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## FROM FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO LINGUA FRANCA: NOTES ON THE BNCC AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

DE LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA PARA LÍNGUA FRANCA: NOTAS SOBRE A BNCC E O ENSINO DE LÍNGUA INGLESA

DE LA LENGUA EXTRANJERA A LA LINGUA FRANCA: NOTAS SOBRE LA BNCC Y LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS

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**ABSTRACT:** This text presents partial results from qualitative and documentary research, which aims to analyze the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC). The scope and delimitation of this investigation consider the concept of *lingua franca*, which is the language that several people use to communicate with each other, regardless of their native languages. The aim is to present changes and alterations in this document, with regard to the teaching of English, which was considered in the PCN as a foreign language and came to be considered as a *lingua franca* in the BNCC. It considered the perspective adopted in the BNCC considers the existence of a multi-semiotic and globalized world in which the teaching of English cannot be based on a Eurocentric, hegemonic, and homogenizing approach. This view allows us to question the idea that the only "correct" English is spoken by Americans or British.

**KEYWORDS:** English. Língua Franca. Language teaching. Foreign language.

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**RESUMO:** O presente texto apresenta resultados parciais advindos de uma pesquisa qualitativa e documental, que visa analisar a Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC). O recorte e a delimitação desta investigação consideram o conceito de língua franca, que é aquela que várias pessoas utilizam para comunicar-se entre si, independentemente de suas línguas maternas. Busca-se apresentar alterações e mudanças no referido documento, no que diz respeito ao ensino de língua inglesa, que era pensada nos PCN como língua estrangeira e passou a ser pensada como língua franca na BNCC. Considera-se que a perspectiva adotada na BNCC cogita a existência de um mundo multissemiótico e globalizado, onde o ensino de língua inglesa não pode ser pautado em uma abordagem eurocêntrica, hegemônica e homogeneizante. Tal visão permite que seja problematizada a visão de que o único inglês “correto” é aquele falado por estadunidenses ou britânicos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Inglês. Língua Franca. Ensino de Línguas. Língua Estrangeira.

**RESUMEN:** Este texto presenta resultados parciales surgidos de una investigación cualitativa y documental, que tuvo como objetivo analizar la Base Curricular Nacional Común (BNCC). El alcance y delimitación de esta investigación considera el concepto de lengua franca, que es aquella que utilizan diversas personas para comunicarse entre sí, independientemente de su lengua materna. El objetivo es presentar cambios y alteraciones al mencionado documento, en lo que respecta a la enseñanza del idioma inglés, que era considerado en el PCN como lengua extranjera y pasó a ser considerado como lengua franca en la BNCC. Se considera que la perspectiva adoptada en la BNCC considera la existencia de un mundo multissemiótico y globalizado, en el que la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa no puede basarse en un enfoque eurocéntrico, hegemónico y homogeneizador. Esta visión nos permite cuestionar la idea de que el único inglés “correcto” es el que hablan los estadounidenses o los británicos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Inglés. Lengua Franca. Enseñanza de Idiomas. Lengua Extranjera.

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## INTRODUCTION

This text proposes a documentary analysis of the BNCC (Brazil, 2017), with regard to the English language curriculum component in basic education. In the meantime, a qualitative approach was adopted by analyzing excerpts from the document that allude—directly or indirectly—to the teaching of English as a foreign language in the document. First of all, it should be noted that the BNCC's English language skills are aimed at ensuring school initiatives aimed at understanding the meanings of this language among English speakers.

In this way, it can be seen in this discussion that this document does not consider the native speaker as the ideal speaker, as well as breaking with the conception that “the English language is no longer that of the ‘foreigner’, from hegemonic countries” (Brazil, 2017, p. 241our translation) and centers actions on learning English as a *lingua franca*, focusing on understanding the language among individuals who use it for interaction purposes. From this perspective, emphasis is placed on the “*social and political function of English*” (Brazil, 2017, p. 241, emphasis added, our translation), as it is detached “from the notion of belonging to a particular territory and, consequently, to cultures typical of specific communities, legitimizing the uses of the English language in their local contexts” (Brazil, 2017, p. 241, our translation).

These contexts imply looking at the subjects and the uses they make of this multisemiotic language (through speech, writing, sound, static, or moving images) in the face of hybrid cultures (García Canclini, 2019) and the inter/multi/transculturality (Rojo, 2013) that constitutes their inter/multi/translingual subjectivity (Megale & Liberali, 2020; Rocha & Megale, 2021), and how they are produced in the different social practices of language marked in a given chronotope (time and space). “This understanding favors a language education geared towards interculturality [towards multi- and transculturality], that is, the recognition of (and respect for) differences” (Brazil, 2017, p. 241, our translation), in the dialogical relationship between *me-other* and *other-me* (Bakhtin, 1979/2011).

