

# Multilingualism and Indigenous School Education in Brazil: past, present and future challenges

Carolina Miranda de Oliveira

*Universidad de Cádiz*

Samuel Figueira-Cardoso

*University of Warsaw*

Correspondence to:  
carolinamiranda@id.uff.br  
s.figueira-ca2@uw.edu.pl

## ABSTRACT

In Brazil, only with the Federal Constitution of 1988 is indigenous peoples guaranteed the right to use their languages and cultures. However, since colonization, many languages have disappeared. The number of speakers of these languages has decreased, and different stages and language policies have promoted the Portuguese language at the expense of indigenous languages. All these factors to different sociolinguistic situations, current challenges in language teaching and learning, as scenarios of monolingualism in an indigenous language, continuum bilingualism, and non-speaking communities of an indigenous language. However, with revitalization, actions occur in the Brazilian context. We resorted to assumptions derived from studies on multilingualism, language policy, and language pedagogies. Based on these assumptions, this article aims to reflect on the moments and movements of indigenous school education and language policies in Brazil's multilingual and multicultural country. This study is qualitative interpretive research based on a literature review in an integrative approach of theoretical perspectives concerned with the topic.

**Keywords:** Brazilian languages; indigenous education; language policies; multilingualism; bilingualism.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Brazil is a multilingual and multicultural country. Brazilian indigenous languages and cultures constitute the social mosaic of the largest country in South America. These statements, at first sight, seem carefree and straightforward. However, as we will

discuss in this article, the different moments of the construction of Brazilian society, focusing on the schooling offered to native populations in a multilingual society, have always been in conflict and contact in favor of hegemonic discourses of a single language that represented white European culture.

The voices that built this article were formed from experiences and studies on indigenous school education in Brazil and our experiences in territories with indigenous and riparian populations in the Southeast and North of Brazil. Our locus of enunciation is translated from outside and inside through studies carried out directly and indirectly with native people (Author, 2020) and traditional communities (Author, 2021; 2022). Thus, this article is framed within the qualitative interpretative research based on a literature and documentary review (official documents), seeking to contribute to the discussion of the theme in other spaces, with other readers, and in other languages.

In this study, we will discuss indigenous school education in general. After numerous claims, in 1988, it was guaranteed that the indigenous schooling offered to all ethnic groups was differentiated, intercultural, and bilingual. To this end, we sought in the notions of multilingualism and language policy some contributions to the reflections presented in this study.

The article is divided into the following sections. First, we clarify some notions of multilingualism and bilingualism, language policies, and indigenous school education that we believe are relevant to the discussions in the following sections. We trace a path without claiming to be exhaustive, focusing on the Brazilian scenario. In the second section, we present a chronological overview of Indigenous School Education in Brazil, based on the studies of D'Angelis (2012). In the third section, we focus on analyzing official documents from Brazil. In the fourth section, we discuss the language policies for Indigenous School Education (*lato sensu*), highlighting possible paths for a plural and emancipatory education. Finally, we end the article with the final remarks.

## **MULTILINGUALISM/ BILINGUALISM: THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

In language studies, psychology, and education, the concepts about language learning and acquisition, multilingual contexts, and the uses of different language systems by a speaker are sometimes not very clear or are used without more

profound reflection on the terms and the statuses they acquire, that is, we talk about the bi- multi- and pluri- prefixes attached to human language. Depending on the learning purposes and conceptions of language, one or another term is used, given the four basic skills, and provided further subdivisions to consider divergent possibilities in titles such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, we soon come to a considerable number of essential elements when we talk about language acquisition (Edwards, 2013: 12).

When we observe the institutionalized practices and interventions carried out in favor of a dominant language and the choices that speakers make in the uses of speech in each geographical context, one or more languages coexist in implicit or explicit tensions (Lagares, 2018). In this sense, we promote a brief theoretical reflection on the topic in this section. We defend that it will be necessary, thus understanding Brazil as a complex, mestizo/hybrid society due to centuries of contact with sociolinguistic conflicts.

The number of research and events that use the term multilingualism has been increasing (Tidigs; Huss, 2017; Bhatia, 2017; Giordano, 2019; Bianco, 2020; Gramling, 2021; Schroedler, 2021). In recent studies, researchers have diverged on notions of multilingualism (Krawczyk-Neifar, 2017). Many are the perspectives and approaches to using the term: Harter and Borges (2019) discuss the concepts of second language acquisition, bilingualism, multilingualism, and multilingualism in deaf education (e.g.). Mozillo and Spinassé (2020: 1298) analyzed 'cases that specifically involved immigration languages and heritage languages to assess what linguistic ideologies underlie their speakers and what conceptions these speakers of a minority language have about their language.' We focus, however, on two terms: i) bilingualism, the latter more commonly used in work on language acquisition, and ii) multilingualism, a term that has gained ground at the table of discussions about language and language teaching. On the one hand, the divergences arise from the complex situation of multilingual regarding the nature of their use of multiple languages and, on the other hand, from different backgrounds, ideologies, and purposes of researchers. Within academia, Krawczyk-Neifar (2017) clarifies that,

The fact that multiple language users are currently evident in most countries and regions may not explain the triggering of such attention, given the existence throughout the history of the phenomenon of multilingualism. The difference in the contemporary world may be that the deployment of multiple languages is an outstanding, indispensable feature of the world landscape. (Krawczyk-Neifar 2017: 172)

The discussion of these notions has implications for the position of the language researcher and language teacher. They must be culturally sensitive to the languages and cultures of the learners, whether mother tongue or additional language, in multiethnic and indigenous contexts. Speaking more than one language is an indispensable feature in today's world, so it is important to examine social relations in the process known as globalization to shed some light on the interrelationships between this process and the dramatic changes that are observable in language behavior (Aronin, Singleton, 2012: 31-32).

In the European context, for an increasingly politically and socially interconnected Europe in various dimensions of these spheres of social organization, such as education, thinking about language policies for teaching, integrating countries increasingly and efficiently has been on the table for many years. The Council of Europe is the main body at the continental level working for such integration, creating guiding documents for language teaching, such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2001), documents in which the terms multilingualism and plurilingualism appear.

