



Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada

ISSN: 1984-6398

Faculdade de Letras - Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

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Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada, vol. 18, no. 2, 2018, April-June, pp. 389-416

Faculdade de Letras - Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

DOI: 10.1590/1984-6398201812048

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Portuguese as a Welcoming Language for forcibly displaced immigrants in Brazil: some principles for teaching in light of Interculturality

Português como Língua de Acolhimento para imigrantes deslocados forçados no Brasil: alguns princípios para o ensino à luz da Interculturalidade

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents some results obtained from a Master's research study whose objective was to suggest principles for the teaching of Portuguese as a Welcoming Language – PWLg – (AMADO, 2013; LOPEZ, 2016; LOPEZ & DINIZ, *in press*; among others) for forcibly displaced immigrants in Brazil. Supported by Indisciplinary Applied Linguistics (MOITA LOPES, 2006), the present work analyzes the discourse of coordinators, teachers, and students in order to highlight their perspectives on the process of teaching and learning Portuguese in this context. Based on the results, I suggest the teaching of PWLg to be based on some principles of *Interculturality* (MAHER, 2007), established through two main dimensions of action: the immigrants' political strengthening and the surrounding education.

KEYWORDS: Indisciplinary Applied Linguistics; Portuguese as a Welcoming Language; Forcibly Displaced Immigrants; Territorializations; Interculturality.

RESUMO: Este artigo revisa alguns resultados obtidos de uma pesquisa de mestrado cujo objetivo foi sugerir princípios para o ensino de Português como Língua de Acolhimento – PLAc – (AMADO, 2013; LOPEZ, 2016; LOPEZ; DINIZ, *no prelo*; entre outros) para imigrantes deslocados forçados no Brasil. Respalçado pela Linguística Aplicada Indisciplinar (MOITA LOPES, 2006), este trabalho analisa o discurso de coordenadores, professores e alunos, destacando suas perspectivas sobre o processo de ensino-aprendizagem de português neste contexto. Diante dos resultados, sugiro que o ensino de PLAc seja fundamentado em princípios da *Interculturalidade* (MAHER, 2007), pautado

em duas dimensões de ação principais: o fortalecimento político dos imigrantes e a educação do entorno.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Linguística Aplicada Indisciplinar; Português como Língua de Acolhimento; Imigrantes Forçadamente Deslocados; Territorializações; Interculturalidade.

1 Introduction¹

This paper presents results obtained by means of a Masters' study which aimed to outline principles for the teaching of Portuguese as a Welcoming Language (PWLg)² (AMADO, 2013, 2016; LOPEZ, 2016; LOPEZ & DINIZ, *in press*; SÃO BERNARDO, 2016; SOUSA, 2015; SENE, 2017, among others) for forcibly displaced immigrants in Brazil. The present work is affiliated with the epistemological position of the *Indisciplinary Applied Linguistics*³ (MOITA LOPES, 2006), and is based on the methodology of qualitative research, adopting an ethnographic and interpretive perspective (BIZON, 2013; GRANDE, 2011; MOITA LOPES, 1994). Among its main goals, this paper aims to discuss the discourse of PWLg coordinators, teachers, and students (immigrants), concerning the following points: 1) the target public's designation by coordinators and teachers of PWLg and 2) the immigrants' (PWLg students) perspective on the role that the Portuguese language has in their daily lives. These categories were selected to be investigated because of the outstanding frequency in which they were mentioned by the participants, whether directly or indirectly.

On the one hand, based on the analysis conducted by this study, the results pointed to a tendency of the PWLg professionals to *totalize* (MAHER, 2007) the forcibly displaced people by representing them mainly via their (supposed) *losses* and *absences*, thus collaborating in the construction of an image of *helplessness* (AYDOS, 2010) of these immigrants. On the other hand, a large part of the immigrants who participated in this study portrayed

¹ This paper derives from discussions conducted in Lopez (2016), Masters' research study, advisor: Dr. Leandro Rodrigues Alves Diniz (FALE/UFGM).

² In Portuguese: "Português como Língua de Acolhimento (PLAc)".

³ The term *Indisciplinary* should not be confused with *Interdisciplinary*. *Indisciplinary Applied Linguistics* is defined by Moita Lopes (2006) as a new paradigm for what the author considers as "traditional" Applied Linguistics. This term will be properly discussed in the second section of this paper.

their Portuguese learning processes as either a *necessity* or a *self-defense tool*. Such images can indicate that their territorialization processes are being held *precariously* (HAESBAERT, 2016) in Brazil.⁴

In light of such results, the main contribution of this work relies on the suggestion of underlying principles for PWLg teaching in Brazil, aiming at fostering a teaching practice that could collaborate for the democratization of multiterritorialities (*idem*) for forcibly displaced immigrants in the country. The principles I suggest are fundamentally based on the perspective of *Interculturality*, as understood by Maher (2007).

In addition to this introduction, I have organized this paper in four subsequent sections. In the first section, I draw a brief overview of forced displacement in the world, in general, and in Brazil, specifically. I also demonstrate the current legislation for the protection of this population, as well as define and highlight the PWLg's role in the social integration of these immigrants. In the second section, I present a theoretical review of the main concepts raised in this work: Indisciplinary Applied Linguistics (MOITA LOPES, 2006, among others), (precarious) Territorialization (BIZON, 2013; HAESBAERT, 2016), and the central elements that should be taken into account to organize courses geared toward socially minoritized groups, in light of Interculturality (MAHER, 2007). In the third section, I develop my analysis of the discourse of both professionals and students of PWLg, focusing particularly on the two aforementioned aspects of analysis. In the fourth section, based on the results of the investigation, I present the suggested principles for teaching PWLg for forcibly displaced immigrants in Brazil.

1.1 Forced displacement and PWLg: a brief contextualization of the theme

According to the latest report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 65.3 million people around the globe are currently recognized as *forcibly displaced migrants*, a category in which UNHCR claims to include *internally displaced persons*, *refugees*, as well as *asylum seekers* (UNHCR, 2016). This wistful number means this is the worst humanitarian crisis that the world has faced since World War II (*idem*).

