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LANGUAGE TEACHING AND HISTORY OF EDUCATION: THE BRAZILIAN CASE

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to evince the correspondence and interdependence between the teaching of languages and the history of education in general and the history of Brazilian education in particular. Language teaching is a common object of study for linguists and pedagogues but not for historians, and this lack of a historical perspective makes those researchers come to conclusions that, without discussing with what has been studied and spoken of the matter, always run the risk of walking in circles, or, in a different degree, rediscovering gunpowder.

Keywords: Brazilian education. History of education. Language teaching.

ENSINO DE LÍNGUAS E HISTÓRIA DA EDUCAÇÃO: O CASO BRASILEIRO

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é evidenciar a correspondência e interdependência entre o ensino de línguas e a história da educação em geral e a história da educação brasileira em particular. O ensino de línguas é um objeto de estudo comum para os linguistas e pedagogos, mas não de historiadores, e essa falta de perspectiva histórica faz com que aqueles pesquisadores cheguem a conclusões que, sem dialogar com o que tem sido estudado ou falado sobre a matéria, sempre correm o risco de andar em círculos ou, num grau diferenciado, de redescobrir a pólvora.

Palavras-chave: Educação brasileira; História da educação; Ensino de línguas.

ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUA Y LA HISTORIA DE LA EDUCACIÓN: EL CASO BRASILEÑO

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es evidenciar la correspondencia e interdependencia entre la enseñanza de lenguas y la historia de la educación en general y la historia de la educación brasileña en particular. La enseñanza de lenguas es un objeto de estudio común para los lingüistas y pedagogos, pero no de historiadores, y esa falta de perspectiva histórica hace con que aquellos investigadores lleguen a conclusiones que, sin dialogar con lo que se ha estudiado o tratado sobre la materia, siempre corren el riesgo de andar en círculos o, en un grado diferenciado, de redescubrir la pólvora.

Palabras clave: Educación brasileña; Historia de la educación; Enseñanza de lenguas.

L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE LANGUES ET L'HISTOIRE DE L'ÉDUCATION: LE CAS DU BRÉSIL

RÉSUMÉ

L'objectif de cet article est mettre en évidence la correspondance et interdépendance entre l'enseignement de langues et l'histoire de l'éducation en général et l'histoire de l'éducation brésilienne en particulier. L'enseignement de langues est un objet d'étude commun pour linguistes et pédagogues, mais n'est pas un objet des historiens, et cette manque de perspective historique permet que ces chercheurs parviennent à des conclusions que, sans dialoguer avec ce qui a été étudié ou parlé sur la matière, courent le risque de se répéter.

Mots-clés: Éducation brésilienne ; Histoire de l'éducation ; Enseignement de langues.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to evince the correspondence and interdependence between the teaching of languages and the history of education in general and the history of Brazilian education in particular. Language teaching is a common object of study for linguists and pedagogues but not of historians, and this lack of a historical perspective make those researchers come to conclusions that, without discussing with what has been studied and spoken of the matter, always run the risk of walking in circles, or, in a different degree, rediscovering gunpowder.

There are many ways of studying the history of language teaching, and many are the results of researches around the world which are concentrated on different aspects of this practice, if we can call it this way. In the field of history of education, some historians concentrate on the intellectual, political and private life of teachers and professors who are held as important historical characters, and not only in the teaching of languages.

Some others prefer to concentrate on the institutions in which the teaching of languages took place, although those institutions were not only dedicated to the teaching of languages, but to different kinds of curricula: universities and religious, military, commercial, elementary and secondary instruction. The intention here is to emphasize the historical importance of institutions in its symbolic and physical dimension.

There is also a growing group of works dedicated to the study of schoolbooks and other didactic material. The classification and disposition of all this rich material through history offers a great contribution to the study of language teaching, once it can suggest some of its historical practices.

In the field of Applied Linguistics, the studies on the history of the teaching of foreign languages have been concentrated on the different methods of language teaching through history, although the emphasis and focus on the technical specificities of each method sometimes tend to be anachronic, once it doesn't take into account the historical peculiarities of the phenomena (Howatt, 1988).

One way of studying the history of language teaching taking into account all the elements mentioned above without running the risk of forgetting any one of them, but not of emphasizing some of them, is tracing a parallel between the history of language teaching and the history of pedagogical ideas and, in the case of Brasil, the history of Brazilian education.

The different educational or linguistic politics adopted and executed by the many federal and state governments throughout history can give us a general idea of the material and cultural conditions of each epoch, as well as the intellectual context of the time, in terms of political and pedagogical ideas. Besides, through its many sources and written records, it is possible to notice the impact caused by the foundation of great buildings dedicated to public education.

Depending on the source chosen in the research, which, in turn, depends on the nature of the object – be it printed presses, journals, magazines, schoolbooks, official legislation, ministerial reports, novels, films etc. –, one or more aspects of language teaching will be more or less emphasized.

The interdependence between the history of language teaching and Brazilian education, to be made possible, has to be tested through a chronological table. In the case of the history of language teaching, we have to establish first the chronological marks.

