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## THE PLURAL APPROACHES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL COMPETENCES IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to present definitions and a literature review on plural approaches in the development of plurilingual didactics for teaching and learning foreign languages. From this perspective, we propose to show the importance of thinking about the insertion of these tools as an alternative for the realization of a more diverse and dynamic teaching, as well as for the promotion of meaningful socio-cultural experiences for learners. In this sense, we discuss how the practice and insertion of these approaches contributes not only to linguistic development, but above all to broadening the cultural vision of students who come into contact with different languages in the light of a plurilingual didactic proposal.

**Keywords:** Plural approaches; plurilingualism; cultural dialog; foreign language

## INTRODUCTION

Discussions in the field of linguistics applied to language teaching have reaffirmed the importance of working with different didactic tools in order to build innovative teaching methodologies that dialog with cultural diversity and all the technological advances that surround us today. In this article we propose to discuss the characteristics of plural approaches and their respective contributions to foreign language (FL) teaching and learning. Firstly, we will give a brief overview of the definitions and objectives of each of the approaches, while also discussing the benefits of including them in foreign language classes. Finally, we will present the contributions of these methodological tools to expanding knowledge and promoting cultural dialog in the classroom, so that we can develop posi-

ve attitudes that are open to the socio-cultural differences of contemporary times.

## THE PLURAL APPROACHES: OBJECTIVES AND DEFINITIONS

Plural approaches are linked to teaching approaches that use activities involving more than one language and/or culture. From this perspective, “we call plural approaches a pedagogical practice in which the learner works simultaneously with several languages.” (Candelier, 2003, p. 19). In this sense, language is taught openly and together, based on the relationships we make with our own mother tongue and with other foreign languages too. The process of teaching a language, from this perspective, is not seen in isolation, but above all is built on relationships that interact with the student’s previous knowledge and with contact with the other person’s language and its differences. As Candelier (2007) describes:

The term “plural approaches to languages and cultures” refers to didactic approaches that use teaching/learning activities involving several (i.e. more than one) varieties of languages or cultures. This is to be contrasted with what we might call “singular” approaches, in which the didactic approach takes into account only one particular language or culture, considered in isolation. (Candelier, 2007, p. 07).<sup>1</sup>

We can say, then, that through plural approaches we are moving towards developing strategies linked to the plurilingual proposal. In this way, learners come into contact not just with one focus language, but with a cultural and linguistic plurality that we haven’t seen before in language teaching, open to possible variations that involve dialog with different languages and cultures.

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1. The term “pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures” refers to didactic approaches which use teaching/learning activities involving several (i.e. more than one) varieties of languages or cultures. This is to be contrasted with approaches which could be called “singular” in which the didactic approach takes account of only one language or a particular culture, considered in isolation. Singular approaches of this kind were particularly valued when structural and later “communicative” methods were developed and all translation and all resort to the first language was banished from the teaching process (Candelier, 2007, p. 07). (Our translation).

Thus, a teaching practice in which the aim is only to address a single language and/or a particular culture is, according to the authors' considerations, defined as a singular approach. In this conception, language is taken and learned in isolation, focused on itself and its traditional grammatical structures.

The basic teaching document that deals with the use of plural approaches in language teaching is the *Cadre de référence pour les approches plurielles des langues et des cultures* (CARAP). Translated into English as *Framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures* (FREPA), it shows us the importance of focusing on a teaching methodology that takes into account not just one language in isolation, but above all the use of different languages and cultures when teaching and learning a new language, as we discussed in the previous topic. In this sense, the project presents teachers and educational managers with skills and resources that can be considered as instruments for developing more teaching materials and activities that take into account plural approaches in the development of learners' attitudes and competences.

According to the document, the so-called "singular approaches", which contrast with the objectives of plural approaches, had their peak at the time of the so-called structural methods, which later evolved into the communicative method. In the face of these previously widespread methodologies, access to the mother tongue was completely banned in the process of teaching a new language. On the other hand, plural approaches, which are considered dynamic and hybrid, rely on the use of different languages and cultures, with the aim of generating reflections on linguistic diversity and cultural phenomena that dialog with otherness.