⁴ All different authors' and research participants' words/discourse quoted in this paper were translated by me from Portuguese to English.

This scenario is becoming internationally common; therefore, an increasing number of immigrants are seeking asylum in Brazil. According to the most recent report organized by the Brazilian National Committee for Refugees (CONARE),⁵ the number of refugee requests received in 2015 was 28,670, which represented an increase of 2,867.90%, compared to the 966 requests received in 2010 (CONARE, 2016). The country currently hosts 8,863 refugees from 79 different nationalities, mainly from Syria, Angola, Colombia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (*idem*).

This number is even greater if I include the immigrants who originate from other *forced* (AYDOS, 2010) or *crisis* (CLOCHARD, 2007; SANTOS, 2014) migration processes, who are not considered in any category as *refugees* by the current Brazilian legislation,⁶ as is the case of Haitians, for example, who already comprise approximately 85,000 inhabitants in Brazil (MJC, 2016). As a solution to this situation, humanitarian visas have been provided to Haitian nationals, although many of them enter the country as asylum-seekers.⁷

Brazil stands out internationally as one of the countries participating in the main international Human Rights treaties. Even though the country acceded to the 1951 United Nations' Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol (UNHCR, 2014), as well as the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (AYDOS, 2010), Brazil still presents precarious legislation in this area and lacks efficient public policies to receive and satisfactorily organize the immigration processes of forcibly displaced people (SÃO BERNARDO, 2016). However, it should be noted that the Brazilian government is creating strategies to overcome this impasse, for

⁵ In Portuguese, "CONARE" stands for "Comitê Nacional para os Refugiados".

⁶ The current Brazilian legislation recognizes a refugee as an individual who: (I) is outside their country of nationality, and is unable or unwilling to accept the protection of that country due to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion; (II) not having a nationality and being outside the country where they had their habitual residence before, cannot or does not want to return to it, because of the circumstances described in the previous item; (III) is forced to leave their country of nationality to seek asylum in another country as a result of serious and widespread violation of Human Rights (BRAZIL, 1997, Law No. 9.474, Article 1, my translation).

⁷ According to data from the Brazilian Federal Police Department, presented by CONARE (2016), up to March 2016, Haitians alone submitted 48,371 refugee requests in Brazil.

example, in the enactment of its new Migration Law (BRAZIL, 2017), which will replace the conservative Foreigner Statute in November 2017 – Law No. 6.815/80 (BRAZIL, 1980) – which still carries remnants of the Brazilian military dictatorship of 1964-1985. Although the government demonstrates some concern about the legal *status* of immigrants, governmental measures involving the effective social insertion of these people – which is, somehow, permeated by the Portuguese language – are still very few.

In this work, I believe the Portuguese language plays an essential role in the forcibly displaced immigrants' social integration movement due to it being the official and major language in Brazil. It constitutes a mediating element in the (material/physical and symbolic) appropriation processes of the new territory by these immigrants, in other words, the immigrants' processes of (re)territorialization (BIZON, 2013). As a consequence of the aforementioned lack of articulated actions by governmental bodies on this matter (SÃO BERNARDO, 2016; SOUSA, 2015), civil society institutions, through their non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religious communities, are leading the initiative of teaching the language to this public.⁸ This leaves Brazil behind other countries including: Portugal, France, and Germany, which have public policies aimed at teaching their national languages to integrate immigrants (SÃO BERNARDO, 2016).⁹

In this sense, since Brazil does not count on either linguistic policies aimed at this specific public (SOUSA, 2015) or policies to fill the considerable lack of training of teachers who work in language teaching for immigrants

⁸ As examples of civil society entities that help with the reception and the socio-labor insertion of refugees and other forcibly displaced immigrants in Brazil, I can mention: the Institute of Migration and Human Rights (IMDH), in Brasília; The Institute for Reintegration of Refugees, in São Paulo; some religious institutions supported by Catholic orders, such as the Zanmi Center (in Belo Horizonte), Cáritas Brasileira (present in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Manaus), and Missão Paz (São Paulo); as well as Islamic institutions, such as the Mosques of Brazil (also located in São Paulo).

⁹ France, with the *Fonds d'Action Sociale* (Social Action Fund) program; Germany, with its various integration courses for immigrants; and Portugal, with its *Portugal Acolhe – Português para Todos* ("Portugal Embraces – Portuguese for all") program (SÃO BERNARDO, 2016). Such governmental initiatives are important because they can give visibility to the situation and challenge policies aimed at their public – although these initiatives can be marked by different controversies. A recent German draft law, for example, suggested that immigrants should be required to learn German and take language proficiency tests, under the threat of losing their residence rights in the country (CARREL, 2016).

(AMADO, 2013), academic research, teaching, and extension activities addressed to the forcibly displaced immigrants are highlighted.¹⁰ Such activities, especially concerning research and teaching, are contributing to the emergence in the country of the specialty referred to as PWLg (AMADO, 2013, 2016; LOPEZ, 2016; LOPEZ & DINIZ, *in press*; SÃO BERNARDO, 2016, SOUSA, 2015; SENE, 2017, among others). Broadly, PWLg is the specialty affiliated with the subarea of Applied Linguistics (AL) denominated *Portuguese as an Additional Language* (PAL). It concerns the teaching of Portuguese for immigrants coming from different processes of forced displacement (AYDOS, 2010) or crisis migration (CLOCHARD, 2007; SANTOS, 2014), those “who are vulnerable and do not have Portuguese as their mother tongue” (LOPEZ & DINIZ, n/p, *in press*). Echoing what I have stated in prior works, I believe:

PWLg cannot be seen as a mere “adaptation” of previous knowledge to a new teaching-learning context. In contrast, teachers and researchers need to constantly interrogate themselves as to who these migrant individuals are, what relations they establish with the different territories and languages that constitute them, and how the teaching of Portuguese can be conducted with this public. Interrogations that, along with others, feed on – at the same time that they can foster – discussions in AL, more generally, and in PAL, particularly. In this sense, PWLg is a transdisciplinary specialty which requires a continuous dialog with different fields – such as Anthropology, Political Science, Social Sciences, Law, Geography, History, Linguistics, Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and International Relations – as well as with different civil society entities which have been, as Amado (2013) observes, for the most part, responsible for the reception of these immigrants in the country, and for their initial contact with the learning of Brazil’s major language (LOPEZ & DINIZ, s/p, *in press*).

