LANGUAGE PRACTICES IN PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE CLASSES IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

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▪ ABSTRACT: Different research studies in Applied Linguistics, in Brazil, have sought to examine the work with language practices in Portuguese language classes in Elementary Education. These studies have employed ethnographic research, action research, and analyses of documents and discourses. Within this approach, our article aims to propose a theoretical-methodological discussion about the concept of 'language practices' present in national parameterizing documents. Through this, we aim to systematize a metatheoretical construct concerning this concept, focusing specifically on the discipline of Portuguese Language in Elementary Education. Theoretically, we ground our work in the principles of Dialogical Studies of Language, and, methodologically, we align with the assumptions of Metatheorization and Document Analysis. The results demonstrate that the analyzed documents reflect convergent/approximate meanings regarding 'language practices' as linguistic usages in real situations and as teaching and learning units or axes. Based on these results, this study proposes a metatheoretical overview of this concept, not only revisiting core issues already demonstrated in document analysis but also addressing other aspects that reaffirm the social, ideological, and political aspects of working with 'language practices' in schools.

▪ KEYWORDS: Portuguese Language Classes; Language practices; Document analysis; Metatheoretical construct.

Introduction

Different researches in Applied Linguistics (AL) have focused on the debate surrounding language practices in Portuguese Language (PL) classes in the context of Basic Education in Brazil. However, we note that the debate is not specific in the very

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meaning of the concept of 'language practices'. In addition to research, the most recent Brazilian educational policy documents (PCN, Brasil, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a; 1998b; BNCC, Brasil, 2018) deal with the terms in several passages of the guidelines. Based on this, we are concerned with the following questions: what are language practices? How can we define 'language practices'? How do educational policy documents define 'language practices'?

In order to open a debate on the issue, our objective, in this article, is to propose a theoretical-methodological discussion on the concept of 'language practices' as it appears in national parameterizing documents. From this discussion, we seek to systematize a metatheoretical construct about this concept, with a specific focus on the discipline of Portuguese Language in Elementary Education.[1],

To this end, as a guiding framework, this study will be anchored in dialogical studies of language (Bakhtin, 2003 [1979]; 2008 [1963]; Medviédev, 2012 [1928]; Volochínov, 2013 [1928]; 2017 [1929-1930]). Thus, our proposal follows the panorama of linguistic-philosophical studies of the Circle of Russian thinkers, which elucidates the context through which and from which our proposal is outlined.

Methodologically, our article is essentially theoretical-methodological, drawing from literature review (Fonseca, 2002; Pádua, 2004; Gil, 2008) and metatheorization (Talja; Keso; Pietlãinem, 1999; Edwards, 2013; Vanderberghe, 2013; Bufrem; Freitas, 2015; Hedlung *et al*., 2015; Garcia, 2018) in dialogue with document analysis (Cellard, 2008; Bowen; 2009; Flick, 2009). From this, we will not only revisit theoretical frameworks, through the bibliography, but also perform a meta-analysis of two parameterizing documents for Elementary Education: the National Curricular Parameters (PCN, in Portuguese) (Brasil, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b) and the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC, in Portuguese) (Brasil, 2018), in order to develop alternative theorizations concerning our conceptual object – 'language practices'.

To fulfill our objective, we have organized the text as follows: in addition to the introduction and final considerations, we first engage in a brief reflection on the conception of language and teaching units. Subsequently, we analyze the concept of 'language practices' in two educational policy documents: PCN and BNCC. Finally, we present a metatheoretical construct regarding the analyzed concept. We believe that this discussion is relevant, as it provides a theoretical-methodological framework for the understanding of the concept of 'language practices' in the context of teaching and learning practices of the Portuguese language in schools. This has the potential not only to contribute to research in Applied Linguistics in the field of language education – by answering the question, 'what are language practices?' –, but also, to provide a path for (re)interpretation of Brazilian educational policy documents.

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[1] We chose to delimit the scope of the analysis to Elementary Education for the purposes of feasibility of the research and its subsequent publication in the scientific article genre.

The beginning of the journey: concepts of language and basic units

Delineating a path for developing concepts is not an easy task. It requires continuous exploration within the realm of theoretical-methodological frameworks, along with a systematic approach to mobilize a metatheoretical construct of analysis. This is only possible through metatheorization.

Metatheorization involves theory about the theory, meaning the investigation of a theoretical construct (concepts, categories, etc.) through the very theory (within the specific theoretical field). It constitutes a process of self-awareness within a given scientific field. In other words, it entails analyzing an already proposed theory, a reflection on something previously presented, aiming to reconstruct, resignify, and/or expand theoretical knowledge within a specific field (Talja; Keso; Pietlãinem, 1999; Edwards, 2013; Vanderberghe, 2013; Bufrem; Freitas, 2015; Hedlung *et al*., 2015; Garcia, 2018).

In this context of literature review and metatheorization, this section aims to propose a conceptual debate on 'language practices' within the theoretical-methodological framework of dialogical studies. Thus, our proposal is enriched by this linguistic-philosophical approach, consequently carrying ideological and evaluative reverberations from this field. However, we understand that the same discussion, under a different epistemological framework, would yield different contributions and a distinct conceptual construct.

This section is organized into two other subsections, in which we present a debate with theoretical-methodological contributions that can, given our proposal, guide the construction of a conceptual architecture on the term 'language practice'.

It all starts from the conception of language

Discussing the concept of language conception can be approached from various perspectives. In this section, we will base our discussion on the works of Volóchinov (2013 [1928] and Volóchinov (2017 [1929-1930]). For the author, the linguistic-philosophical trends from the early 20th century (but still relevant today) encompass two major approaches: (i) one focused on the immanent objectivity of the linguistic system and (ii) another anchored in the subjectivity of linguistic creation.