CARAP (2012) is presented as a complementary document whose function is to dis-

cuss and present perspectives and teaching strategies that seek to disseminate and compartmentalize the learning of a language, now seen in a plural way and no longer taught in an isolated and watertight manner. Aiming to highlight bridges of dialog in the relationship with the use of other languages and cultures, the CARAP project (as the document sometimes refers to it) focuses on plural pedagogical practices and is an important instrument for the development of language teachers, teacher trainers and students in general. In this sense, this document is a relevant and necessary tool for articulating new methodologies and teaching perspectives for educational policy proposals related to plural approaches and foreign language teaching in schools.

Among the studies that discuss plural approaches, we will look at Candelier (2013) who, in one of his articles, discusses the historical and epistemological reflections of such terminology. Initially, for example, what was called the practice of "awakening to languages" was also referred to as a "plural approach", which later moved from the singular to the plural form, due to the insertion of other pedagogical practices, which also dealt with working with more than one language, becoming "plural approaches" (Câmara, 2020). These other pedagogical practices are the so-called *intercomprehension of related languages*, *integrated language teaching* and a final one which then became part of and is called the *intercultural approach* (Candelier *et al* 2013). Since then, plurilingual approaches have been presented in four different forms, all of which aim to work with the didactics of plurilingualism/plurilingual competence, promoting plurilingual situations and activities. Below we present the four plural approaches described in the framework of reference as: awakening to languages, intercomprehension of related languages, integrated language teaching and intercultural approach.

## THE AWAKENING TO LANGUAGES

Awakening to languages, mentioned at the outset, seeks to make cultural connections and bridges not only to instigate knowledge of languages other than our own, but above all to carry out transdisciplinary work in the classroom, which dialogues with the prior knowledge of the student in question. This approach works simultaneously with languages that the school doesn't plan to cover and is seen as a kind of preparatory phase for learning new languages. Regarding this approach, Käfer (2013) states that:

In addition to developing skills for listening, analyzing and learning languages, language awakening also aims to promote the development of favorable perceptions and attitudes towards not only languages and their diversity, but also towards those who speak the language and their cultures (Kafer, 2013, p. 33).

Through this approach, therefore, learners' critical sense, conduct and behavior are also worked on and developed. Learning a language involves not only structural aspects that are disconnected and out of context, but is "awakened" through contact with other potential speakers of other languages who, at the same time, enrich them with their authentic and genuine cultural experience. The researcher also points out that "awakening to languages" develops students' ability to understand language, observing the contrasts and similarities with their mother tongue.

To illustrate and provide an example applied to elementary school students, we mention here a study carried out by Câmara and Lima (2018) in a school located in the city of Belo Horizonte, which aimed to work with the awakening to languages in Portuguese classes as a tool for consolidating work with narrative text types. The research report showed, however, that by including and approaching the reading and comprehension of two French songs in 6th grade classes, the

experience was positive and the students were curious and interested, given that most of them had never had contact with other languages/cultures.

The work of the researchers mentioned above, in this sense, aimed to sensitize students to expand their knowledge of a new language and promote varied linguistic experiences in the Portuguese language classroom. Thus, the main purpose of awakening to languages was achieved through what we call "*linguistic awareness*", which according to Hawkins (1999), is a process of linguistic awareness that emphasizes and validates the importance of knowing and valuing the language/culture of others, giving due emphasis and relevance to this role in the development of the student's language skills.

In terms of the objectives and benefits of this approach, we see that cross-cutting themes, as well as encouraging intercultural contact, are the basis for more dynamic and inclusive learning, given the challenges of education in the contemporary world. In short, this is an approach that not only arouses students' interest in different languages and themes in the classroom, but also provides favorable moments for us to carry out increasingly engaged work based on difference and respect for others.

## THE INTERCOMPREHENSION OF RELATED LANGUAGES

In the 1990s, the intercomprehension (IC) of related languages emerged with the aim of expanding and multiplying the ways of approaching a foreign language and another culture in the language classroom. In this sense, CI teaching was born as an approach that brings intercultural and linguistic issues to the fore through interaction with the language of the "other" and its sociocultural characteristics (Doyé, 2005). From this perspective, intercomprehension suggests the dynamism of the

act of dealing with a language other than our own and appears as a bridge that mobilizes knowledge in the process of learning a foreign language (Santos, 2018).