The development of PWLg in Brazil contributes not only to attend to a growing demand, but also to foster and give visibility to the debate on the limitations of the current legislation for the reception and welcoming of forcibly displaced immigrants in the country, with emphasis on the language policy gap aimed at this audience (SOUSA, 2015).

¹⁰ Cf. Lopez & Diniz, *in press*.

2 Indisciplinary Applied Linguistics, Territorialization, and Teaching for Minoritized Groups in Light of Interculturality

The *Indisciplinary* Applied Linguistics (MOITA LOPES, 2006), also referred to as *Critical* Applied Linguistics (PENNYCOOK, 2001; RAJAGOPALAN, 2006) or *Transgressive* Applied Linguistics (PENNYCOOK, 2006), whose principles guided the present investigation, points out new directions for the research practice of the “traditional” Applied Linguistics (AL) (MOITA LOPES, 2006, p. 14). For Moita Lopes (2006), the creation of a new paradigm, which considered “the understanding of the changes related to sociocultural, political, and historical life” (2006, p. 21) of the people who live and act in the applied context in which the research is developed, was necessary in AL. This implies that the disciplinary barriers are broken and, consequently, AL becomes an INdisciplinary, or even ANTI-disciplinary, field of study. For this reason, *Indisciplinary* AL lies in the sphere of the postmodern or postcolonial theories (MOITA LOPES, 2006, p. 23), characterized by the questioning of power relations and the *status quo*: the latter marked by objectivist perspective and positivist practices. As part of its project, this paradigm recognizes the political issues involving all types of social practices, as well as questions the act of doing research itself. Therefore, it is considered to be critical, self-reflexive, and ideological (MOITA LOPES, 2006, p. 21).

Including and considering the opinions of individuals who act, transform, and are transformed by the sociopolitical and historical conjuncture in which the AL practice occurs is part of the *Indisciplinary* AL’s presupposition in understanding social relations, to be (better) able to transform it. Thus, by means of its commitment to social transformation, it brings to the center of interest, sociohistorically marginalized individuals, contexts, and visions, with the dual objective of changing and learning from this reality. According to Fabrício (2006, p. 51), assuming this position:

[...] without neglecting consecrated knowledge, forces us into continuous displacements, moving the angle of observation from the center (i.e., the developed countries, and the occidental discourses, and the episteme produced by them) to the fringes of the globalized system, to the invisible organizations, to the peripheries, to the forms of being considered subaltern or inferior (in regard to sexuality, race, social class, etc.), to the so-called third world, and to those excluded from the benefits of development.

However, this exercise of bringing to the center the reality of marginalized lives should not be understood as a form of “salvation” of those less socially favored – a value that is very important to this paper. Instead, Fabrício (2006) indicates an epistemological change which recognizes the *gains* derived from this new practice, especially as an opportunity to learn how to try alternative forms of perception and organization of experience that are “not compromised with vicious historical logics and senses” (p. 52). Rajagopalan (2006), on the other hand, considers *Critical Linguistics* as a broader field in which several related areas (considered as “proposals” by the author) – AL included – are aligned. For this author, such areas are related, because they share the same ideals and assume their scientific practices are either political with interventionist goals, to change the social reality, or, using the author’s words, “to intervene in the reality that is out there” (RAJAGOPALAN, 2006, p. 163).

Thus, in this study, I have adopted the perspective of Indisciplinary AL, inasmuch as I sought to carry out investigative methods that could allow one to listen to the *Other* and whose main objective was to collaborate with a transformation of one of those realities that are “out there”. As part of the study’s methodology, I attempted to include the perspectives of the individuals who acted and lived in the context in which I developed the study – namely PWLg coordinators, teachers and students – in order to be able to elaborate general teaching principles that would consider their perspectives and interests. In addition to understanding the social context in which this study was theorized, I wanted to collaborate for the transformation of the sociopolitical practice of language teaching for the public comprised of forcibly displaced immigrants, a minoritized group in Brazil.

This study’s concept of *minoritized* group aligns with the perspective of what Maher (2007) calls *minority*,¹¹ which means the term is used in a *political* sense rather than a *demographic* one. For the planning of educational programs directed to minority/minoritized groups, Maher (2007) believes one should consider three elements, namely: 1) the group’s *empowerment*, *politicization*, or *political strengthening*, in line with 2) surrounding educational actions, sustained by 3) the presence of favorable legislation for that specific

¹¹ Differently from Maher (2007), I prefer to adopt the term *minoritized* instead of *minority*, in view of emphasizing the condition of “minority” not as a status, but as consequence of social, historical, and political processes of oppression, destitution of rights and/or accesses – processes which are pierced by power relations.

group. Maher's (2007) proposal is based on a critical view of education, supported by the perspective of Critical Multiculturalism or, as this author prefers to call it, *Interculturality*. I will also briefly discuss the three principles defended by Maher (2007), considering that they may also be fundamental for the teaching of additional languages to groups consisting of vulnerable and minoritized groups of immigrants in Brazil, such as the forcibly displaced.

Regarding the first course of action, Maher (2007) prefers to use the term politicization or political strengthening, rather than empowerment, to refer to the "ideological shift" (p. 256) necessary to recognize and legitimize rights, ways of being/behaving, or speaking, thus giving voice and visibility to some minoritized populations. According to the author, empowerment is a term that, although important for AL – in my view, especially the *Indisciplinary* AL (MOITA LOPES, 2006, among others) – has been mistakenly overused; consequently, its meaning has been emptied.