In the objectivist trend, language is seen as a structure whose constituent elements are turned on themselves under the rule of the system. The focus is on the form and immanence of the system. The look at language is fixed on the systemic objectivity of the forms of language that are organized into a structure that is unshakable to any centrifugal force. The perspective views language as homogeneous, unchangeable, and abstract. In summary, this approach embodies the characteristics of an abstract objectivist view of language, according to Volochínov (2013 [1928]) and Volóchinov (2017 [1929-1930]).

In the subjective trend, in turn, language is the product of an individual's mind. It results from the individual creative activity of the subject, who, while thinking, represents their thoughts in language. Language is understood to represent the egocentric desires of a subject oriented towards themselves, towards their individuality. The perspective sees language as representational, a product of subjective creation, and essentially psychologizing. In this regard, in summary, this approach embodies the features of an idealistic/psychologist subjective view, according to Volochínov (2013 [1928]) and Volochínov (2017 [1929-1930]).

However, unlike the two trends postulated above, according to Volochínov (2013 [1928]) and Volochínov (2017 [1929-1930]), a trend towards the social uses of language is emerging. From the sociological perspective proposed by the author, the central point of discussion is the social constitution of language in interactions. In other words, far from an objectivist or subjectivist view, language constitutes and functions as a means and material of/in social interactions. Every individual, seen as a social, historical, and cultural subject, engages in different dialogic situations through language. Language use, in this perspective, occurs concretely in the form of utterances.

In the sociological approach, the utterance is understood as a unit of discursive communication (Bakhtin, 2003 [1979]), unlike clauses, which are understood as conventional units of language (language-system). The utterance belongs to the realm of discourse and is studied based on its linguistic-enunciative-discursive 'regularities'. Clauses, on the other hand, exist within the system and are studied based on their inherent linguistic-systemic 'repeatability'. Furthermore, every utterance is constituted and functions as a mediating unit of interactions, which in turn occur within different spheres of human activity. Clauses, in contrast, are constituted and function crystallized in the formal construct of the system, completely disconnected from social reverberations.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that every clause becomes an utterance in interactions, that is, every clause, when nuanced by the social resonances of the interactive situation, transforms into an utterance. Thus, as Bakhtin (2008 [1963]) explains, logical relations (through clauses) and dialogical relations (through utterances) interpenetrate and interconstitute each other but cannot be reduced to themselves. That is what Volóchinov (2017 [1929-1930]) proposes as the axes of 'signification' and 'meaning'. Both intersect in the constitution and functioning of the utterance.

Therefore, in summary, we can understand that there are conceptions of language that sometimes value objectivity, sometimes subjectivity and, in another scope, sociolinguistic perspective. In this article, we will address the sociological perspective of language to construct intelligibilities on the concept of 'language practice'. However, before that, we turn to another issue related to working with language practices in schools: Geraldi's (2011 [1984]) proposal on the 'basic units' of teaching in PL classes, which is foundational for our discussion.

The proposal for basic teaching units and their reverberations

Geraldi (2011 [1984]) proposes 'basic units' of teaching as a construct to integrate reading, text production, and linguistic analysis in PL classes in the context of Basic Education. For the author, these basic units need to be integrated to contribute to the expansion of knowledge and understanding of language usage in social life. Moreover, according to the author, the basic units need to be mobilized under a conception of language as a form of interaction, aligning with the sociological view proposed by Volochínov (2013 [1928]) and Volochínov (2017 [1929- 1930]).

According to Geraldi (2011 [1984]), reading practice can involve texts of different lengths and depths. Additionally, texts with different purposes and with different stylistic-compositional constructions should be in dialogue in the classroom. He points out that texts, in reading classes, need to "[...] perform their function of disrupting the understanding of reality" (Geraldi, 2011 [1984], p. 64).

Regarding text production, Geraldi (2011 [1984]) explains that we need to deconstruct the idea of writing only to the teacher, in an artificial, objective, and unidirectional view of writing. Texts should have a potential interlocutor and be produced under real interaction conditions. Producing real and concrete texts, aimed at other subjects, delineates, among other features, the characteristics of text production as a basic unit of PL teaching, according to the author.

Integrated into reading and text production practices, Geraldi (2011 [1984]) proposes the practice of linguistic analysis. According to the author, this is not a new terminology for working with grammar, but a new didactic-pedagogical approach. In a footnote, he clarifies: "linguistic analysis includes both traditional grammar issues and broader text-related matters [...]" (Geraldi, 2011 [1984], p. 74). Therefore, the practice of linguistic analysis extends beyond strictly grammatical analysis.

With this discussion about basic units proposed by Geraldi in 1984, we can already notice that the author uses the term 'practice' to describe activities involving reading, text production and linguistic analysis. There is not an explanation in that work about the use of the term 'practice', in a more substantial way, but we believe that it is related to the interactionist conception of language that guides his discussion. Furthermore, we can begin to glimpse ways for our understanding of 'language practices', when associating 'basic units' with 'language practices' within the scope of the mentioned work.

'Language practices' in educational policy documents: where and how does this concept appear?

Supported by a sociological perspective of language comprehension, we seek, in this section, to build intelligibility on the concept 'language practices', searching for it in the educational policy documents of Elementary Education, selected for this study, namely: PCN (Brasil, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b) and BNCC (Brasil, 2018).

Both advocate teaching that encourages reflections on language use so that students can use it appropriately.

In our analysis, we intend to answer the following question: how does the conceptual object 'language practices' appears/reverberates/echoes in both documents? Through a meta-analysis exercise, within the framework of documentary analysis, we will seek more solid foundations to construct theories about its understanding(s). Let's start with the PCN and then move on to the BNCC.