The Council defines multilingualism as: 'the use of languages for communication (...) where a person (...) has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. Thus, multilingualism refers to a person's ability to use several languages and the co-existence of communities of different languages in a geographical area. On a more social level linked to geographic space, the term has been used to describe a field of

policy for language education and preservation.

The European Commission's goal is to promote a climate conducive to the full expression of all languages by strengthening the teaching and learning of different languages. However, language tensions are not a recent phenomenon unique to the old continent, but in contemporary societies are challenges of multilingual Europe.

De Angelis (2007) points out that the terms bilingualism and multilingualism as synonyms can lead to confusion when appealing to the proficiency levels with which bilinguals or multilingual use two or more languages. In the first half of the 20th century, bilingualism was associated with adverse effects such as speech disorders, cognitive deficits, and mental retardation. Nobre (2012), supported by Maher (2005), defines the term bilingualism as a multidimensional phenomenon, in a broad definition including the variety of sociolinguistic situations of indigenous communities and the ability to use more than one language.

Therefore, the bilingual or multilingual individual may use different language systems for cultural, social, economic, and affective reasons. An indigenous student who needs to leave his village to study in the city uses the majority language for his academic education. However, when he returns to the indigenous society, he speaks his mother language again, applying the knowledge acquired in education, or an immigrant who learns the host country's language necessary for integrating into the host society. There is, therefore, a cross-border space used for one purpose or another for research and teaching, as Ribeiro and Nunes (2020: 14) clarify.

The notion of bilingualism seems to acquire new meanings, where speakers face the challenge of understanding, (inter)understanding each other, interacting through gestures, or being silent in the mute language of the other that imposes itself. It is, therefore, in the cross-border space that cultural, linguistic, and identity codes produce understanding and conflicts in a constantly litigious dialogue.

Goesjean (1992), with a psycholinguistic focus, suggests a holistic view of this phenomenon. He argues that a bilingual person is not two monolinguals in one person and proposes a holistic view of bilingualism, advocating a *continuum* of bilingualism. In this sense, the holistic view is that the bilingual speaker is fully competent; he or she develops *competence* in both languages and possibly in a third system that results in a combination of the first two systems to the extent required by his or her needs in the context in which he or she is inserted, that is, the bilingual use the two languages separately or together for different purposes in different domains of life in society with other people. Edwards (2013) argues that bilingualism's personal and social manifestations are, of course, important. However, it should be noted that the emphases are quite different: an in-depth discussion of individual bilingualism involves, for example, linguistic and psycholinguistic dimensions that figure much less prominently, if at all, on the social level where other dimensions - historical, educational, political, and so on - are taken into consideration.

Nobre (2012: 4), based on D'Angelis (2001), seems to get closer to this social notion of bilingualism, pointing out three models of bilingual education, namely:

- i) 'Transition Bilingualism' to the majority language, where the minority language is used only initially and then entirely replaced by the majority language.
- ii) 'Maintenance or Resistance Bilingualism,' where the minority language is encouraged and employed effectively throughout school education.
- iii) 'Immersion Bilingualism,' where full coexistence with the majority language (or the target language) leads to the disuse of the minority language.

Indeed, the more profound the linguistic and cultural deepening in another community, the more significant the impact on identity. This, in turn, suggests that those whose bilingual competence is nurtured early on will, on equal terms, have a firmer footing in both (or more) fields. (Edwards 2013) Teachers' and researchers' use of one term or another has implications for how linguistic diversity is understood

and how language and culture work within language teaching. Sometimes, these terms are emptied of their semantic content and used indiscriminately.

Based on these three models of bilingualism, Nobre (2012) points out the importance of using bilingualism for maintenance or resistance in the indigenous schooling process since using this type of bilingualism contributes to the strengthening and modernization of indigenous languages. The "Transitional Bilingualism" used for many years in the teaching offered to native peoples only serves as a bridge for the native language to be abandoned entirely. In "Immersion Bilingualism," the purpose is the same.

Currently, many indigenous peoples defend that schools in their territories should be bilingual. Teaching should be based on their native languages and the official language, Brazilian Portuguese, without one overlapping the other. In many cases, the initiatives are being built as a need for indigenous peoples, as a place of speech to strengthen themselves as a unit. Language becomes an instrument of struggle and affirmation of identity, a right for all. By revitalizing the language of their people, the speakers of these communities recognize themselves as indigenous in the entirety of their people. Listening, the way out of the invisible, becomes insurgent, and to be better heard, it is necessary to speak the language that the dominant forces do not understand (Ramos and Gobi, 2020).

Thus, there is an urgent need for teacher education/training and a keen understanding of the knowledge and wisdom of students in multilingual contexts, as is the case of indigenous schools, practices that can reveal a pedagogy of multilingualism, capable of meeting the needs of students, but also taking this knowledge to those who are speakers of the majority language. The school, which represents the State and legitimizes knowledge, is the ideal space for promoting practices of language use that aim at the integral education of the individual.

## INDIGENOUS SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THREE PERIODS

The school education offered to the indigenous peoples in Brazil and other Latin American countries, for many years,

had the objective of converting them to the religion of the colonizers and integrating them into the society that was established with the permanence and domination of the Europeans in the conquered lands. In Brazil, the history of indigenous school education goes through some periods, which we will briefly describe, following the temporal organization proposal by D'Angelis (2012).

The first period "The Catechism School," 1549-1759/67, is characterized by an institution composed of Portuguese and Spanish Jesuit missionaries, which began in 1549 and lasted until the Jesuits' expulsion in 1759. This period was marked by schooling that served only as a tool for the catechization and conversion of the indigenous people to Christian teachings and as labor for colonization (Knapp, 2016). This was the initial moment in which education was part of a civilizing project and the conversion of the indigenous populations to the colonizers' ways of life.