However, as mentioned above, Maher (2007) believes that, although essential, the knowledge of their own value and demands by the members of a certain minoritized group is not enough to actually *have* or *attain* rights. For this reason, favorable advances in legislation are fundamental. Ideally, with a law that helped to reduce some of the sociopolitical inequality faced by this group, being aware of their rights and the legitimacy of their demands, as well as their linguistic and behavioral characteristics, a minoritized population would follow a favorable course for the effective establishment and practice of their citizenship.

Unfortunately, the guarantee of rights alone does not necessarily imply its *exercise*. In the case of forcibly displaced immigrants, for instance, having the same rights and services as native or naturalized Brazilians, according to what the legislation provides (LOPEZ, 2016), is not enough for these immigrants to be treated (socially speaking) like native or naturalized Brazilian citizens. As an illustration, even when these immigrants are in possession of the documentation allowing them to work in the country, they are often unable to get a job that matches their qualifications (FERNANDES *et al.*, 2014; SÁ & FERNANDES, 2016). Additionally, they are more likely to suffer episodes of labor abuse (*idem*). This leads us to discuss the third point presented by Maher (2007): the surrounding education which is supported by the logic of *Interculturality*.

In short, Critical Multiculturalism or *Interculturality*, as Maher (2007) prefers, recognizes “the dynamic, hybrid, non-consensual, and non-hierarchical character of cultures” and “brings to the center of the debate the differences of forces between different cultural groups” (MAHER, 2007, p. 264). In dialog with Semprini (1999), Maher (*idem*) presents four principles that guide Interculturality: “a) reality is a construction; b) interpretations are subjective and discursively constructed; c) values are relative; and d) knowledge is a political act.” Regarding the materiality of educational practice, according to the author, this critical view of culture announces that differences are respected and even questioned, rather than celebrated or tolerated, as the conservative and liberal perspectives of Multiculturalism, respectively, claim.

The practice of *Interculturality* is central to the development of the surrounding education (MAHER, 2007). Just as the author, I believe that without this education, these groups are not able to fully exercise – or will do so in a restricted or *precarious* manner (HAESBAERT, 2016) – the rights that they may occasionally have. From Maher’s (2007) perspective, the surrounding education is anchored in two main precepts. The first is the necessity of *learning to accept the changeable nature of the other*, aiming not to fall into the misconception of considering that there are “cultural losses”. The second indicates that one must *question the patterns that are chosen as “authentic” in a culture*, which means understanding that culture is not something homogeneous or static, much less something that can be “possessed”. According to the author, this deconstruction is crucial in order to eliminate the mistaken practice of perceiving cultural groups as monolithic, which could ultimately lead to their stereotyping. In the case of forcibly displaced immigrants, the bridge between themselves and the knowledge of their rights – a necessary facet for the exercise of such rights – inevitably passes through the *territory* of the Portuguese language. To explain this point, it is necessary to briefly discuss the concepts of *territory*, *territoriality*, and “(*precarious*) *territorialization*”.

For Bizon, *territory* is not only conceived in its physical/geographical/material dimension, but also perceived as both the “actor and object of action” (SANTOS, 2002 *apud* BIZON, p. 120), that is, a constant result of acts or agency. In other words, territory is *built* at the same time that it is a construction scenario. In one of the definitions of territory presented by Bizon, the author evokes the following words of Guattari & Rolnik (1986):

The notion of territory is here understood in a very broad sense, which goes beyond its use by the ethology and the ethnology [and the Geography, we should add]. [...] Territory may be relative to both a lived space, and a perceived system within which an individual feels “at home”. Territory is a synonym of appropriation, of subjectivation itself. (GUATTARI & ROLNIK, 1986, p. 323 *apud* BIZON, 2013, p.118).

Based on this fundamental principle, Bizon (2013) mobilizes Haesbaert's (2004) the concept of *territorialization*, which is the movement of both material and symbolic appropriation of the territory by an individual. In this sense, territorialization – attention to the phenomenon as a *verb*, that is, a *process* or an *action* in constant movement – can happen in multiple contexts, since, “as long as there is a conjunction between mechanic agencies of bodies and collective agents of enunciation, it is possible to territorialize in anything” (p. 118). Roughly, territory is a “social and political *construction* encompassing different instances of spatiality (material and symbolic)” (p. 122), while territoriality would be the “*process* through which territories are built, [which] does not need material construction” (*idem*, my emphasis). Thus, if territory is a “synonym of appropriation”, as highlighted by the excerpt from Guattari & Rolnik (1986 *apud* Bizon, 2013, p. 118), and assuming that appropriating something presupposes an agency, “territoriality is, therefore, a central feature of agencies” (BIZON, 2013, p. 118).

In addition to agency, Bizon (2013) points out two other dimensions of territories: *detrterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*, composing a constant movement of *de(re)territorialization*. For the author, “creation always implies destruction. It is necessary to detrterritorialize to be able to reterritorialize” (p.118). That is:

[...] territories always carry within themselves vectors of detrterritorialization and reterritorialization. Much more than a thing or an object, territory is an act, an action, a *rel-a[c]tion*, a movement (of territorialization and detrterritorialization), a rhythm, a movement that repeats itself and over which one exercises control (HAESBAERT, 2004 *apud* BIZON, 2013, p. 118, emphasis in the original).

It is necessary to emphasize that these movements of *de(re)territorialization* are multiple. In Bizon's (2013) interpretation, there may be *de(re)territorializations* in immobility, while territorializations in movement. In this sense, I understand that the movement(s) of *de(re)territorialization* can happen due to a certain voluntary agency (as in the case of the nomads, to

use the author's example), or involuntary agency (as in the case of Jews in Nazi concentration camps).¹² In that regard, according to Bizon (2013), territories can be understood as political spaces, demarcated by power relations, comprising the senses of (material/geographic) *domination* and (lived experiences/usage values/symbolic) *appropriation*.