National Curriculum Parameters (PCN)

When looking, more specifically, at the PCN, we resort to the following documents that represent them: *National Curricular Parameters: Introduction to National Curricular Parameters* (1st to 4th grade) (Brasil, 1997a) *National Curricular Parameters: Portuguese Language* (1st to 4th grade) (Brasil, 1997b) ; *National Curricular Parameters: third and fourth cycles of primary education: introduction to national curricular parameters* (Brasil, 1998a), *National Curricular Parameters: third and fourth cycles of primary education: Portuguese Language* (Brasil, 1998b).

For the purpose of searching for the conceptual object 'language practices' in the documents, we used the "find" feature provided by Word, which allowed us to browse the documents that, as indicated in the footnote, are digitized on the Ministry of Education's Portal.

The search in the four documents revealed that the conceptual object 'language practices' is employed only once and in one of them: the PCN (Brasil, 1998a) which introduce guidelines for the third and fourth cycles of Elementary Education. In this document, when the PL knowledge area is presented, it is stated that this area should enable students to expand their mastery of language and language use. To this end, it advises that the school organizes teaching so that students can develop their discursive and linguistic knowledge by reading, writing, expressing themselves appropriately and reflecting on language phenomena. In this context, it is understood that "[...] **language practices** form a totality, and the individual expands their capacity to use language and reflect upon it in meaningful interlocution situations" (Brasil, 1998a, p. 59, emphasis added).

From this statement, we infer that the object 'language practices' encompasses all forms of language use – "the totality" –, which seems to be anchored in a sociological foundation, since it focuses on the uses and reflections of/about language, in "meaningful interlocution situations". By "meaningful interlocution situations" we understand the real uses of language materialized in utterances socially produced for interaction (Volochínov, 2013 [1928]; Volóchinov, 2017 [1929-1930]).

Although the term "utterance" has not been explicitly presented/explored/addressed in the document, it is understood that language practices "should be organized taking the text (oral or written) as the basic unit of work, considering the diversity of texts

that circulate socially" (Brasil, 1998a, p. 59). The text, in this excerpt, is treated as an utterance, that is, as a unit of discursive communication (Bakhtin, 2003 [1979]), used to mediate interactions that are organized in different spheres of human activity.

In the same direction, when presenting guidelines for teaching PL in the Early and Final Years of Elementary Education (Brasil, 1997b, 1998b), the document defends "the text as the basic unit of teaching", as opposed to taking the letter, syllable, word, and phrase decontextualized, as basic units of literacy; or just the grammatical dimension as a pre-established categorization for language study. Thus, a homogeneous, unchangeable, and abstract view of language, supported by the form and immanence of the system, disconnected from social reverberations, is discarded. It orients towards understanding language "as a discursive activity" (Brasil, 1998b, p. 27) and, consequently, teaching language for the development of "discursive competence, which is a central issue" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 29).

In these guidelines, it is possible to establish a dialogue, even if implicit, with the basic teaching units presented by Geraldi (2011 [1984]), when the author argues that the text should be considered, in PL classes, as a basic unit of work/teaching, from which 'language practices' (oral communication, reading, and writing) must be explored/developed.

After the meta-analysis of the documents, in the following table, we seek to synthesize the reverberations established between the conceptual object 'language practices' and the theoretical-methodological framework presented earlier.

Table 1 – The conceptual object "language practices" in the PCN

Conceptual object 'language practices'	Relationship with the conception of language	Relationship with basic teaching units
'Language practices' are understood as any form of language use.	Sociological perspective, as it takes interactions as "significant situations of dialogue" (Brasil, 1998a, p.59).	It recognizes "the text (oral or written) as the basic unit of work, considering the diversity of texts that circulate socially" (Brasil, 1998a p. 59).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

As the conceptual object 'language practices' appeared only once in the four explored documents (Brasil, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b), we felt the need to look for another conceptual object that, in our view, could have some correspondence with the object of study. Thus, in the meta-analysis exercise, we noticed an intrinsic relationship, in the documents, between 'language practices' and 'language use' – with the latter concept being used as part of 'language practices'.

Due to this proximity, we began to trace, in the aforementioned documents, the usage of the conceptual object 'language use'. This expression was not used in the document that introduces the guidelines for the early years of Elementary Education (Brasil, 1997a); it was used ten times in the document that guides the teaching of PL in

the Early Years (Brasil, 1997b); mentioned only once in the document that introduces the third and fourth cycles of Elementary Education (Brasil, 1998a), and cited seven times in the document that guides PL teaching in the Final Years of Elementary Education (Brasil, 1998b).

Our interpretation was that, by using the expression 'language use', the documents intended to guarantee the centrality of language teaching in its practical applications, so that these applications became the starting and ending points for teaching. In this sense, the PCN established, as a general objective of PL teaching in the early years, "to expand the language use in private instances and use it effectively in public instances, being able to express themselves and produce coherent and cohesive texts – both oral and written – that are appropriate to their recipients, their proposed objectives, and the topics being addressed" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 33, emphasis added). For the final years,

> [...] the student is expected to expand the active command of discourse in different communicative situations, especially in public instances of language use, in order to enable their effective integration in the world of writing, expanding their possibilities of social participation in the exercise of citizenship (Brasil, 1998b, p. 32, emphasis added).

To effectively achieve these objectives, the documents emphasize the centrality of epilinguistic activities, understanding that these can provide the student with greater "reflection on the language in situations of production and interpretation, as a way to become aware of and improve control over their linguistic production" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 31), thus expanding their ability to monitor and critically analyze the possibilities of language use. To this end, it is considered that "[...] the natural place, in the classroom, for this type of practice seems to be shared reflection on real texts" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 31).