The second period, "The First Letters and the Civilizing Project," eighteenth to twentieth centuries, is divided into: "Pombaline Phases!" (mid-18th to mid-19th century) and "The Empire, the First Republic, and Dictatorships" (mid-19th century to mid-20th century). In 1757, it began with the Indians Directory or Pombaline Directory, which, dissatisfied with the Jesuits' work with the indigenous villagers, imposed changes in the educational policy offered and political disputes with the kingdom of Spain (see Author, 2020). With this change, the indigenous people could no longer use their native languages and started to communicate only in Portuguese, which was one of the most perverse policies against the Brazilian indigenous languages; among the native languages that resisted centuries of contact and social conflict, we have the Nheengatu or General Amazonian language (Freire, 2003; Author, 2020), which in recent years has received attention from linguists, anthropologists, and other scholars. This imposition coming from the Portuguese Crown is described in the following fragment:

When the Indians were summoned to the sound of trumpets, an officer of Mendonça's escort, an expert in the Tupi language, gave them a practice, insinuating that, in the future, they

would live in other customs, another order, and another law (Azevedo 1930 quoted in Freire 2003: 108).

Reading the fragment, it is possible to imagine the anguish and perversity suffered by the general language speakers. In the school context, another Pombaline order determined that there would be a school for boys and one for girls, where they would learn to read and write. The boys' school would teach counting, different from the girls' school, which would teach spinning, lace making, and other tasks reserved for the female sex at the time. In practice, the form of organization of these schools, foreseen in the regulations, did not work, and the settlements based on the Indian Directory were restricted to being a center of power (and corruption) of colonial government officials to manage the exploitation of Indian labor (D'Angelis, 2012).

According to Knapp (2016), after the decline of the Indian Directory, indigenous school education and other policies aimed at indigenous people were almost non-existent. The only document that refers to schooling is the Royal Charter of 1798, which abolished the actions of the Pombaline Directory. Fifty years after the end of the Directory, Decree No. 426 of 1845 was signed, consisting of a set of measures that remained in place for some years. This decree was the primary determinant of the second phase of this period (The Empire, First Republic, and Dictatorships).

This decree created the position of Director-General of Indians in each province and a director in each village under the appointment of the Director-General, and a Missionary also for each village. It is up to this Director-General of Indians to propose to the Provincial Assembly the creation of schools of first letters for the places where the missionary is not enough for this teaching (Article 1, par. 18), as well as to promote the establishment of workshops of mechanical arts (Article 1 par. 26). It is up to the missionaries to teach reading and writing, counting to boys, and adults, who are willing to acquire this

instruction (Article 6, par. 6) (Nobre, 2005: 3).

In the First Republic, to acculturate the indigenous people already contacted and insert them into national society, including fostering the participation of indigenous people as national labor at that time, the Indians Protect Service (SPI in Portuguese) was created in 1910. In the context of the acculturation of indigenous societies (Nobre, 2005; Knapp, 2016), the SPI was created by Decree 8072, of June 20, 1910, in the government of Nilo Peçanha. As a republican ideal, the creation of the SPI aimed to protect the indigenous and separate them from the Catholic catechesis.

For the first time, Brazilian education was not officially in the hands of the clergy, but missionaries were still active in some Indian communities. The purpose of education when the SPI guarded the indigenous people was no longer to convert them but to make them workers, cheap labor for the country's development; the teaching was based on agricultural work and domestication.

The third-period "Bilingual Education" is divided into the "National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and Bilingual Education," and "Alternative Indigenism, the Indigenous Movement and Indigenous Schools." This period begins in the late 1970s and lasts until the 21st century. In 1967, the SPI was extinguished after numerous accusations of corruption, such as selling wood from indigenous lands, mistreatment of indigenous people, and being replaced by the FUNAI (Knapp, 2016).

With the creation of FUNAI, school education for indigenous populations underwent significant changes. At that moment, we have the establishment of the Statute of the Indian (Law 6001/73), establishing bilingualism as a premise in indigenous school education. In the deliberations of the Geneva Conference, which recommended that the literacy of the Indians should be carried out in the language of the group to which they belonged, they were being sought (Zephiro, 2017).

Given the above, we postulate that bilingual teaching for indigenous societies began with the literacy actions of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a Christian-

based institution in Brazil, in 1959. The work of SIL in indigenous communities was supported and organized by FUNAI through an agreement. This group of missionary linguists settled in the indigenous communities, learned the native languages of the ethnic groups, registered these languages, and taught literacy using the native language of the indigenous groups. However, the real purpose was to convert and integrate them into the dominant Christian culture through transitional "bilingualism. Ferreira (2001: 77) corroborates that SIL's bi-cultural model would also guarantee the efficient integration of the Indians into the national society since the values of Western society would be translated into the native languages and expressed in a way to fit the indigenous conceptions."

The second phase of the third period, "Alternative Indigenism, the Indigenous Movement and Indigenous Schools," took place in the late 1970s. Several entities supporting indigenous causes were established during this phase. Initially, the Anchieta Operation (OPAN), founded in 1969, and the Indigenous Missionary Council in 1972, were the precursors. From then on, non-governmental organizations emerged, such as social movements, researchers, and even missionaries who claimed the rights of indigenous groups. The Pro-Indian Commission of São Paulo, in 1978; the Pro-Indian Commission of Acre, in 1979; the Ecumenical Documentation and Information Center, in 1979; the National Association of Support to the Indian (Porto Alegre, 1977; Bahia/1979); the Indigenous Work Center, in 1979; the Institute of Socioeconomic Studies, in 1979; and the Evangelical Missionary Working Group, also in 1979; various universities such as the University of São Paulo, State University of Campinas and Federal University of Rio de Janeiro also began to contribute with specialized advisory services (Nobre, 2005). Still, at this time, the first Indigenous assemblies were held in which the ethnic groups articulated themselves to pressure the Brazilian State to guarantee their rights, "the results of these Indigenous Assemblies are reflected in the struggle for the constituent already during the 1980s and the rights then conquered in the Federal Constitution in 1988" (Knapp, 2016: 46).