Following that perspective, resistance is indispensable in reterritorialization processes, that is, leaving our marks on what is predetermined to us, since **“when we do not exercise effective dominion and appropriation over the territory, even when we occupy an apparently well-defined physical space, we continue to be deterritorialized”** (BIZON, 2013, p. 123, my emphasis). This means that the first characteristic of territorialization – as a process – is agency: this field and possibility of resistance. Thus, if this agency is somehow either interrupted or non-existent, even if the individual is positioned in such apparently well-defined physical spaces, it is considered a *precarious territorialization* (HAESBAERT, 2016).

Having discussed these principles, it is my belief that PWLg teaching can be seen as a *territory* of politicization,¹³ whose objective would be “the production and circulation of linguistic-discursive knowledge that ultimately contributes to ‘produce and democratize mobilities and multiterritorialities’” (LOPEZ & DINIZ, n/p, *in press*) for forcibly displaced immigrants in Brazil. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider that PWLg, by itself, would not be enough to guarantee non-precarious territorializations. Thus, I endorse Maher's (2007) conviction that an emancipatory teaching, from the perspective of *Interculturality*, associated with advances in legislation in favor of this population as well as the surrounding education, could be crucial in this regard.

¹² As an example, Bizon (2013) states that “Nazi concentration camps, for example, are cases of in-situ or immobility deterritorialization, while nomads, even without a fixed territory, territorialize along their paths” (p. 119).

¹³ In our view, politicization is what well-known theoretical approaches, such as the Critical Pedagogy, based mainly on Freire (2015 [1996]), seek to do.

3 The *Helpless* Immigrant and Portuguese as a *Necessity* or *Self-Defense Tool*: Considerations on the Discourse of PWLg Coordinators, Teachers, and Students

As previously mentioned, this paper discusses some of the results achieved by conducting a qualitative study with an ethnographic and interpretive perspective (BIZON, 2013; GRANDE, 2011; MOITA LOPES, 1994).¹⁴ It is important to clarify that the ethnographic dimension of the work consists of participative observations conducted by myself in two PWLg course contexts – the Zanmi Center and the PWLg course at a local university, both located in Belo Horizonte, in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The interpretative dimension of the research was adopted in the interpretation of the participants' discourses. The two main points discussed in this paper – the immigrants' characterization by PWLg coordinators and professors and the Portuguese language's role for PWLg students – were selected from the study's questionnaire-generated register when they were clearly evident and recurrent in the participants' speech. Regarding the participants, in total there were five PWLg coordinators and 20 professors who worked in different parts of the country. Additionally, there were 20 forcibly displaced immigrants in PWLg courses in which the participant observation was conducted, including 16 Haitians and 4 Syrians. As mentioned above, based on participants' responses, the analysis discussed here was organized into two main points, namely: (1) how PWLg's target audience is characterized and (2) how immigrants picture their language learning process.

3.1 The process of designating immigrants: perspectives of PWLg coordinators and teachers

The references to the target public of PWLg by the participants of this study revealed, among other things, an interesting process: the immigrants' recognition by their (alleged) *losses* and *absences*, associating

¹⁴ As discussed in Lopez (2016), the records of this work were generated based on two main instruments: 1) semi-open questionnaires applied to immigrants, students of the Portuguese language, and 2) semi-open online questionnaires applied to teachers and coordinators who work with PWLg in different parts of the country. In addition to these, the participative observation was recorded in a research journal kept by myself. In this work, I do not include much of this journal's content because of a limitation of space.

them to a characteristic of *helplessness* (AYDOS, 2010). According to Aydos (2010), in the process of conceptualizing the refuge phenomenon, there is a tendency to associate refugees with a package of losses of various natures, such as “social capital networks, economic and material goods, political and legal rights” (p. 58). For the author, reiterating this thought contributes to reinforce the criticized image of the *helpless refugee*. Some scholars argue that immigration does not always result in losses or disempowerments, so one must carefully observe each situation before jumping to hasty conclusions. In Aydos’s (2010, p. 59) words: “researchers need to consider the circumstances and possibilities by which the forced migration can result in social empowerment and gains, as much as in losses.”

A tendency of associating the public with a status of vulnerability, loss, and, consequently, helplessness in coordinators’ and teachers’ discourses could be observed (words in bold are my emphasis):

[...] In addition to the cultural issues of approximation, immigrants are seeking basic rights, such as work and housing, and above all, are seeking for the **reconstruction** of their human dignities. (Teacher 1)

They are students in situations of vulnerability (some more, others less), who are far from their country and their families not by choice, but by the **lack** of it. They learn Portuguese out of necessity, so they can **rebuild** their lives in a strange country with a strange language. (Teacher 12)

These students present, in addition to the language barriers, **affective, economic, and psychological trauma** pertinent to their immersion in the country. (Coordinator 2)

[...] This approach [PWLg’s] is sensitive to the total context of this public (origin, cause of displacement, current situation) and aims, with the teaching of Portuguese, to **remedy** the most urgent communication demands of this public, in order to integrate it into the local society. Above all, it is a sensitive approach to its specific audience, in which one of their main objectives would be to make the Portuguese learning a way of integration and, why not, a means of cushioning their sometimes **abrupt and traumatic arrival and establishment** in the country. Integration and cushioning in the sense of being introduced, through the language learning, to the culture, habits, practical, and objective notions of how local systems and codes work, the reality, in sum, to the universe of the country in which this public **landed**. (Coordinator 5)

As can be seen in the passages above, especially through the emphasized words, PWLg students are viewed as people who need to be, somehow, *fixed*, due to the character of *loss* that is always present. Moreover, the differentiation between forcibly displaced people and other immigrants in Brazil was revealed in some of the participants' discourses, based on discrepancies in their social needs or motivations for language learning. Such discrepancies are, to some extent, related to the idea that these immigrants are in constant condition of absence or social disadvantage:

[...] while the vast majority of the foreign apprentices of PFL [Portuguese as a Foreign Language] or PAL are to some extent comfortable, reasonably installed and with their guaranteed daily maintenance, **refugees are in less favorable conditions**, including looking for jobs and better facilities. **The concerns and needs of refugees are generally higher** [than other immigrants], **which is reflected in their performance in the learning process.** (Teacher 8)

The PWLg course receives people in **vulnerability** situations, who, more than only learning the Portuguese language, have the desire to be integrated and **to be part of the Brazilian society.** (Teacher 9)

Following an interpretable logic of the passages, there is a tendency to consider that, due to such *absences* and *losses* inherent to their immigration processes, forcibly displaced persons are understood to be suffering from many kinds of deficiencies, from affective to psychological.

