clara Costa, then SME’s planning advisor¹⁰. These reports and testimonies reinforce the importance of the project and its impact on aspects such as the motivation of the school community and, above all, the students and the possibility of a more integrated and meaningful learning.

The theoretical and methodological assumptions that guide the teaching of additional language, in the scope of the Bilingual Schools Project of Rio de Janeiro, presuppose the integration of content from different areas of the curriculum, the target language being employed for communication and for the learning of a given content (Rio de Janeiro, 2018). Moreover, the teaching of the additional language should also “address cross-cutting themes and the development of life skills, with an emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication.” (Rio de Janeiro, 2018).

Thus, activities developed for the teaching of additional language in the scope of the Bilingual Schools Project of SME-RJ are guided by the following principles:

I consider the function and social use of the additional language for planning, considering the subject/theme of the lesson;

II have as a goal the development of skills for the effective use of the additional language, as well as the skills related to a specific area of knowledge (according to the subject/theme of the class);

III promote the development of receptive and productive skills in the additional language

10 Source: <http://www.multirio.rj.gov.br/index.php/reportagens/14064-escolas-bil%C3%ADngues-na-rede-p%C3%BAblica-municipal-de-ensino>. Accessed on: Apr. 14, 2023.

IV adopt a discursive perspective on language, moving away from work focused exclusively on grammar and lexicon learning;

V reflect the understanding of the social-interactive nature of learning with methodological approaches that promote experiences and interactions in the additional language; and

VI consider equally important the affective, cognitive, and cultural aspects of the teaching-learning process. (Rio de Janeiro, 2018).

In this sense, it is observed in the described context the promotion of a multilingual education, that is, an education for linguistic diversity, which “seeks to expand the student’s linguistic repertoire through the development of a plurilingual and intercultural competence” (Broch, 2014, p. 117). It is emphasized that this competence “corresponds to various levels of linguistic and cultural knowledge, unequal levels of greater or lesser linguistic proficiency that result in a citizen with a plural attitude” (Broch, 2014, p. 117-118).

6 Concluding remarks

This article has set out to reflect on and discuss proposals considering Brazilian linguistic plurality in the educational context, based on recent studies on plurilingualism (Orlandi, 2009; Monteagudo, 2012; among other authors) and intercultural language education (Siqueira, 2018; Freitas *et al.*, 2020, and others). In addition, we sought to bring to the discussion the example of the bilingual schools project in Rio de Janeiro, which focuses on offering different additional languages in its curricula besides English, demonstrating a plurilingual education initiative

with the implementation and expansion of a framework of bilingual schools in this municipality.

Throughout the history of teaching additional languages in the Brazilian context, different movements have been observed, mainly based on laws, guidelines and parameters that have either favored the offer of these languages in school curricula or led to their decrease or even erasure (Leffa, 1999; Vidotti; Dornelas, 2007). The current globalized world only leads to the realization that multilingualism is an undeniable reality. This fact is also supported by the world connected by the Internet in cyberspace, in which information and communication technologies favor and facilitate the interaction between speakers of different languages and from different cultural contexts.

Thus, an educational policy that does not privilege multilingualism is against the demands of the contemporary world, which led, as discussed in Section 4 of this paper, to the significant increase in the offer of additional languages in early childhood education and basic education in recent years and, consequently, the need for research on the teaching-learning process of the target language (Freitas *et al.*, 2020).

The challenge of a plurilinguistic education (Broch, 2014) in a country that still believes in the myth of monolingualism (Oliveira, 2008; Monteagudo, 2012; Carboni *et al.*, 2017) was evidenced in the many comings and goings towards plurilingualism in the history of language education in Brazil (Leffa, 1999; Vidotti; Dornelas, 2007). The recent experience of the Bilingual Schools Project under the Rio de Janeiro Municipal Education Secretariat (Rio de Janeiro, 2009; Rio de Janeiro, 2018) demonstrates, however, that despite recent laws and guidelines insisting on a policy of regression to monolingualism,

such as Law 13. 415 (Brasil, 2017) and the BNCC (Brasil, 2018) that instituted English as the only additional language in school curricula, there is still an awareness of the relevance of plurilingualism, evidenced also by resistance movements such as “Moveplu” and “Fica Espanhol” (Stay Spanish), as exposed in Section 1 in this article.

Based on the discussions developed in this paper, we also highlight that plurilingualism conceives language as an essential element of cultural identity and promotes respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, besides valuing linguistic and cultural diversity, fostering the development of skills, sensibility and intercultural awareness. In this way, it can contribute to students becoming “[a] ‘plural being’ in the face of the diversity and dynamism of the world as we observe it today”. (Altenhofen; Broch, 2011, p. 20).

Finally, we would like to point out that future research could deal with topics not covered here due to the scope of our article, such as the didactics of plurilingualism, approaches and methodologies aimed at intercultural language education, as well as researches that look more specifically at language teacher training focused on aspects such as linguistic plurality and diversity.

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