## LANGUAGES, MULTILINGUALISM, AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN BRAZILIAN LEGISLATION

Gersem Baniwa (2013), an indigenous professor, argues that since the Federal Constitution of 1988, the indigenous school has had the opposite mission of the former “school for Indians,” contributing to the historical continuity of the indigenous peoples, ethnically, culturally and physically. For him, the fulfillment of this new assignment becomes the greatest challenge of the contemporary indigenous school. How to transform the old colonizing and whitewashing school of 500 years into a school that promotes indigenous cultures, languages, traditions, and rights in dialogue with other cultures, knowledge, and values? The conquest of rights in indigenous school education was possible after a long process of struggle carried out by and for the indigenous people, with the support of social movements, indigenous, and research professors from universities.

The original peoples of Brazil are diverse, there is not a single culture and language, and the indigenous people of each region of Brazil have a distinct reality. Still, according to Baniwa (2013), indigenous people historically conceived their school and designed it according to their contextualized perspectives. The diversity of ongoing experiences is another historical advance, as a central characteristic of indigenous school education, in their own school's theoretical, political, and pedagogical perspective, specific and differentiated, as defined by the Brazilian laws.

The first innovation of the Federal Constitution is abandoning an assimilationist perspective, which understood the Indians as a transitory social category, doomed to disappearance. In Brazilian legislation, it was only with the 1988 Constitution that the right of indigenous people to continue being themselves was guaranteed through schooling based on and linked to their cultural and linguistic realities. In this Constitution, the requests are expressed in a specific chapter - Title VIII, Da Ordem Social (Social Order), Chapter VIII, Dos Índios (About the Indians) and, concerning indigenous school education, in Article 210, paragraph 2.

The second innovation concerns the rights to the lands they occupy, as original rights, that is, rights that predate the Brazilian State's creation, thereby recognizing the historical fact that the Indians were the first occupants of Brazil. However, this comes from a strong movement of claims by the indigenous themselves, who pressured the State for their rights, and the support of researchers and non-governmental organizations in favor of indigenous causes.

The new constitutional precepts assured respect for indigenous peoples' social organization, customs, languages, beliefs, and traditions. For the first time, the right to difference is recognized for the Indians in Brazil; that is: to be Indians and to remain as such indefinitely, a right explicit in the caput of Article 231 of the Constitution: “Their social organization, customs, languages, beliefs and traditions, and the original rights over the lands they traditionally occupy are recognized to Indians, the Union being responsible for demarcating them and protecting and enforcing respect for all their assets.” (Brasil, 1988 – Article 231).

It is important to emphasize that the right to difference does not imply fewer rights or privileges. The Constitution ensured indigenous peoples' right to use their languages in the educational context. Their learning processes in primary education are seen in Article 210, par. 2, an important landmark for actions related to indigenous school education, namely: “Regular elementary education will be given in Portuguese, with the indigenous communities also guaranteed the use of their native languages and their learning processes.” (Brasil, 1988 – Article 210, par. 2).

However, it is essential to point out that indigenous school education in Brazil has not been through a leisurely break with the history of the oppressive school and the current modern and liberating school. The recent school in indigenous communities is still surrounded by conflicts and can still be an instrument that leads to the destruction of the cultures and languages of these peoples.

Many of these conflicts have worsened under Brazil's current president, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, because, as recent studies show, the government has loosened policies to protect forests and indigenous communities in favor of large logging cor-

porations (Tourneau, 2019; Caetano et al., 2020; Climate Observatory, 2021). Adding to this is the Covid-19 pandemic, which left many indigenous people without medical care due to contamination caused by non-indigenous people invading their territories for hunting and logging in forest areas protected by Brazilian law, thus demarcation of indigenous lands urgent.

In 2020 the vulnerability of the indigenous peoples was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic. The growing invasion of ITs by illegal activities, especially mining and deforestation reinforces the need for demarcation. In addition to ensuring the way of life and the collective rights of the indigenous populations, it has already proven effective in preserving biodiversity and reducing deforestation. As promised by Jair Bolsonaro, not a single centimeter of indigenous land was demarcated between 2019 and 2020. (Stec & Ainbinder, 2021: 91-92) (emphasis by the authors)

In addition, the influence of evangelical Protestant churches (Pontes 2021) in many communities provoked anti-vaccine behavior among the indigenous people. Many did not want to be vaccinated, convinced that the vaccine could harm the health of those who took them (FILAC 2021).

The laws after the Federal Constitution that deal with education, such as the Law of Directives and Bases for National Education (Law 9.394/1996) and the National Education Plan (13.005/2014 – current version), have addressed the right of indigenous peoples to a differentiated education, guided using indigenous languages, by the appreciation of the traditional knowledge and wisdom of these peoples and by the training of indigenous people themselves to act as teachers in their communities. Compared to a few decades ago, this is a true transformation in progress (many advances are still needed) that has generated new practices to design a new social function for schools in indigenous lands (Brazil 2002).

There were many achievements for indigenous school education; however,

there are still many obstacles and challenges to accomplishing what the official documents say. Meliá (1979) already defended ‘a school of the Indian and not for the Indian’, even before the re-democratization of Brazil. As Nobre (2020: 19-20) says, for the school not to fulfill only its reproductive role, it is necessary to guarantee that it is inserted in the larger educational project of the community, that it contributes to the maintenance and strengthening, even if re-signified, of some traditional cultural values, such as the indigenous language. The school within the indigenous territories is a space for dialogue with the surrounding society and not cultural domination.

We reiterate that even after creating laws, indigenous schooling in Brazil continues to be subjected to pedagogical modes and forms alien to indigenous communities. There is no autonomy, and a large part of the indigenous schools in Brazil continue to be managed by whites, even though there are indigenous people with academic qualifications.

Teachers at all stages of schooling must be indigenous, principals are indigenous, and that teaching is linked to the wishes and projects for the future of the communities. According to Nobre (2020: 20), schools need autonomy to fulfill the crucial emancipatory role. This means that the indigenous school needs to build its laws to be autonomous, which implies the participation of indigenous people in their elaboration and the need to participate in the elaboration processes of public policies for schooling and, mainly, for teacher education.