As we can see, "real texts" are recognized as the "natural place" in which the uses of language take place and from which one can reflect on the possible ways of using/ employing the language. Therefore, the understanding is that "language is realized in use, in social practices" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 35, emphasis added); or

> It is **in social practices**, in linguistically significant situations, that the expansion of language use capacity and the active construction of new abilities take place, enabling the increasingly greater mastery of different speech and writing patterns (Brasil, 1998b, p. 34, emphasis added).

Considering 'social practices' in PL teaching means, according to the documents, teaching through significant situations for the student, yet without disregarding the logical and immanent relationships of the linguistic system, since, as mentioned before, the logical and dialogic relationships interpenetrate in the constitution of a text-utterance. The axes of 'signification' and 'meaning', therefore, are included in the proposal, since it is understood that "PL teaching must take place in a space where

language use practices are understood in their historical dimension, and where the need for analysis and theoretical systematization of linguistic knowledge arises from these same practices" (Brasil, 1998b, p. 34).

We understand, therefore, that the conceptual object 'language use' is anchored, is grounded, just like the object 'language practices', in a sociological approach, since it is always mobilized towards varied and diverse interlocution situations. Furthermore, it also involves a practice/ "discursive activity" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 35), understanding that these are located in "real" oral and written texts, that is, in a living language (Bakhtin, 2008 [1963]) that materializes in interactions. These interactions, according to the document, unfold "into speaking and writing, reading and listening activities" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 35). Therefore, if the purpose of PL teaching is to expand the student's possibilities of using language, the capabilities that must be developed in the student are speaking, listening, reading, and writing, as Geraldi (2011 [1984]) already advocated.

Supported by such considerations, the PCN for Portuguese Language – Early Years (Brasil, 1997b) present the basic axes for "the use of oral and written language and the analysis and reflection on language" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 35, emphasis added):

Table 2 – Basic axes for teaching LP

Oral language: uses and forms	Written language: uses and forms
Analysis and reflection on language	

Source: PCN (Brasil, 1997b, p. 35).

As the document itself asserts, the contents "are organized according to the USE - REFLECTION - USE axis. They appear, therefore, as "Reading practice", "Text production practice" and "Analysis and reflection on language" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 35, emphasis added). Likewise, in the PCN for PL – Final Years, it is understood that "Portuguese Language contents are articulated around two basic axes: the use of oral and written language, and reflection on language" (Brasil, 1998b, p. 34).

The 'uses' refer to practices that promote dialogue, considering their contextual elements, such as the historicity of language; the production context (interlocutors, purpose, place, and moment of interlocution); and the implications of context in the organization of discourses and the process of meaning-making (Brasil, 1998b, p. 35). The 'reflection' is oriented on the uses of language, in order to enable the "analysis of the functioning of language in situations of interlocution, in listening, reading, and production, emphasizing some linguistic aspects that can expand the individual's discursive competence" (Brasil, 1998b, p. 36). To this end, it lists the contents that it considers as tools that can be used to promote reflection: linguistic variation, structural organization of utterances, lexicon and semantic networks, processes of meaning construction, and modes of discourse organization.

In order to synthesize the meta-analysis presented so far regarding the conceptual object 'language use', in its relationship with the conception of language and with the basic teaching units presented by Geraldi (2011 [1984]), we have organized the following table:

Table 3 – The conceptual object 'language use' in the PCN

Conceptual object 'language use'	Relationship with the conception of language	Relationship with basic teaching units
- It is a constituent part of 'language practices'; - It is the starting and ending point for teaching; - Expands active mastery of speech in different communicative situations; - Defined as 'social practices'.	It is anchored in a sociological approach to language, since it is always mobilized towards varied and plural situations of interlocution.	- It is based on "real" texts, considered the *locus* of language USE - REFLECTION - USE; - Promotes epilinguistic activities; - It is guided by "Reading practice", "Text production practice" and "Analysis and reflection on language" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 35).

Source: prepared by the authors.

Therefore, we understand that the conceptual object 'language use' is configured, in the PCN (Brasil, 1997b; 1998a, 1998b), as part of 'language practices', since it is grounded in texts that circulate socially, which, in this case, can also be related to enunciative practices, since, according to Bakhtin (2003 [1979]), utterances (real texts) are living and concrete units of discursive communication. Hence, it is 'language use' that articulate the basic teaching units (Geraldi, 2011 [1984]), directing actions with oral communication, reading, and writing through reflections on these uses. As stated, "if the objective is for students to use the knowledge acquired through the practice of reflecting on language to improve their ability to comprehend and express themselves, both in written and oral communication situations, educational work should be organized from this perspective" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 60).

National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC)

When looking at the BNCC for Elementary Education (Early and Final Years), we use its official version, published in 2018 and made available digitally on the MEC Platform[2] (Brasil, 2018), which contains guidelines for Early Childhood Education and High School. Similar to the PCN, we searched for the conceptual object 'language practices' through the "find" feature provided by Word, focusing specifically on the

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2   Available at: http://basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br/images/BNCC_EI_EF_110518_versaofinal_site.pdf. Accessed on: 28 March 2022.

area of Languages – Portuguese Language. Upon conducting this search, the search tool indicated that the conceptual object 'language practices' appears 126 (a hundred and twenty-six) times in this part of the document, including its mention in titles and in the tables that indicate the knowledge objects and skills that should be explored/worked on with students.

It is important to highlight that, as used, "language practices", in the area of Language - LP, correspond to the teaching units indicated by Geraldi (2011 [1984]) and included in the PCN (Brasil, 1997b, 1998b) as "**Reading practice**", "**Text production practice**" and "**Analysis and reflection on language**" (Brasil, 1997b, p. 35, emphasis added). In the BNCC, it is stated that "[...] the integration axes considered in the BNCC for the Portuguese Language are those already established in the Area's curricular documents, corresponding to **language practices: oral communication, reading/ listening, production (written and multisemiotic) and linguistic/semiotic analysis**" (Brasil, 2018, p. 71, emphasis added). In other words, the BNCC allows us to infer that the term 'language practices' revisits the established teaching axes already included in previous documents. Therefore, the term 'language practices' corresponds to teaching 'axes'.