In intercomprehension, “the subject is able to communicate by developing comprehension strategies between languages that have their roots in the same language family” (Lima, 2015, p. 29). In this way, as well as extending linguistic and cultural understanding of the other language and of words from a language other than our own, CI brings political and intercultural discussions into the FL classroom (Santos, 2018). Thus,

to the extent that communicative situations are created from the perspective of intercomprehension, we begin to dialog with a perspective that encompasses social, cultural and plural factors, interrelated with the aim of experiencing contact with both our own language and the language of the “other” (Santos, 2018, p.18).

Intercomprehension, then, is related to the act of being resourceful, knowing how to react and build comprehensible communication when interacting with this linguistic diversity and with the interactive nuances of contact that these cultural differences can and do promote. That said, we can say that working with CI (and with plural approaches in general) not only contributes to linguistic consolidation and expansion, but also expands contact with the new and broadens perspectives and worldviews based on otherness

Studies involving this approach have been growing in the academic world and bringing relevant results for language teaching in general in recent years. An example of this, as we’ll see below, was the research carried out by Lima (2015), at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN). Her dissertation aimed to investigate how the plurilingual proposal, through CI and literary texts, could be developed with mother tongue students in elementary school. In her work, the researcher

offered 8th grade students texts in Spanish, French and Italian in their literature classes. In this way, they came into contact with literature that was different from what they were used to and were able to get to know different languages “more closely”. According to the study, the results showed that the multilingual proposal encouraged the students to read, as well as helping them to enter secondary school with better language skills and competences. According to the researcher,

Working with texts in other languages in a mother tongue class goes beyond knowledge of another language, as it is not a foreign language class, but rather a way of promoting reflection on the language, based on comparisons with others. Whether it’s syntactic structure or knowing a new word, or even realizing that they can understand texts from different languages that they didn’t know (Lima, 2015, p. 31).

As a result, Portuguese lessons became even more attractive and interesting for the students, who were curious about the new perspective approached in the classroom. The aforementioned researcher states that her study contributed and helped to stimulate “the student’s ability to walk through different languages and realize, through various texts, such as those of a literary nature, the richness of a vocabulary that comes from Latin and passes through different languages, until it reaches Portuguese” (Lima, 2015, p. 79).

The relationship with other languages, promoted through the activities that the researcher carried out in her research, succeeded in a positive way and had a positive impact on the lives of these students. It’s important to point out that oral competence is the one most focused on when working with CI, as this practice doesn’t emphasize learning another language by studying its structures directly, but only promotes sensitivity to dealing with languages other than our own, which are little remembered in the classroom. Thus, everything

happens naturally and spontaneously through an exolingual situation (Capucho, 2010). It is also important to note, as Alas-Martins (2014) states, that:

The intercomprehension of Romance languages is not intended to replace or compete with conventional language teaching and learning. In the Brazilian context, it can raise awareness of the discovery of different languages, typologically related to Portuguese, contribute to the diversification of language teaching and strengthen learners' potential as citizens. (Alas-Martins, 2014, p. 119).

Thus, an example of this strengthening of potential is broadening horizons beyond the learner's linguistic field, as we have discussed so far. Based on these considerations, we believe that this didactic tool is unavoidable if we are to contribute to training students who are increasingly open to dealing with the "different" and aware of the inferences we can make when learning a foreign language. In addition, it helps us to train learners who are increasingly aware of the otherness and cultural proximity that this skill develops.

## **INTEGRATED LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Integrated language teaching can be used both to promote language teaching and as a link to the students' curricular content, developing their education (Brohy, 2008). Methodologically, this approach aims to integrate the student's previous knowledge and their own mother tongue as a facilitating bridge when learning a new language. It then adds the knowledge acquired previously to the construction of the acquisition of another language.

Regarding the practice of integrated language teaching, we can say that it can interrelate methodological aspects of mother tongue teaching with foreign language teaching in a practical way, or vice versa, by analyzing and relating how the experience of practicing the methodology of one language can contribute

to the construction of knowledge of another language, for example. It is pertinent to highlight here the example of bivalence, discussed by Soares (2003), because it is similar to what happens in integrated didactics, since:

what is suggested is combining or incorporating not exactly the contents of the two disciplines, as is usually the case in inter- or transdisciplinary proposals - but the two didactics, that of the mother tongue and that of the foreign language, the teaching practices of one and the other (Soares, 2003, p. 10).