The problem – or even the myth – of the origins is of difficult solution, unless we restrict the possibilities by imposing some criteria which must be observed in delimiting and dating the phenomena. One way of solving the problema is considering the teaching of languages only when it is inserted in an educational policy. In other words, only when it is part of a greater political and educational project, or part of a curriculum.

HISTORY OF BRAZILIAN EDUCATION

Taking this into account, we cannot begin the history of language teaching, in the Brazilian case, before the Pombaline reforms and all its implications in Brazil, both as a colony and an independent empire, as it was supposed to be during the most part of the eighteenth

century. That is why we begin our history with the Pombaline reform of language teaching in 1759.

The pombaline influence on the teaching of languages was already studied and dealt with in a book published by our research group in 2010 (Oliveira, 2010a). It remained in Brazil until, at least, 1827, when a new political context and economic and cultural change ended up creating a new period not only in the teaching of languages, but in education in general. Since this first period, we can notice a profound relationship between the political context of the period and the teaching of languages, what can be shown in many sources, such as schoolbooks and the educational legislation, among others.

The other period, taking place during the Brazilian empire, encompasses the reigns of Pedro II and Pedro II and follows, in the beginning, the same structure of the Pombaline reformation (Oliveira, 2010b), but from the second half of the century on, when the circulation, reception and appropriation of foreign models, due to the consequences of the opening of the Brazilian ports, initially to the British government, but then to the rest of the world. It is during this period that the great objective of the teaching of the foreign languages in the country changes from an instrumental to a literary orientation. Its change to a practical perspective will occur only at the end of the century, when the justification of the permanence of the language teaching in the official curriculum lies on its communicational aspects.

During the period known by First Republic, although the foreign languages were sometimes excluded from the list of disciplines of the curriculum – and many were the political reforms during this short period –, the same structure was maintained – that is, the grammatical approach, its instrumental and literary aims –, but in the thirties, with the coming of the period known as “getulista”, due to the president who became dictator, Getúlio Vargas, the practical orientation of the teaching of foreign languages came to an extreme, once the direct method was imposed as the official method in 1931 (Oliveira, 2015).

For the first time, there was an official method, imposed by a federal law, especially dedicated to language teaching, what made many researchers of the

field of the Applied Linguistics think that 1931 was a kind of major divide in the history of language teaching, when, from the perspective of educational history, it was just a continuum which had been initiated at the end of the nineteenth century.

The situation changed one more time with the fall of the dictatorial regime known as “Estado Novo”, when the government, with the support of many intellectuals from the educational field – some of them “pioneers” who had been members of the previous government –, began a process of democratization of elementary education which was translated in practical terms in the reduction or simplification of the national curriculum (Hilsdorf, 2003).

This process was marked by the law of 1961, which changed the structure of basic education and of the universities, something which were created in 1931 by Getúlio Vargas. With this legislative move, the foreign languages – which used to include Latin, Italian, Spanish and German, now reduced to French and English – became to be considered superfluous in the formation of Brazilian citizens. Even though, the public and private schools around the country continued to offer at least one foreign language.

It is important to notice that, among the foreign languages, French occupied a hegemony throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (until, at least, the half of it) only comparable to that occupied by Latin during the Renaissance and the seventeenth century. The fact is that since the Enlightenment, French was, around the world, “the” only language that people wanted to learn. Even the British and North American authors came to be read in French, that is, through French translators. After the II World War, the supremacy of North American economy and the place it came to occupy in modern culture helped to put the English language in a hegemonic position, something which became undeniable in the seventies, when the American culture – literature, music, movies – and most of the English courses invaded the country, so as to speak (Moura, 1986).

After the military Coup d’État of 1964, things in education changed only in 1971, with a strong tendency towards the technical formation of Brazilian citizens.

There was also the elimination and transformation – we could even say “amalgamation” of basic disciplines, such as history and geography, which became “social sciences”. There was also the creation of new disciplines, especially dedicated to teach the students how to respect the dictatorship under which the country was subjected, like “Moral e Cívica”. Just like the previous reform, the foreign languages were not mandatory disciplines in the curriculum.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

It was only in 1996, with a new and democratic law concerning education, that the situation of foreign languages in Brazilian curriculum changed. It is important to say that this change did not come from a governmental initiative, but from the many associations of teachers of foreign languages who decided to vindicate their right to be respected just like the other teachers. For the first time, after the timid attempts of the imperial period, multilingualism or plurilingualism were contemplated and, at least theoretically, every foreign language had equal rights to enter the national curriculum, depending of the special necessities of each region.

In 2005, even the hegemony of the English language in the school curriculum was threatened, for there was a law which made the teaching of Spanish mandatory in high school. The Universities began to create courses dedicated to teacher’s training of Spanish and the media obviously associated the governmental initiative with the political preferences of President Lula, who tried to transform “Mercosul” into an important political agent in world economy. I even wrote a paper dealing with the subject. It was presented in the ABRAPUI event of 2007 (Oliveira, 2007).

In 2016, with the impeachment of President Dilma, from the same political party of President Lula, in a process which is object of debate both in international media judicial courts. For a person who has been accompanying the history of language teaching, given the political tendencies and relationship of the government of President Temer, it is not a surprise that the law of 2005 has been extinguished and that English is the only mandatory foreign language in the national curriculum.

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