However, how is this conceptual object presented/explored in the document, given its prominent place? We sought out an answer for that question.

Its first mention in the text occurs in the fourth part of the document, where "The Elementary Education stage" is presented/discussed. The conceptual object is mentioned for the first time in the following excerpt: "Throughout Elementary Education – Early Years, knowledge progression occurs through the consolidation of previous learning and the expansion of language practices and children's aesthetic and intercultural experience, considering both their interests and expectations regarding what they still need to learn" (Brasil, 2018, p. 59).

As we can see, although the object 'language practices' was used for the first time in the document, it is taken as known/shared by all interlocutors with whom the document interacts most directly – Basic Education teachers – when reporting on the "[...] expansion of language practices". Having noted this occurrence, we felt the need to look for guidelines from Early Childhood Education, the level of education preceding this one, to analyze whether/how this object was used there. If in Elementary Education – Early Years the orientation is to broaden language practices, it is inferred that in Early Childhood Education there has already been guidance/explanation about initial activities with language practices at this level of education.

In the organization of the teaching proposal for Early Childhood Education, the learning objectives are distributed across "fields of experience" in which the child's learning and development rights are covered. According to the BNCC, "fields of experience constitute a curricular arrangement that embraces the concrete situations and experiences of children's daily lives and their knowledge, intertwining them with knowledge that is part of cultural heritage" (Brasil, 2018, p. 40). These fields are called: The self, the other and the us; Body, gestures, and movements; Traces, sounds, colors,

and shapes; Listening, speaking, thinking, and imagining; Spaces, times, quantities, relations, and transformations. In this organization of Early Childhood Education, as you can see, the object 'language practices' is not used directly, but it is understood that, "through different languages, such as music, dance, theater, pretend play, they communicate and express themselves in the intertwining between body, emotion and language" (Brasil, 2018, p. 41). In other words, the conceptual object 'language practices' is not used in Early Childhood Education, which uses other concepts – such as "field", for example – to guide/organize learning and development objectives.

Therefore, we understand that there is a conceptual gap in the BNCC, as it is "a normative document that defines the organic and progressive set of essential learning that all students must develop throughout the stages and modalities of Basic Education" (Brasil, 2018, p. 7), it should strive for clarity, especially regarding founding/guiding concepts in the field of knowledge.

We continued tracking the conceptual object, aiming to understand its underlying comprehension. The next mention of 'language practices' occurs in the presentation of the Languages area, at which point the document justifies the purpose of incorporating, in this area, the curricular components of Portuguese Language, Art, Physical Education, adding, in the Final Years of Teaching Fundamental, English Language. According to BNCC, the purpose of this grouping is "to enable students to participate in diverse language practices, which allow them to expand their expressive capabilities in artistic, bodily and linguistic manifestations, as well as their knowledge about these languages, in continuity with the experiences lived in Early Childhood Education" (Brasil, 2018, p. 63, emphasis added).

In this excerpt, 'language practices' are understood as a condition for the development of the student's expressive capabilities, whether in the linguistic, artistic, or physical domains. In other words: the document expresses between the lines that 'language practices' go beyond the linguistic and can also be semiotic. And, once again, it refers to Early Childhood Education, highlighting the importance of continuing the experiences lived at that level of education.

However, as the focus is on Elementary Education – Early years, the 'language practice' emphasized for the first two years of this level of education is that the "literacy process must be the focus of pedagogical action" (Brasil, 2018, p. 63), since it is understood that reading and writing practices "expand their possibilities of building knowledge in the different components, through their insertion in literate culture, and of participating with greater autonomy and protagonism in social life " (Brasil, 2018, p. 63). Similarly, for the Final Years of Elementary Education, it is understood that "the language practices achieved in Elementary Education – Early Years, including learning English" (Brasil, 2018, p. 63) must be expanded, in addition to deepening artistic, physical, and linguistic language practices.

To implement these practices, the document proceeds to list the 'Skills' that it considers essential for the students' development. Among the six presented, the conceptual object appears in only one of them:

2. Know and explore different **language practices** (artistic, physical, and linguistic) in different fields of human activity to continue learning, expand their possibilities of participation in social life and contribute to the construction of a more fair, democratic, and inclusive society (Brasil, 2018, p. 65, emphasis added).

Once again, 'language practices' are circumscribed to the artistic, physical, and linguistic domains, which we consider a positive aspect in the BNCC, as it demonstrates the understanding that these practices are broad and go beyond the linguistic area. When producing an utterance, we do not always mobilize only linguistic resources. We often intertwine languages so that the verbal merges with the non-verbal, constituting the enunciative whole.

This understanding is explored in the document, more directly, when focusing on the PL component. When introducing the reflections of this component, it is informed that it dialogues with other curricular guidelines produced/ disseminated in recent decades. If, as Bakhtin (2008 [1963]) explains, the dialogical orientation is organic to any discourse (living language), we cannot lose sight of the fact that the BNCC is a living discourse, oriented towards pedagogical practice which, in this case, demonstrates a concern with updating its discourse in relation to the others it claims to dialogue with. This update is intended to incorporate "the transformations in language practices that have occurred in this century, largely due to the development of digital information and communication technologies (DICT)" (Brasil, 2018, p. 67).