We can say that thinking about an Indigenous School Education from the point of view of a specific, intercultural, differentiated, and bilingual education seems to represent an attempt to guarantee Indigenous peoples a rupture with the colonial process, giving way to another proposal for the construction of school knowledge, which we understand as decolonial Indigenous school education.

As mentioned, there are advances in the schooling offered to indigenous populations. However, the struggle for a genuinely indigenous education is still ongoing, and education in which the interested parties have the power to manage their schools autonomously and that this space effectively contributes to the strengthening of their lan-



guages and cultures. It is not enough that the schools have an indigenous name, with an indigenous teacher teaching in an indigenous language to guarantee a quality school education, transforming and progressive, if the curriculum and the pedagogical practices are reproducers of a non-indigenous conception of capitalist society, of a neoliberal, individualist, competitive, colonizing, and conservative character (Author, 2020). The indigenous languages in Brazil are threatened; even those with many native speakers are in danger of disappearing. If not developed to strengthen these languages, education in indigenous territories can contribute to this ‘erasure.’ Therefore, it is essential that indigenous people have ‘linguistic attitudes’ (D’Angelis, 2011), adopting policies to strengthen their languages, giving them privileged spaces in schools to curb the advances of the dominant language, what Calvet (2007) calls ‘native’ sociolinguistics.

## LANGUAGE POLICIES AND SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The indigenous schools work in partnership with the State, the University, and the indigenous communities. The Brazilian State maintains the schools financially, the University trains the indigenous teachers, and the communities direct the school based on their projects for the future. However, it is essential to mention that the indigenous teachers still don’t have autonomy over their schools. The State regulates the school organization, which follows the model of non-indigenous educational institutions. Most of the schools in the communities are run by non-Indians, and the teachers must follow orders from outside. On the other hand, universities do not have the necessary funding to expand the offer of specific degrees for indigenous people. Changing this dynamic is one of the biggest challenges for indigenous leaders, teachers, and authorities in Brazil today.

Before we move on in the discussion, it is worth briefly retaining that the very socio-history of the formation of Latin American nations can be observed from the rural/urban dimension, this dimension being a possible crucial sociolinguistic indicator in

describing Latin American countries. This is because, in the case of the Spanish language, Spanish is predominant in countries with high levels of urbanization, as is the case of Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile. In contrast, countries with low levels of urbanization indicate a higher level of maintenance of indigenous languages, for example, Guatemala, Paraguay, and Bolivia ((Escobar 2013: 740). A scenario that can also be observed in the Brazilian territory, the northeast, and southeast regions, with more urban areas, concentrate fewer peoples and languages; In contrast, the northern region, with more rural areas, has a higher indigenous population and languages (Fundação Nacional do Índio, 2020). In Brazil, indigenous languages are under constant threat of disappearance, as no speech is fully protected. D’Angelis (2002) presents a worrying example of how contact with the Portuguese language and its agents can harm indigenous languages: “The Kaingang did not place their language as an important marker of their ethnic identity when they began to be pressured by the advance of Luso-Brazilian society.” (D’Angelis, 2002: 113). Many other indigenous groups also lost their languages after contact with non-indigenous people, and even after 520 years, this is still a reality. Many ethnic groups throughout Brazilian history lost the value of their languages because of oppression and persecution that made them think that their languages and cultures had no value and that the language and culture of non-Indians were better. During Brazil’s colonial period, the only experiences with indigenous school education, that is, the teaching and training of interpreters, were in the interest of the Catholic Church, to convert the souls of the *gentios* (gentiles), as stated by Father Antonio Vieira in his Epiphany sermon, delivered in the royal chapel of Lisbon before the Regent Queen in 1662 (Vieira, 2001).

When the territory of an ethnic group settles in urban contexts, this group receives a more significant cultural and linguistic influence from the dominant culture. The surrounding language, which has more substantial speakers, gradually ‘swallows’ the minority languages, which gradually cease to exist when there is no plan to value and maintain these languages. The survival and revitalization of indigenous languages and support for bilingual education seem to

be highly dependent on other factors.

Some studies point out that the abandonment of the mother tongue in indigenous communities may be caused by the attempt to escape from an identity socially marked as unfavorable and to seek another identity, somehow externally valued and advantageous, leaving a 'backward' identity to become the 'civilized,' the 'Catholic,' the 'believer,' etc. (D'Angelis 2002: 110). In this sense, the school in indigenous communities needs to be progressive and committed to offering differentiated schooling that strengthens the cultural identity of children, youth, and adults so that they are not ashamed of their identities and value their languages and culture.

The integration of local knowledge (indigenous knowledge), that is, "a set of knowledge and know-how about the natural and supernatural world, transmitted orally from generation to generation" (Diegues et al., 2001: 31). Therefore, there is an urgent need in indigenous school education for a pedagogy that is culturally sensitive to the knowledge and actions of indigenous students, which attends to the differences between the culture they bring with them and that of the school, and shows the teacher how to find effective ways to make their students aware of these differences (Erickson, 1987 quoted in Bortoni-Ricardo, 2003: 131). This attitude in the teaching-learning environment is fundamental for an emancipatory and integral education. However, Baniwa (2013) warns that one of the biggest challenges of the indigenous school is in the pedagogical field, that is, how to put into practice the innovative political-pedagogical concepts of indigenous school education.

For him, this difficulty originates in interrelated dimensions. The first dimension is the school systems that resist conceptual changes. The political leaders, managers, and local technicians present strong resistance to the change in mentality, culture, and political practice. Many indigenous schools elaborate their innovative political-pedagogical projects with dynamic school time organization and by the social and educational systems of the community. Still, the education councils or education secretariats do not recognize or accept them. The resistance results from a mix of fear or insecurity of the managers in the face of the new, different, and comfortableness or at-

tachment to the old models and patterns of school and traditional colonial school education (Baniwa, 2013).

In Walsh's studies (2009), we find contributions to the defense of a decolonial pedagogy built on the critical interculturality approach, which integrates the languages and linguistic practices of the minority language speaker. Thus, in indigenous schools, the use of didactic material and the programmatic contents aimed at promoting a multi and plurilingual education should also be guided by the culture and languages of the students in the pedagogical context, having the contexts and socio-communicative practices as teaching tools, in the mother language and the State language.