As a way of illustrating the author's point, we can point out that a practice that would be a good example of the methodology of integrated language teaching would be for the same type of activity used in foreign language teaching to have a similar form and applicability in exercises aimed at teaching Portuguese as a mother tongue (PLM). One example is activities with music, which are often used by teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). In this way, integrated language teaching helps us to add teaching practices to our methodologies that don't just focus on a single teaching and learning model, but that can take a diversified approach to teaching that further explores students' potential in an interactive, intercultural and comprehensive way.

## **INTERCULTURAL APPROACH**

The intercultural approach is part of the plural approaches, in line with the realization that teaching should not be directed singularly towards a single culture and disconnected from the others, but above all seen in an interrelated way with all cultural plurality. According to Canclini (2006), globalization has accentuated this dialogue between different cultures. Learners around the world, therefore, are increasingly connected due to the increase in social media interactions and the generation of virtual applications. As Gonçalves (2010) also reiterates,

globalization puts an end to the idea that each society is a delimited system, the subject has the possibility of coming into contact with other realities. The result of this is the strong influence that certain cultures and societies have on others. The dynamism of cultures means that they have to adapt their operating models to the new (Gonçalves, 2010, p.15).

In this sense, in the approach in question here, this cultural dynamism is the essential guideline so that in language classes, learners can dialog with various different realities at the time of their experience with a language. As the definition of the strong characteristic of globalization well describes, teaching here is no longer delimited, but largely constructed through contact with the new. The intercultural factor, therefore, is used not only in the didactic-linguistic sphere, as mentioned above, but above all in relations about subjectivities and social and economic relations in the face of contact with diverse cultures.

Kramersch (1995) emphasizes the importance of the cultural and intercultural factor within the classroom, stating that not focusing on just one culture, but bringing the dialogue of different cultural perspectives into the foreign language classroom is the key to a more dynamic and enriching language teaching. In this sense, considering the importance of other cultures, recognizing and dealing with different lifestyles and all this diversity is a preponderant factor in the development and enrichment of our own cultural identity, as well as that of our students.

According to Blanchet (2015), these cross-cutting implications, which concern the issue of linguistic and cultural plurality in the FL classroom, should be an increasingly present and unneglected theme, especially when dealing with the intercultural factor in the field of linguistics and in studies involving this sociodidactic perspective. In other words, based on this interculturality, it is possible to demys-

tify those preconceptions that we often hold about what we don't really know, as well as to prevent students from committing attitudes of strangeness and prejudgment about another language and/or culture, for example

Pinheiro-Mariz (2007) emphasizes the importance of interculturality in generating a perspective of self-knowledge when learning a foreign language. In this way of thinking, this self-reflection promotes opportunities for a change in the learner's view of themselves and their mother tongue, as they discover other ways of learning and getting to know the world (Pinheiro-Mariz, 2007).

Therefore, this approach takes into account the fact that this cultural exchange can bring relevant dialogues into the classroom and contribute to the pedagogical practice of LE teaching, either through the student's contact with their own language and the language of the "other" themselves, or through this cultural otherness that is an important point and presents itself as one of the pillars to be addressed at the time of its application.

Still reflecting on the intercultural approach to foreign language teaching, Brun reiterates that:

Learning a foreign language implies the transformation of the person through contact between their languages and cultures. This means considering not only the communicative aspect of linguistic activity, but also its function as a representation of the world (Brun, 2004, p. 92).

It is clear, however, that language teaching should not be seen in isolation from the subjectivity of the students; it should be associated with the visions and life experiences that they bring to the classroom, as well as with the new discoveries of world representation that they may acquire along the way, from contact with the unknown in the process of their education. Da Silva and Lima (2016), who also bring up conceptions of the intercultural approach, write something important:

Intercultural competence, in light of what has been said about the formation of identity and concepts of difference, requires (re) knowledge of and respect for the intercultural diversities present in sociolinguistic behaviors, conceptions and attitudes, as well as in the sociocultural values agreed upon by the societies of the cultures in contact (Da Silva; Lima, 2016, p. 177).