To also consider DICT within language practices, the document uses the term 'contemporary language practices' which, according to the BNCC, "not only involve new genres and increasingly multisemiotic and multimodal texts, but also new ways of producing, configuring, making available, replicating, and interacting" (Brasil, 2018, p. 68). Considering that multimodal genres are increasingly present in our daily lives due, especially, to technological advances, it is important that the BNCC emphasizes 'contemporary language practices' arising from DICT, since these are historical configurations of language use present in interactions. Therefore, it is the school's responsibility to prepare students for this reality, as, according to the BNCC, without mastering these contemporary language practices, "participation in public life, work, and personal spheres can occur unequally" (Brasil, 2018, p. 67).

To encompass these 'contemporary practices' of language use, the document highlights the need to mobilize knowledge about different semiosis, in relation to reading and production practices,[3] understanding that such knowledge can expand the possibilities of student participation in different spheres/fields of human activity. However, it is not enough to simply guarantee mastery of different language practices; In this direction, the BNCC presents yet another demand for the school: "to critically

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[3] In this regard, the document does not mention other language practices (oral communication and linguistic/ semiotic analysis).

contemplate these new language practices and productions, not only from the perspective of meeting the many social demands that converge towards a qualified and ethical use of DICT [...], but also to encourage debate and other social demands that surround these practices and uses". (Brasil, 2018, p. 69).

When trying to guarantee this critical look at 'contemporary language practices', we understand that the document is situated within a sociological approach (Volochínov, 2013 [1928]; Volóchinov, 2017 [1929-1930]), as it demonstrates an understanding that language is the material means that mediates the most varied interlocutory situations, which requires the interlocutor to have a critical attitude to analyze the utterances with which they interact.

After situating and advocating for the work with 'contemporary language practices', the document starts to focus on "language practices: oral communication, reading/listening, production (written and multisemiotic) and linguistic/semiotic analysis" (Brasil, 2018, p. 71). By directly relating 'language practices' with the "Axes" of reading, text production, oral communication and linguistic/semiotic analysis, the document adopts, in a more direct way, the correspondence between 'language practices' and 'axes' of teaching at LP. This substitution (but still relating) of one concept for another is not random; on the contrary, it allows us to glimpse a dialogue with the "enunciative-discursive perspective of language" (Brasil, 2018, p. 67) that the document claims to assume, from which it is understood, using the PCN, that language is "a process of dialogue that takes place in the social practices existing in a society, at different moments in its history" (Brasil, 1998, p. 20). Therefore, it becomes more coherent with this perspective to use the term 'language practices' instead of 'axes'.

Nevertheless, where do 'language practices' (text reading, oral communication, text production, and linguistic/semiotic analysis) come into fruition? According to the BNCC, they manifest in the fields of action, defined as meaningful contexts from which language practices derive: the "fields of action point to the importance of contextualizing school knowledge, to the idea that these practices derive from situations of social life and, at the same time, they need to be situated in meaningful contexts for students" (Brasil, 2018, p. 84).

The fields of activity covered by the BNCC are presented in the following table:

Table 4 – Fields of activity at BNCC

Early years	Final years
Field of everyday life	
Artistic-literary field	Artistic-literary field
Field of study and research practices	Field of study and research practices
Field of public life	Journalistic-media field
	Field of action in public life

Source: BNCC (Brasil, 2018, p. 84).

The selection of these fields is justified, according to the document, because they cover important formative dimensions of language use, both within and outside the school, guaranteeing students, as individuals in the process of education, greater conditions so that they can act in different spaces. Furthermore, these fields include, in the words of the document, the production of knowledge and research, the exercise of citizenship, and an aesthetic education "linked to the experience of reading and writing literary texts and the understanding and production of multisemiotic artistic texts" (Brasil, 2018, p. 84).

By indicating this intrinsic relationship between 'language practices' and 'fields of action', we perceive an implicit dialogue with the concept of fields of human activity or social spheres, developed by Bakhtin (2003 [1979]), in the text *Speech Genres*. Therefore, it is coherent for the BNCC to consider language practices located in their proper field, as it is in them that the text-utterances are produced in their relationship with the genre.

Finally, after the meta-analysis of the conceptual object 'language practices' at BNCC, we were able to infer the following relationship with the conception of language and the basic teaching units:

Table 5 – The conceptual object 'language practices'
in the BNCC – Elementary Education

Conceptual object 'language practices'	Relationship with the conception of language	Relationship with basic teaching units
- It is used to revisit previous practices developed in Early Childhood Education; - Relates to artistic, physical and linguistic manifestations; - Includes 'contemporary language practices', resulting from the development of DICT, which manifest as multisemiotic and multimedia genres and texts; - Demands a critical approach to 'contemporary language practices'; - It is located within the fields of activity.	It is anchored in a sociological approach to language, as it aims to ensure work with socially situated language practices.	- It is directly related to the 'axes': oral communication, reading/listening, production (written and multisemiotic) and linguistic/semiotic analysis" (Brasil, 2018, p. 71).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

After these theoretical-methodological explanations, we understand that the BNCC seeks to ensure that the 'language practices' suggested/proposed/defended are explored/worked on extensively. To this end, it presents tables that list the Knowledge Objects

and Skills that would allow them to be explored. In this regard, we ask: are the elements listed capable of exploring 'language practices' within a sociological perspective? This is another (and very important) discussion that we will not engage in in this text. We propose, in the following section, to present, based on the reflections made so far, a metatheoretical construct for the concept 'language practices' within the scope of Portuguese Language teaching.

A *metatheoretical construct* for the concept of 'language practice' in the context of teaching and learning Portuguese in Basic Education

In this section, we present our proposal for a metatheoretical construct about the concept of 'language practice', after analyzing it in the light of dialogic language studies. To this end, we are based on the results of the literature review of references on dialogical studies and teaching and learning PL in Brazil (as per previous sections), the precepts of metatheorization as a methodological approach and the documentary analysis of two Brazilian educational policy documents, PCN (Brasil, 1998) and BNCC (Brasil, 2018) (cf. previous sections). From this perspective, in the following paragraphs, we systematize some theoretical constructs about the concept 'language practices', seeking to reconstruct, re-signify and/or expand it, within a dialogical basis.