Thus, indigenous populations should have a bilingual school that gives space for the empowerment of their languages in an environment that strengthens the vernacular languages and that the dominant language does not stand out for the indigenous language in a movement in which the subject can equally transcend between the two modalities of language acquisition (Silveira 2020: 62). D'Angelis (2009) points out that the historical and social aspect of languages is still little discussed in the training of Brazilian indigenous teachers. This discussion should consider the experiences and knowledge of indigenous communities in the construction of teaching programs; courses are built in a participatory manner.

This all goes through an epistemological option, incorporating such knowledge and cultural wisdom into the academy - a decolonial position. This position disengages from the genuine foundations of Western concepts and accumulation of knowledge. In this sense, by epistemic disengagement, we do not mean, based on (Mignolo 2008: 290), abandonment or ignorance of what has already been institutionalized all over the planet, but a co-construction of practices and knowledge, in which the traditional understanding of different communities are valued in academic and school spaces.

The school in indigenous territories today is committed to leading them to value their histories, languages, and cultures because when an ethnic group is concerned about the future of its language and creates linguistic strategies to keep it strong, the dominant language in the case of Brazil,

Portuguese, does not take over the vernacular language in the community's daily life. This is one way to soften the impact of the dominant language on native languages. However, all indigenous languages are threatened because, according to Santos (2020), studies on language policies for indigenous languages have revealed a contradictory scenario. After all, while indigenous people have been assuming the authorship of projects and actions to enhance their languages, these same languages remain threatened by the colonial project, which remains vigorous and unbridled in the Brazilian context. D'Angelis (2019: 23-25), in general, points out some conditions for the future of indigenous languages, presenting some fundamental strategies in the process of strengthening and valuing indigenous languages in Brazil.

- i) Creating a government program for recognizing, valorizing, and strengthening indigenous languages is urgent.
- ii) All indigenous languages in Brazil need language planning.
- iii) About half of the indigenous languages in Brazil could benefit from an effort to develop written uses of the language.
- iv) The end of the isolation to which indigenous languages have been or still are subjected and
- v) Big indigenous and geographically dispersed groups should create independent ways of designing their language policy and direct language planning actions toward their ancestral language.

There are several ways to act politically on languages. Santos (2020: 29), supported by (Calvet 2007, Grenoble & Whaley, 2006), reiterates that for an action to be realized in practice, it is paramount to understand, beforehand, how the community recognizes itself sociolinguistically, as this will determine the vitality of the language. Santos argues that the number of speakers, language attitudes, spaces of use, social functions, documentation, registers, and teaching will influence the decisions to be proposed for a given language action. In this sense, each community exposes a distinct linguistic reality (threatened, dying,

dead, alive<sup>4</sup>, and others). Specific actions are needed to revitalize, strengthen, resuscitate, and recover an indigenous language (D'Angelis, 2011). Some indigenous communities in Brazil, such as the Pataxó, seek their languages' resurrection. We will not give an example of each of the classifications presented above. However, we think it is fundamental to highlight the example of the Pataxó ethnic group that, with the support of teachers and researchers from the Pataxó people (southern Bahia), has been reviving the language, now called Patxohã, belonging to the Maxakali family, Macro-jê trunk (Rodrigues, 1986).

The Pataxó people currently use Portuguese as their first language; however, through the resuscitation of the original language, which began in 1998 (Bomfim 2017). With this, they are strengthening themselves and are relearning, the result of a collective movement of mobilization for the valorization of their culture and the affirmation of their identity as Pataxó people. This is just one of the examples of language actions or policies that have been developed in many indigenous territories. Strengthening, modernizing, recovering, or resurrecting a native language is an act of resistance "to the advances of the modern-colonial project, especially about the continuity of the struggle for territory, the space-time in which they can be" (Santos 2020: 46). Thus, we are supported by Ramos and Gobi (2020), who argue that thinking about the resumption, strengthening, and valorization of the language as an exercise of giving visibility, leaving the invisible, the occultation imposed by colonialism, and the coloniality that remains in the relations with the majority society and its institutions, a system that has the school as a privileged locus of manifestation of identities, has become the desire of many people and has been gaining strength in the generation formed by young indigenous people who have become interested in more complex aspects of their culture.

## FINAL REMARKS

This article aimed to reflect on multilingualism in Brazil and indigenous school education for indigenous peoples. We hope that the reflections presented here

can contribute to understanding Brazil's multilingual and multicultural country, especially about indigenous school education.

Brazil is a culturally diverse country, and this multiculturalism makes it one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse. According to the IBGE Census (Brasil, 2010), 274 indigenous languages are not officially recognized. Because of the lack of positive visibility, many Brazilians are unaware that we are a multilingual country, believing that only the Portuguese language exists. Maintaining a multilingualism approach in indigenous school education today is one of the essential strategies to stop the advance of the surrounding language in the communities. To this end, the native language must have a privileged place in official educational spaces. The communities know the importance of valuing their languages and have developed linguistic strategies to keep them alive.

Discussions about language teaching and learning in indigenous contexts have been at the center of the debate. The world is gearing up for the decade of indigenous languages, 2022-2032. Giving visibility to indigenous languages is extremely important to strengthen and modernize them. The school in indigenous territories can be a channel for this strengthening.

For the school not to be a vehicle for the destruction of native languages as it was for many years, it is necessary that in the process of indigenous schooling societies, use the bilingualism of maintenance, the bilingualism of resistance in which the indigenous language has relevant spaces in all stages of education.

Finally, quoting Monserrat (2011), we reiterate that in the disappearance of a language, part of the memory of humanity also disappears; language is the vehicle of culture. Without language, culture does not survive; a culture founder finds language. Knowing the Brazilian mosaic's languages is to learn more about our culture and our people.