Interestingly enough, the process of identifying immigrants by such characteristics had a consequent effect on how the participants demonstrated the picture of practice in PWLg. Since these individuals' migration is basically seen as a shock of traumatic consequences, the Portuguese language appears as a means through which to diminish this shock, or "cushion" the impact it causes. Consequently, the practice of PWLg is now understood as an almost heroic rescue practice, as the following responses demonstrate:

[Teaching PWLg] **is to perform the role of the "good guy"** in the best sense of the word! That is: **to give** the basic tool of social interaction (the language) **to those who come to us from the most varied, usually subhuman or even inhuman contexts.** (Teacher 19)

PWLg teaching is something new in my life – I have coordinated these courses for two years now – but it is something I have dreamed of in my professional and personal life for a long time, and I did not even know why. The experience of being **able to share** what I know from my

native language **with those who urgently want and need to know it, is more than rewarding, it is about learning resilience and tolerance.**
(Coordinator 1)

As indicated above, serving the immigrant who is portrayed as helpless, the PWLg practice has such a special meaning that it represents the worker of this specialty as the “good guy” doing a “rewarding, resilient, and tolerant” work. Such terms create the effect that PWLg is nearly a practice of charity, which intends to rescue the immigrant who would need help coping and overcoming extreme difficulties. This can also be a consequence (as well as a reinforcement) of the way in which PWLg activities are being carried out in Brazil, mainly based on civil society’s efforts (especially through religious groups), established primarily upon a volunteer system.

I do not intend to say that situations of fragility cannot be or are not often a reality in the experience of forcibly displaced immigrants in Brazil. Since they are a heterogeneous group (GROSSO, 2010), I do not believe all forcibly displaced people necessarily find themselves in a vulnerable situation because they have suffered from processes of losses, yet their vulnerability arises from their minoritized status (CARMO, 2016) in the country.

Moreover, I believe it is necessary to change the lenses through which I see these people to ensure that I not only see them from the perspective of (alleged) absences or losses. Critically thinking, if such losses and absences were really the norm for these people, the use of Interculturality (MAHER, 2007) in PWLg would already be impossible. The logic of these people being in a constant *loss* gives a sense that *we* are the only ones who have something to offer them (the role of the “good guy”); as a consequence, they are seen as people who have nothing to give/offer us. Thus, I believe that the first step towards an emancipatory teaching (MAHER, 2007) in PWLg should be based on the students’ perspective. For this, professionals who work with this specialty should seek to know and understand their public’s backgrounds and, more importantly, should move away from assuming they are constantly in need of something, reaffirming their *helplessness* image.

In my view, this exposes another PWLg conceptualization challenge. I advocate a Welcoming Language proposal that maintains a critical bias, moving away from a vision that crystallizes its students in a predetermined place that positions them as people who need to be hosted – in the sense of *shelter* and *care*. Hence, it is important to denaturalize the evidence effects produced by the type of thinking discussed in this section. I affirm this

because the linguistic conceptions and myths carried out by the professionals about the context in which they teach directly relates to the way in which this teaching is conducted, as discussed by previous studies (CAMARGO, 2016; HILGEMANN, 2004; LIMA, 2008; PAIVA, 1997, only to cite a few).

3.2 The role of PWLg learning: immigrants' opinions

In the records of this research, I identified some common experiences among the immigrants that can indicate that their processes of territorialization are perhaps being established precariously (BIZON, 2013; HAESBAERT, 2016) in Brazil. This can be verified within the data in two main moments, both related to the learning of Portuguese: 1) by the mandatory *need* the students feel in learning Portuguese to carry out diverse activities and to have access to better living conditions and 2) by the constant reference to the use of Portuguese as a *self-defense tool*.

Regarding their need to learn Portuguese, according to the participants, learning the national language of Brazil is compulsory for them as immigrants because (words in bold are my emphasis): “[...] when a person arrives in a foreign country it is very important that they speak the language of the country, so **going to Portuguese classes is the first thing for an immigrant to do** (Student 4).” Here it is noticeable the idea that speaking the major language of the country is so important that it must be the *first* thing to be sought out by an immigrant who has recently arrived in the country.

The importance of knowing Portuguese, for these immigrants, is related to the role that this language assumes as majoritarian in Brazil. Many participants revealed that the lack of such knowledge implies the impossibility of performing several critical activities:

[...] is very important because [the Portuguese course] **allows each immigrant in Brazil to fulfill his/her needs**. (Student 7)

[...] Taking a Portuguese course is important for all immigrants in Brazil because if you had to **rent a house** you would not know how to ask for that house. Then if you were on the street and you needed **to buy [something]** you would not know how to ask for it. All this is important. (Student 8)

[...] if a person does not speak Portuguese and is living in Brazil, **how they will be able to live well** [?]. If the person has a problem, **how**

they will be able to defend themselves [?]. In my opinion, [PWLg] is a course that is important for all the immigrants who are living in Brazil, **especially for me.** (Student 9)

These immigrants believe, illusorily, that knowing Portuguese implies a guaranteed access to certain activities and solutions for their problems. It is true that for these forcibly displaced immigrants, most basic or survival activities take place in Portuguese; therefore, to carry them out, they need the language. This leads us to conclude that, for these people, knowing the Portuguese language can function as a means of subsistence. Grosso (2010) believes this is exactly what distinguishes PWLg from other PAL specialties.