Based on the analysis carried out on the two documents, we can understand:

(i) *'Language practices' as sociological practices*: based on Volóchinov (2013 [1928]) and Volóchinov (2017 [1929-1930]), far from an objectivist-immanent-abstract conception and a subjectivist-idealist-psychologizing one, we endorse the sociologizing approach to language as a basic anchor of the conception of 'language practices'. This implies that we are situated in social interaction and language as a means and mediating material of the most varied and plural interlocutory situations. Therefore, we cannot mobilize work with language practices at school from a structural, formal, or essentially psychological perspective. Theoretical-methodological and didactic-pedagogical work with language practices can only be carried out through the lens of a sociological approach to language.

(ii) *'Language practices' as discursive practices*: according to Bakhtin (2008 [1963]), every living language, in its concreteness in/of/with interactions, only takes place in discourse. From a sociological perspective of a dialogic approach, discourse is the living and concrete architecture of language. Engendered within the spatiotemporal dimensions of the chronotope and the social ways of grasping and comprehending the social reality of ideology and valuation (Medviédev, 2012 [1928]), every discourse add nuances to language in its living organicity within the axiological time-space of the social. Theoretical-methodological and didactic-pedagogical work with

language practices can only be accomplished under the framework of language as discourse.

(iii) *'Language practices' as enunciative practices*: for Bakhtin (1998 [1975]), all discourse takes place materially and concretely in the form of utterances. Utterances, according to Bakhtin (2003 [1979]), are living and concrete units of discursive communication. Unlike the conventional units of the language-system, clauses and utterances are constituted and function under the aegis of the language-discourse. Every utterance is constructed in interactions, through the intertwining of temporal, spatial, thematic, and evaluative horizons (Volochínov, 2013 [1926]) and through the interception between the alternation of subjects in communication, evaluative expressiveness and the enunciative-discursive conclusiveness of the semantic content, the project of saying and the typified forms of enunciation – the speech genres (Bakhtin, 2003 [1979]). The theoretical, methodological, and didactic-pedagogical work with language practices can only be realized through the concrete and living materiality of utterances and their relatively stabilized typical forms in social interactions.

(iv) *'Language practices' as language use practices*: as we have seen, under a dialogic-based sociological panorama, all social language use takes place in the concrete discursive form of utterances. Utterances are discursive units made up of linguistic elements that respond to the reverberations of the social interaction situation. With this, the resources of the linguistic materiality of the utterance (lexical, grammatical, textual resources) respond axiologically to the demands of interaction. It is not studied separately, abstracted from the social, as objectivist and subjectivist views of language propose, but always integrated into interaction. In this way, the unit of linguistic analysis becomes the utterance, studied as a unit that orchestrates elements of the language (in all its layers) based on the demands of interlocutions. A theoretical-methodological and didactic-pedagogical approach to language practices is only guided under the scope of language as interaction, that is, the study of language elements based on the demands of social interactions.

(v) *'Language practices' as basic teaching units:* based on Geraldi (2011 [1984]), we can state that language practices correspond to the basic teaching units: reading practices, textual production, and linguistic analysis. In this way, reading, speaking, listening, producing texts, reflecting on/with the language, and using other semiotic and paralinguistic forms to interact begin to integrate, in an organic way (vivid, concrete, and dialogic), language practices at school. Every class needs to integrate and guide the work based on language practices, basic units that operationalize, mobilize, enhance, and signify teaching and learning in the classroom. Theoretical-methodological and didactic-pedagogical work with language practices can only be anchored in language practices as basic teaching units: reading practices, text production,

oral communication practices, and linguistic/semiotic analysis practices, all integrated and interrelated, dialogically.

(vi) *'Language practices' as operational and reflective practices:* based on Britto (1997) and the PCN (Brasil, 1998), we understand that language practices, as basic teaching units, move two axes – that of use and that of reflection (Brasil, 1998) or, according to Britto (1997), operational and reflective axes. The operational/use axis involves reading, oral communication and text production practices. It is using the language in different interactional situations in social life. On the other hand, on the reflexive/reflection axis, there is the practice of linguistic/semiotic analysis that aims to reflect on/ with language in its different semiotic manifestations. The axes work in an integrated manner and cannot be restrictive or fragmented. A theoretical-methodological and didactic-pedagogical approach to language practices only mobilizes itself through the integrative work of the operational/use and reflective/reflection axes in relation to language usage.

(vii) *'Language practices' are teaching practices:* 'Teaching' is the term coined by Anastasiou (1998) to refer to a social, critical, reflective, and educational practice between teacher and student, encompassing both the action of teaching and learning, inside or outside the classroom. It is a dialogical and participatory process, anchored in Paulo Freire. From this perspective, we understand that work with reading, text production, oral communication, and linguistic/semiotic analysis needs to be linked to a critical, reflective, participatory, and dialogical approach, including the student as an active interlocutor of the practices mobilized. Using real, concrete texts in social circulation, in addition to enabling the student to engage in real situations of language use, in a way that not only expands their repertoire of text uses, but also expand their participation in the world, is an example of teaching practices. Theoretical-methodological and didactic-pedagogical work with language practices is only socially enhanced when surrounded by teaching practices, in which/when teaching and learning go hand in hand.

(viii) *'Language practices' as linguistic-ideological practices:* linguistic ideologies arise from political, cultural, and economic constraints. These are the ways of seeing and understanding language in social life. They are beliefs, feelings, evaluations of how language works in society (Kroskrity, 2004; Moita Lopes, 2013; Woolard, 1998). Based on this, we can state that the choice to work with language practices at school is a linguistic-ideological stance, it is a way of seeing, apprehending, recognizing, and valuing the world. Differently from a curriculum focused on the system's grammatical extracts, fixed to an objectivist language stance, a curriculum designed based on language practices enables a school focused on a social, critical, historical, and cultural view of language. A theoretical-methodological and didactic-pedagogical approach to language practices is always guided by a linguistic ideology.