## REFERENCES

- Aronin, Larissa, and David Singleton. 2012. *Multilingualism*. Vol. 30. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Bhatia, Tej K. 2017. *Bilingualism, and multilingualism from a socio-*

*psychological perspective*, in *Oxford research encyclopedia of linguistics*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.82>

- Bianco, Joseph Lo. 2020. *A meeting of concepts and praxis: Multilingualism, language policy, and the dominant language constellation*, in *Dominant Language Constellations*. Cham: Springer, 35-56.
- Bomfim, Anari Braz. 2017. *Patxohã: a retomada da língua do povo Pataxó*, in *Revista Linguística / Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Linguística da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*, 1 (13): 303-327. ISSN 2238-975X 1. Available: <https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/rl>.
- Brasil. 1988. *Constituição Federal da República Federativa do Brasil*. Brasília: Senado Federal.
- Brasil. 2002. *As leis e a educação escolar indígena: Programa Parâmetros em Ação de Educação Escolar Indígena*. Brasília, Brasil: Ministério da Educação, Secretaria de Educação Fundamental.
- Brasil. 2010. Instituto de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE). *Os indígenas no Censo Demográfico 2010: primeiras considerações com base no quesito cor ou raça, 2012*.
- Brasil. 2021. *Observatório do Clima*. Available: <https://www.oc.eco.br/passando-boiada-o-segundo-ano-de-desmonte-ambiental-sob-jair-bolsonaro/>. [2021, december 22].
- Brasil. Fundação Nacional do Índio. Retrieved from (<https://www.gov.br/funai/pt-br/atuacao/povos-indigenas/quem-sao>). Accessed in 15.05.2022.
- Baniwa, Gersem. 2013. *Educação Escolar Indígena no Brasil: avanços, limites e novas perspectivas*. 36<sup>a</sup> Reunião Nacional da ANPED – 29 de setembro a 02 de outubro de 2013, Goiânia-GO.
- Calvet, Louis-Jean. 2007. *As Políticas Linguísticas*. Florianópolis e São Paulo: IPOL/Parábola. 166 p.
- Council of Europe. Council for Cultural Cooperation. Education Committee. Modern Languages Division. 2001 (current version 2017). *Common European Framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- De Angelis, Gessica. 2007. *Third or additional language acquisition*.

- Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- D'Angelis, Wilmar da Rocha. 2002. Kaingáng: questões de língua e identidade. *Liames–Línguas Indígenas Americanas*: 105-128.
- D'Angelis, Wilmar. 2012. *Aprisionando Sonhos: A Educação Escolar Indígena no Brasil*. Campinas: Curt Nimuendaju.
- D'Angelis, Wilmar. 2011. Recuperar, ressuscitar, adotar ou inventar? Povos indígenas em busca de (alg)uma língua. En (Presidencia), *La antropología interpelada: nuevas configuraciones político-culturales em América latina*. Simposio llevado a cabo en el X Congreso Argentino de Antropología Social. Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- D'Angelis, Wilmar. 2009. Lengua indígena: lengua extranjera en tierra indígena. *Avá. Revista de Antropología*, 14.
- D'Angelis, Wilmar. 2019. Línguas indígenas no Brasil. In: D'Angelis, Wilmar. *Revitalização de línguas indígenas: o que é? como fazemos*. Editora Curt Nimuendajú.
- Edwards, John. 2013. Bilingualism and multilingualism: Some central concepts. *The handbook of bilingualism and multilingualism*. 5-25.
- Bortoni-Ricardo, S. M. 2003. Processos interativos em sala de aula e a pedagogia culturalmente sensível. Cuiabá: Polifonia EDUFMT. N° 07 p.119-136.
- Escobar, Anna María. 2013. Bilingualism in Latin America, in *The handbook of bilingualism and multilingualism*. 725-744.
- Erickson, F. 1987. Transformation and school success: the politics and culture of educational achievement. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 18(4) pp 335-56.
- Ferreira, Mariana Kawall Leal. 2001. *A Educação Escolar Indígena: um diagnóstico crítico da situação no Brasil*. In: Silva, Aracy Lopes & Ferreira, Mariana Kawall Leal. *Antropologia, história e educação*. SP: Global Editora.
- FILAC. 2021. *Caos na pandemia: Indígenas viram alvo de fake news antivacina* 23 February 2021 <https://www.filac.org/caos-na-pandemia-indigenas-viram-alvo-de-fake-news-antivacina/>; Accessed 23 December 2021.
- Freire, José Ribamar Bessa. 2003. *Da língua geral ao português: para uma história dos usos sociais das línguas na Amazônia*. Rio de Janeiro: UERJ.
- Giordano, Christian. 2019. National State and Multilingualism: Contradiction in Terms?, in *Multilingualism in the Baltic States*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. 481-501.
- Gramling, David. 2021. *The Invention of Multilingualism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grosjean, François. 1992. "Another view of bilingualism." *Advances in psychology*. Vol. 83. North-Holland, 51-62.
- Harter, Larissa Ruth Siniak dos Anjos, and Flávia Girardo Botelho Borges. 2019. *A questão do bilinguismo. Uma discussão teórica sobre os conceitos de bi, multi e plurilinguismo na Educação para Surdos*. *The Specialist*, 40 (3).
- Knapp, Cássio. 2016. *Entre as línguas e a escola: interculturalidade e bilinguismo na educação escolar indígena em meio aos guarani e Kaiowá de Mato Grosso do Sul* (doctoral thesis) Universidade da Grande Dourados, Brasil.
- Krawczyk-Neifar, Elżbieta. 2017. *Bilingual Teacher Training: Failure or Success? A Students' and Teachers' Perspective*. *Multiculturalism, Multilingualism, and the Self*. Springer, Cham. 171-184.
- Lagares, Xoán Carlos. 2018. *Qual política linguística. Desafios glotopolíticos contemporâneos*. São Paulo: Parábola.
- Maher, Terezinha Machado. 2007. *A Educação do Entorno para a Interculturalidade e o Plurilinguismo. Linguística Aplicada: suas faces e interfaces*. Campinas: Mercado de Letras. 255-270.
- Meliá, Bartolomeu. 1979. *Educação Indígena e Alfabetização*. São Paulo: Ed. Loyola.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2008. *Desobediência epistêmica: a opção descolonial e o significado de identidade em política*. *Cadernos de Letras da UFF–Dossiê: Literatura, língua e identidade*, 34. 287-324.
- Monserrat, Ruth Maria Fonini. 2011. *Política e Planejamento Linguístico nas Sociedades Indígenas do Brasil hoje: o Espaço e o Futuro das Línguas Indígenas*. In: Veiga, Juracilda y Salanova, Andrés. (Orgs.) *Questões de Educação Escolar Indígena: da Formação ao Projeto de Escola*.
- Mozzillo, Isabella, and Karen Pupp