This plural approach, then, develops not only the perspective of broadening and seeing the world around in different ways, but, above all, reinforces attitudes of respect towards others, through a mirroring and re-signification that goes beyond borders and demystifies prejudices and stereotypes. In this conception, “the intercultural approach seems to be more necessary and committed to the search for alternatives and practices for coexistence between cultures” (Da Silva; Lima, 2016, p. 180).

Serrani (2005), in his book *Discourse and culture in the language classroom*, deals with the issue of training teachers with an *interculturalist* profile. For the author, this is the kind of *cultural mediator* teacher who dialogues with socio-cultural identities in the classroom. She also proposes that transdisciplinarity be evoked in language classes, in view of the importance of having students who are increasingly open so that we can promote values and a sense of respect for cultures other than our own.

From this perspective of dialog, there are many factors that make an intercultural approach indispensable when learning a language, especially when we consider the fact that the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC), in reference to the general competencies of basic education, reveals the importance of valuing the diversity of knowledge and cultural experiences in the classroom, while considering it essential that dialog with social factors and bridges of relationships between learners’ experiences and prior knowledge should not be neglected.

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PLURAL APPROACHES TO LEARNERS’ LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

As we discussed in the previous topic, plural approaches to teaching a language have the characteristic of placing the learner at the center of their own language learning, dialoguing with the various contexts around them and promoting an education that is more focused on interaction, rather than closed into distinct and inseparable compartments.

For Andrade and Martins (2009), one of the contributions of the approaches is that they develop learners’ interest in other languages/cultures, improving their communication with otherness, as well as making students show a significant improvement in their self-confidence and sensitivity to recognizing linguistic and cultural diversity in educational and social relationships, thus contributing to their broadening knowledge. Significantly:

It’s about understanding intercultural and plurilingual communication in the context of building a fairer, more supportive and sustainable world, where we seek an understanding of ourselves, the Other, their languages and cultures, and the world, ecosystems and their interrelationships, from an integrated and also plural perspective of building knowledge (Andrade, Lourenço, Sá, 2010, p. 71).

In this way, students develop positive attitudes towards languages and speakers of other languages, as well as responding positively to their participation in intercultural communication situations, revealing more integrated and plural abilities and a better way of thinking about their own language and about situations involving the language of others. Therefore, this interculturality promotes the subjects’ self-knowledge, since “by getting to know the other (the foreigner), the subject also gets to know themselves better” (Morais Filho, 2020, p. 61)

For example, Andrade, Lourenço and Sá (2010), who have been developing studies in this area for some time, emphasize that when we focus on an approach that makes room for the development of linguistic diversity, we develop learners' level of communicative awareness, as well as new opportunities for interaction. In other words, based on the discussions of the researchers above, learners who are faced with a plural approach through contact with more than one language perform better in situations where they need to dialog with other cultures and with the linguistic variants of a society marked by difference.

When we talk about these variations, we understand that even the students' contact with other speakers of our Portuguese language in its various accents, slang and semantic variants, in the face of a Brazil so rich in diversity, contributes to the students' critical, social and cultural development.

However, it is important to mention that by teaching in a way that takes this plural world dimension into account, we can not only broaden cultural knowledge about other countries and other cultures, but also expand each learner's potential for contact with other languages. From this point of view, it is worth dialoguing with Morin (2009) when he reflects on our current education and that of the next generations, understanding that it is only through these interrelationships and an understanding of the plural dimension of the

world we live in that we will be able to build a world with a better education, more sensitive to differences and more integrated in general. Thus, contact with other languages based on plural approaches allows us to understand the possibilities of intercomprehension and/or mutual understanding, generating respect for all forms of communication.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The studies presented in this article show us that plural approaches to foreign language teaching need to be placed as one of the priorities in teaching and learning in contemporary education, so that we develop positive and open attitudes towards differences and cultural otherness. Knowing this, stimulating knowledge perspectives that interact with the "new" in the classroom suggests that we not only develop new methodological alternatives that contribute to the socio-intellectual growth of our students, but that we consolidate, above all, daily exercises that prepare them to deal with the social environment, its obstacles and its heterogeneity.

In this way, as well as enriching learners' linguistic and cultural repertoire, it's important to look at the various possibilities for relating FL teaching to this linguistic diversity in an interactive, self-reflective and positive way, so that we can build bridges that cross intercontinental borders and add significant knowledge collaboratively in the classroom.

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