(ix)   *'Language practices' as educational policy practices: a*s we saw in the previous sections, Brazilian educational policy documents frequently textualize the term 'language practices'. The parameterizing documents are always educational policies, that is, political actions that guide, regulate, regularize, and legitimize educational work. To this end, they bring guidelines, propositions, and certain choices. These choices are not random, but always bring with them a social evaluation (Medviédev, 2012 [1928]). The most recent document, the BNCC (Brasil, 2018), frequently uses the term (as we have seen in this article); thereby shaping the entire document within a perspective of language, in the case of 'language practices', into a social view. An educational policy always reflects and refracts a reality, whether with concordant or conflicting, contradictory discourses. It is always an arena of stratification forces (Bakhtin, 1998 [1975]). Thus, theoretical-methodological, and didactic-pedagogical work with language practices is characterized as an educational policy practice.

(x)   *'Language practices' as political practices:* every action with language is a political action. To live is to politicize. Education is political (Freire, 2003a; 2003b). Working with language practices would be no different. With the choice of working in the classroom with language practices, instead of essentially grammatical teaching, the classroom is transformed into a sociopolitical space. Reading, writing, listening, speaking, analyzing language, and reflecting on semiosis become political acts of confrontation/resistance. Actions of denaturalization begin to be mobilized, an unveiling in which centrifugal discourses duel with centripetal, authoritarian, distorted discourses. Working with language practices is transforming the world (Freire, 2003a; 2003b). From this perspective, working with language practices is always a political act.

It's important to note that not all the conceptual nuances surrounding the definition/conceptualization of the term 'language practice' in the context of Portuguese language teaching in the Basic Education settings are not listed here. Our proposed metatheoretical construct provides initial results. Based on methodological work involving bibliographical review, metatheorization and documentary analysis, many other findings were encountered, problematized and redesigned (which will be explored in future research). However, all these results always meet a common issue: the work with 'language practices' not only duels ideologically/axiologically with the 'teaching of grammar at school', but also articulates a view of the world, of the subject, the school, the language, and, ultimately, life.

Conclusion

The discussion that drives this article arises from concern about the concept of language practices which, under different theoretical-methodological and didactic-pedagogical perspectives, orbits around the educational policy guidelines of Portuguese Language teaching in Brazil. We began by revisiting how such a concept is nuanced by a specific understanding of language, which not only linguistically and philosophically references the conceptualization (within the scope of studies and theoretical fields) but also, consequently, sets an ideological-evaluative tone for this concept. Therefore, within the scope of this article, we understand that the concept of 'language practices' always carries with it a conception of language anchored in a given ideological-axiological stance.

In a second moment, we delved into the discussion about how 'language practices' come to be understood, in the study paths of PL teaching in Brazil, as equivalent to 'basic teaching units' or 'teaching axes'. The practices of reading, oral communication, text production and linguistic/semiotic analysis start to be mobilized as enhancing language in Basic Education, following (and re-signifying), to a large extent, Geraldi's guidelines in his seminal work from 1984.

In light of the documentary analysis, our discussion also problematizes how the educational policy documents in force in Brazil refer to the term/concept of 'language practices'. Sometimes understood as 'language uses', in the PCN, sometimes as 'contemporary languages practices', in the BNCC, the concept focuses, in both documents, on language uses within the teaching axes: reading, oral communication, text production, and linguistic/semiotic analysis, ratifying a sociological perspective on language for working with the Portuguese language at school.

Ultimately, we propose a metatheoretical construct that can theoretically-methodologically guide the work with 'language practices' in the context of language teaching in Basic Education. We believe that the teacher, in possession of this construct, has greater autonomy to manage actions with language in the classroom, opposing an ideologically/axiologically marked language view of working with language at school within a traditional view. This is, therefore, another contemporary study, in AL and Education, involved in the social, dialogic, and political panorama, which seeks to reiterate the stance of working with language, at school, that turns and responds to the demands of social life.

▪ *RESUMO: Diferentes investigações em Linguística Aplicada, no Brasil, têm buscado estudar o trabalho com as práticas de linguagem nas aulas de Língua Portuguesa no Ensino*

Fundamental, seja à luz de pesquisas de cunho etnográfico, de pesquisa-ação, por exemplo, seja sob panoramas da análise de documentos e discursos. Dentro dessa abordagem, nosso artigo tem como objetivo propor uma discussão teórico-metodológica sobre o conceito de 'práticas de linguagem' que orbita em documentos parametrizadores nacionais, a partir da qual procuramos sistematizar um construto metateórico sobre esse conceito, olhando, mais especificamente, para a disciplina de Língua Portuguesa no Ensino Fundamental. Para tanto, em termos teóricos, nos situamos nos preceitos dos Estudos Dialógicos da Linguagem e, em termos metodológicos, nos ancoramos nos pressupostos da Metateorização e da Análise Documental. Os resultados demonstram que, nos documentos analisados, reverberam sentidos convergentes/aproximativos em relação às 'práticas de linguagem' como usos linguísticos em situações reais e como unidades ou eixos de ensino e de aprendizagem. A partir dos resultados, o estudo em tela propõe um panorama metateórico em torno deste conceito, não apenas retomando questões nucleares já demonstradas na análise documental, como questões outras, que ratifiquem a visão social, ideológica e política do trabalho com 'práticas de linguagem' na escola.

▪ *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aula de Língua Portuguesa; Práticas de linguagem; Análise documental; Construto metateórico.*

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