- Spinassé. 2020. Políticas linguísticas familiares em contexto de línguas minoritárias. *Revista Linguagem & Ensino*, 23 (4). 1297-1316.
- Nobre, Domingos. 2012. De que bilinguismo falamos na formação de professores. *Anais do SIELP* 2, (1). 1-8.
- Nobre, Domingos. 2005. História da educação escolar indígena no Brasil.
- Nobre, Domingos. 2020. Resistência e Subordinação nas Armadilhas da Escola Indígena: Autonomia é Possível? In: Coletânea "Educação e Territorialidade". Programa de Mestrado Interdisciplinar Educação e Territorialidade - PPGET – FAIND – UFGD - Dourados – MS.
- Pontes, N. 2021. Pastores afastam indígenas da vacinação, relatam lideranças 29 January 2021. <https://www.dw.com/pt-br/pastores-afastam-ind%C3%ADgenas-da-vacina%C3%A7%C3%A3o-relatam-lideran%C3%A7as/a-56380498>; accessed 23December 2021.
- Ramos, André. R. F. Gobbi Izabel. (2020). A língua como Movimento de Reexistir: a atuação da FUNAI em iniciativas de valorização e revitalização de línguas indígenas. *Experiências brasileiras em revitalização de línguas indígenas*. Org. Wilmar da Rocha D'Angelis, Domingos Barros Nobre. Campinas, SP: Curt Nimuedajú.
- Ribeiro, Jocenilson, and Nathália Nunes. 2020. Discursos sobre o bilinguismo em contexto intercultural de ensino na unila: dois pesos e outras medidas. *Cenas Educacionais*, 3. 7481.
- Rodrigues, Aryon Dall'Ígna. 1986. *Línguas Brasileiras: para o conhecimento das línguas indígenas*. São Paulo: Edições Loyola.
- Santos, Lilian Abram dos. 2020. *Revitalização Linguística: alguns conceitos. Experiências brasileiras em revitalização de línguas indígenas/Organizadores: Wilmar da Rocha D'Angelis, Domingos Barros Nobre*. Campinas, SP: Curt Nimuedajú, 272 p.
- Schroedler, Tobias. 2021. What is Multilingualism? Towards an Inclusive Understanding, in *Preparing Teachers to Work with Multilingual Learners*. *Multilingual Matters*. 17-37.
- Silva, Elias Ribeiro da. 2013. A pesquisa em política linguística: histórico, desenvolvimento e pressupostos epistemológicos. *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, 52 (2): 289-320.
- Silveira, Joicemara Severo. 2020. *Identidade e bilinguismo: um estudo com pessoas surdas*.
- Stec, Taciana, Olivia Figueiredo de Castro Aimbinder. 2021. Amazônia por inteiro: histórico, panorama e análise das políticas públicas federais de 2019 a 2020. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Talanoa.
- Tidigs, Julia; Huss, Markus. 2017. The Noise of Multilingualism. *Critical Multilingualism Studies*, 1 (5): 208–235.
- Tourneau, François-Michel Le. 2019. O governo Bolsonaro contra os Povos Indígenas: as garantias constitucionais postas à prova. *Confins. Revue franco-brésilienne de géographie/Revista franco-brasileira de geografia*, 501.
- Vieira Pereira, Orcione Aparecida et al. 2021. Políticas Ambientais do Governo Federal e sua Relação com o Bioma Amazônico. *Revista Mediação*, 11.
- Walsh, Catherine. 2009. Interculturalidade crítica e pedagogia decolonial: in-surgir, re-existir e re-viver. *Educação intercultural na América Latina: entre concepções, tensões e propostas*. Rio de Janeiro, 7. 12-43.
- Zephiro, Kátia Antunes. 2017. Processo de construção do currículo para/da educação escolar indígena no Rio de Janeiro: limites e aproximações de uma prática decolonial. (dissertation). Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, Seropédica, Brasil.

## ENDNOTES

1. The Pombaline phase is the period that Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, the Marquis of Pombal ruled as Prime Minister of Portugal (1750-1777), during the reign of King José I. The Pombaline educational reform culminated in the expulsion of the Jesuits from Brazil, still a Portuguese colony, taking the command of education out of their hands and passing it into the hands of the State, as well as the signature of the Directory of Indians, a document prepared in 1755, published in 1757, written by Pombal, composed of 95 articles, which prohibited that the general languages (indigenous language) be spoken throughout the national territory. The content of the document can be consulted on the

following page ([https://www.nacaomestica.org/diretorio\\_dos\\_indios.htm](https://www.nacaomestica.org/diretorio_dos_indios.htm)).

2. “São reconhecidos aos índios sua organização social, costumes, línguas, crenças e tradições, e os direitos originários sobre as terras que tradicionalmente ocupam, competindo à União demarcá-las, proteger e fazer respeitar todos os seus bens.” The authors translated all quotations from official documents in this study.
3. Article 210, par. 2: “O ensino fundamental regular será ministrado em língua portuguesa, assegurada às comunidades indígenas também a utilização de suas línguas maternas e processos próprios de aprendizagem.”
4. Endangered languages: if the youngest speakers are young adults, and there are no (or few) speaking children; Dying languages: if there are only a few older speakers remaining; Dead languages are languages that are no longer part of the daily life of a group of people; Living languages are languages used in people's daily lives: for exchanging or seeking information, for personal expression (of feelings, ideas, sensations) (D'Angelis, 2011).