Following this trend, the immigrant discourses pointed to contextual issues which they believe require knowledge of the language; yet, again, language is often represented as a means through which they will have access to opportunities and better living conditions:

[...] [learning Portuguese] is very important and it is more important for Haitians because the **Portuguese language is not easy because you need to learn the language.** (Student 13)

[...] the Portuguese course is important to learn because if you have a job that you would like to have, **because of the language, you do not know how to speak, you will not get this job.** (Student 8)

From the highlighted passages, it is observed that student 13 considers learning Portuguese to be difficult, especially because he *has to* learn it, since, as student 8 says, this knowledge is crucial to have access to certain types of basic survival services, such as getting a job. As mentioned before, in some immigrants' discourses there is an almost automatic association between knowing Portuguese and conquering a certain social ascent – the idea of “living well” mentioned by student 9. More than just reaffirming this idea, which at first may seem obvious and unimportant, it is necessary to problematize why, for these people specifically, as part of a minoritized group, knowledge of the major language of the country is presented as something compulsory, considering that common-sense believes other immigrant groups can visit and live in the country without necessarily having to speak Portuguese.¹⁵ Therefore it is important to question the power

¹⁵ See also some non-researchers discussing the need to know Portuguese to come to Brazil,

relations involved in the processes of (re)territorialization (BIZON, 2013): in this context, to whom is the right to territorialize given/denied? Who can, in fact, exercise it?

This leads our analysis to its second point of interest: the representation of Portuguese as a *self-defense tool*. For student 2, in order to be able to recognize that he was performing work that he should not do, it would be necessary for him to be aware of his work assignment(s). For this, in turn, it was necessary to know the language of the “oppressor”:

I did it [the Portuguese course] first because it's an additional knowledge for me, **so that I defend myself**, so that I **decide alone** something I want or not. Because if I can speak the language **it will prevent people from speaking anything to me, other people will not be able to tell me to do the work that I should not do/that is not mine.** (Student 2)

Student 2 showed interest in knowing the Portuguese language to be able to use it as a tool for the exercise of a right, in fact, more specifically as a means of preventing him from undergoing a type of labor exploitation. This idea was recurrent in another discourse from student 2, and shared by student 9:

[knowledge of the Portuguese language] will allow that person to hear when the people at work are talking to them, so **they will have no problem [...]** **The person will be able to defend himself better.** (Student 2)

[...] if a person does not speak Portuguese and is living in Brazil [...] they will defend themselves. [...] [I decided to learn Portuguese] 1st because I am living in Brazil, 2nd so **I can defend myself in the country because I am a foreigner**, 3rd so I can communicate with all the people who want to communicate with me, and so I can work better. (Student 9)

It can be seen from the highlighted passages that students feel a certain obligation to learn the language in order to defend themselves “because they are foreigners”, in addition to carrying out their activities or their contextual needs. This threat posed by the *Other* – someone who is part of the immigrant host society – is a striking image and, from my point of view,

available at: <<https://hinative.com/en-US/questions/411497>>, <<http://viagem.estadao.com.br/blogs/amanda-viaja/educacao-olimpiadas/>>, and <http://thebrazilbusiness.com/article/jobs-for-non-portuguese-speakers-in-brazil>. Retrieved on: September 8, 2017.

this suggests processes of precarious territorialization (HAESBAERT, 2016) by these immigrants. These students revealed that they feel constantly intimidated by the fear that something bad could happen to them, and because of that, they have to be able to defend themselves – a process that is facilitated if they have knowledge of their (potential) oppressor’s language. Such a threat of oppression, which already represents an oppression itself and a restriction of rights, often reaches minoritized groups (CARMO, 2016), which is no different for forcibly displaced immigrants.

Again, I do not want to say that Portuguese knowledge is not important, but rather point out that this knowledge alone can hardly be effective to develop active citizens in the Brazilian society.

4 Principles for the Teaching of PWLg for Forcibly Displaced Immigrants in Brazil

Based on the analysis and discussions conducted thus far, I will now discuss our proposed principles for PWLg teaching in Brazil. I will propose some subsidies¹⁶ which, in my opinion, can promote education that is more aligned with the profile and the objectives of the population for whom this area is dedicated, and which can, for the most part, contribute to a better social integration rather than contributing to the *assimilation* (MAHER, 2007) of this public to Brazilian society. Finally, I believe that such a proposal is a *starting point* – although it is not the only way to face the complex process of PWLg teaching – to a more well-informed teaching practice.

4.1 De-totalizing the forcibly displaced immigrants

I have discussed the possible effects of meaning produced by the naturalization of some designations to refer to immigrants who are part of the target audience of PWLg. The process of identification of these immigrants occurs principally through their (alleged) losses and absences, corroborating the construction of an image of *helplessness* (AYDOS, 2010) that ends up being selected as a representative “model” (MAHER, 2007) for the whole group of forcibly displaced immigrants in Brazil. By focusing too much on this model, the group is “essentialized” as if there were no

¹⁶ My proposal for subsidies, presented in LOPEZ (2016), is comprised of four main points, but, because of space, I will only be able to develop two of them here.

“contradictions or misconceptions” (MAHER, 2007, p. 260-261) among it. In addition, such stereotyping may help to establish a place of marginality for individuals who are part of this group and could lead one to believe that, on the surface, a forcibly displaced person who is not experiencing a certain “*lack*” is either illegitimate or an opportunist.¹⁷ This does not mean differences should be overlooked; they rather need to be carefully analyzed.

In the classroom, the impacts of such a posture of differentiation may involve leading professors to plan their classes not taking into account their students’ real needs, but instead what they *think* their students need. In a language classroom, this misconception could influence the teacher to believe they should teach Portuguese in the students’ first language, for example, to make the process easier. Regarding this matter, most of the participating students in this study revealed they would not like their teachers to know and use a language they speak in PWLg classes so as not to prejudice their Portuguese learning (keeping in mind the short amount of time these particular students had to dedicate to the study of PWLg: 3 hours a week). Furthermore, the idea that immigrants are always “in need” could reinforce the aspects that differentiate them from the nationals (or even other immigrants!). This could also make them feel like strangers, creating “cultural ghettos”, contributing to their stereotyping or, on the contrary, increase the immigrants’ desire for cultural assimilation (MAHER, 2007).

However, as radical as it may appear, the discourse that the forcibly displaced person *needs* Portuguese to get a job – as if learning Portuguese was in and of itself a means of salvation for this immigrant – is a form of oppression and a misconception at the same time. There are social, historical, and economic factors, as well as power relations, which influence the success or failure of any person, immigrants included – not to mention cleavages of gender, ethnicity, color, economic status, sexual orientation, religion, among others. In my opinion, the immigrants must be aware of the power relationships that underlie the pressure they feel to learn Brazil’s major language. From there, they might be able to choose whether or not to learn the PWLg, since some of them may not be interested in learning the language at all.

¹⁷ In my view, this is one of the reasons that can lead, in my view, to the mistaken differentiation between economic immigrants and refugees (AYDOS, 2010; SANTOS, 2014).

This is why it is my belief that the *de-totalization*, *non-essentialization*, and *non-victimization* of forcibly displaced immigrants in Brazil should be the first step toward being incorporated into any proposal aimed at teaching/learning PWLg, according to the Intercultural perspective defended by Maher (2007), which I endorse. This aspect involves considering the group but without losing sight of the individualities, that is, recognizing both the *inter-* and *intra-*cultural heterogeneity of this minoritized public (*idem*, p. 268).

4.2 (Re)Thinking purpose and practice in PWLg

As a minoritized group, forcibly displaced immigrants who are interested in learning Portuguese may want a language teaching process which, upon working with discursive aspects of the language of the host country, addresses critical issues that are necessary for their political emancipation. Moreover, culture should neither be seen by a Conservative bias – which believes in the universality of rights and skills, contributing to the desire of assimilation of minoritized groups – nor by a Liberal bias – whose focus is exclusively on the differences, creating both the essentialization and cultural apartheid of cultural groups (MAHER, 2007). In my view, PWLg must, on the contrary, be based on the vision of *Critical Multiculturalism* or *Interculturality* (*idem*).

However, as stated above, in the perspective of Maher's (2007) proposal of educational programs for minoritized groups, language knowledge *per se* is incapable of forming citizens that know, exercise, and fight for their rights, in other words, that are active agents of their reterritorialization processes (BIZON, 2013). Thus, PWLg teaching should seek to politically strengthen forcibly displaced immigrants. As an example of initiatives for the political strengthening of immigrants, I can mention the meeting between law students of the Federal University of Minas Gerais with Haitian immigrants in partnership with the Zanmi Center. For specific audiences, an interesting initiative of politicization was the Zanmi Center's talk directed toward migrant and refugee women to address their rights.

As I have argued above, in addition to the political strengthening of the minoritized groups, for the immigrants to be able to have access to their citizenship, in agreement with Maher (2007), I believe that another pillar must be mobilized in PWLg teaching: the surrounding education. This means that the society surrounding this immigrant should also be aware of how to get along and *respect* (not tolerate!) differences (CARMO,

2016; MAHER, 2007). Surrounding education could be promoted by projects conducted with the immigrants and their surrounding community (MIRANDA, 2016). As an example of such an initiative, I can mention the Project *Pelo Mundo* (“For/Throughout the World”), carried out with candidates for the Undergraduate Students-Agreement Program (PEC-G), during the PLA course for this public, developed at a federal university in Minas Gerais in 2015 (*idem*). Another example of an initiative to promote the surrounding education is the *Abraco Cultural* (“Cultural Embrace”), an NGO “which aims to promote the exchange of experiences, income generation, and the valuation of refugees.”¹⁸ The initiative offers opportunities for forcibly displaced immigrants to conduct language courses for the local community. By doing so, the project provides gains for both the immigrants, since it generates income and appreciation of their work, and the society that surrounds it, since it becomes an opportunity to allow them to know immigrants and make cultural exchanges.

The last aspect of Maher’s (2007) proposal to be considered – advances in legislation – cannot be done by PWLg teaching, due to an apparent lack of political force. However, I believe that by embarking on the other two aforementioned aspects – political strengthening and surrounding education – PWLg teaching could become a space in which to challenge the State to promote a more comprehensive and fairer legislation, which could minimize the social marginalization of this group of immigrants.

In light of what has been discussed, this study’s proposal is that PWLg teaching should be viewed as a *political project*, promoting an education which allows its students to fully engage in their agencies to engage in non-precarious territorializations (BIZON, 2013; HAESBAERT, 2016), thereby serving as an instrument of social justice for forcibly displaced immigrants.

5 Final Words

The purpose of this paper was to discuss the opinion of PWLg coordinators, teachers, and students/immigrants in order to suggest some principles for PWLg teaching in Brazil. The path covered by this article demonstrates that, on the one hand, the discourse of PWLg professionals is often crossed by a unilateral view that associates the forcibly displaced immigrant with a “pack” of losses and absences, contributing to the

¹⁸ See also: <<http://abracocultural.com.br/sobre-o-abraco>>. Retrieved on: May 29, 2017.

reinforcement of the stereotype of the *helpless* forcibly displaced immigrant (AYDOS, 2010). On the other hand, the discourse of PWLg students positions the learning of the major language of the country as an arbitrary *necessity* or even as a *self-defense tool*.

Through the present research, I have verified that the Portuguese language can play an essential role in the process of the (re)territorialization (BIZON, 2013) of immigrants, that is, their material and symbolic appropriation of new territories. However, as pointed out above, in order to ensure that this process does not happen in a precarious manner (HAESBAERT, 2016), such immigrants must be able to exercise their own agencies in this favor. To be able to recognize their rights, as well as the power relations that may prevent them from fully exercising their citizenship, it is necessary to educate the surrounding society to learn to respect these immigrants, as well as to politically strengthen this minoritized group (MAHER, 2007).

As Cabete (2010, p.108) defends, I also believe that “any teaching-learning process intends to meet the needs and motivations of the learner.” This is why I sought to bring to the center of this research the individuals who lived and acted in the studied context’s perspectives. I hope this work will open new windows for the development and strengthening of the PWLg, an area of increasing and remarkable importance in the country.

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Data de submissão: 30/05/2017. Data de aprovação: 29/09/2017.