According to Rocha and Megale (2021), translanguaging, which is imbricated with meanings about/with/in/by and from language and culture, is that which

recognizes the political character of the concept by highlighting the commitment of the translingual paradigm to undermine the reductionist conceptions of language and culture imposed by monolingual ideologies, as well as to confront linguistic ideologies which, due to their colonial, racist, sexist, and classist foundations, perpetuate the marginalization of certain people and groups. (n.p., our translation)

The term translingual, presented by Rocha and Megale (2021), recognizes and values the ways of being, thinking, and acting in the language and culture of a people, of a speech community, of the subject who uses English in the most varied social spheres of human activity

(family, school, media, among others), in the case of this chapter, understanding their place of enunciation and constitution (Bakhtin, 1979/2011).

In this direction, starting from an emancipatory and liberating education, corroborates the practice of listening to and respecting the other in/for/with

true dialogicity, in which dialogic subjects learn and grow in difference, above all in respect for it, is the way of being coherently demanded by beings who, unfinished, assuming themselves as such, become radically ethical. (Freire, 1996/2019, p. 59, our translation)

An ethic that understands and respects the human being, the subject-learner of/in the world, as well as the activities they undertake, carry out in/with the world, in/with society, in/with the community, and with the people they live with, whom they use language to express, to participate, to have a voice and a say in choices and in exercising their citizenship.

In view of this, improving language teaching and learning are goals of the BNCC, as will be seen in this paper. In addition, the BNCC proposes that the teaching of English as a *lingua franca* should not be based solely on the content itself, but should be contextualized, taking into account the social practices of language use. In this way, reading, writing, speaking, linguistic knowledge, and the inter/multi/transcultural dimension are considered inseparable elements of language learning, as will be seen below.

### *Situating the corpus: about the document to be analyzed*

The BNCC is a normative document that establishes guidelines for national basic education. Its latest version for early childhood education and primary education was approved in 2017 by the current National Education Plan (2014-2024) (Brazil, 2014), while the version for secondary education only had its final version released in 2018, a year later.

However, historically, this document dates back to the context of initiatives undertaken on national soil 30 years ago, with the 1988 Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988) and the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law, LDB No. 9.394/1996 (Brazil, 1996), which was when early childhood education, for example, was first recognized as an essential phase of basic education. The document mentions that it took into account the National Curriculum Parameters (which preceded it) (Brazil, 1997, 1998a), as well as the National Curriculum Guidelines (Brazil, 1998c), with the aim of guiding curriculum planning for basic education in Brazil.

However, although it was launched in 2017-2018, the document in question still raises many doubts among managers and educators, especially with regard to its implementation in the classroom, considering the perspective presented in it and how it actually ties in with the

teaching and learning work in Brazilian schools.

The BNCC brings with it the defense of the need for a universal curriculum, for example. However, this discussion was not born in 2017. This is because Article 210 of the Federal Constitution of 1988 already established that the Brazilian school curriculum should be unified.

Art. 210. Minimum content will be set for primary education in order to ensure a common basic education and respect for national and regional cultural and artistic values.

Paragraph 1st: Religious education, which is optional, shall be part of the normal timetable of public primary schools.

Paragraph 2nd Regular primary education will be taught in Portuguese, with indigenous communities also guaranteed the use of their mother tongues and their own learning processes. (Brazil, 1988, n.p., our translation)

Later, in 1996, the LDB, especially in Law No. 9.394/1996 (Brazil, 1996), regulates, in its article 26, the need for a common national curriculum for Brazilian education. In 1997, the ten volumes of the *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* (National Curriculum Parameters) (Brazil, 1997) were consolidated, focusing on primary education and the initial years of basic education, and in 1998, the PCNs for secondary education were published (Brazil, 1998b).

At the National Education Conference held in 2010, the need to draw up a BNCC was discussed, so that it could form part of a National Education Plan in the future. Finally, the National Education Plan was introduced, regulated by Law No. 13.005, of June 25, 2014 (Brazil, 2014), which presented 20 goals for improving the quality of basic education, four of which (Goals 1, 2, 3, and 4) included the BNCC.

It should be emphasized that the construction and drafting of this national curriculum document expands on the theoretical concepts set out in the PCN (Brazil, 1997, 1998a, 1998b), especially in relation to (multi)literacy studies and digital culture in the teaching and learning of English in basic education, which is based on a dialogical perspective of language (Bakhtin, 2011[1979]) based on the discursive genres approach. However, according to some critics of the last two versions of the BNCC (Brazil, 2016, 2017), such as Costa-Hübes and Kramer (2019) and Bonini and Costa-Hübes (2019), there is a focus on “competency-centered education” (p. 27, our translation), in addition to the “existence of numerous versions (with different ideological perspectives)” (p. 27, our translation). In relation to the concept coined by the BNCC about competencies, reflections emerge that are based on “functionalist and constructivist theories, which understand that the school must train a citizen capable of adapting to the reality that surrounds them so that they can perform satisfactorily in real work situations” (Bonini & Costa-Hübes, 2019, p. 30, our translation).

What these two linguists, Bonini and Costa-Hübes (2019), emphatically discuss about

the BNCC reveals a move away from a curricular epistemology based on the perspective of libertarian and emancipatory education defended by Freire (2019[1996]), envisioning dialectics, consciousness and autonomy among/with learners, as well as moving away from the enunciative-discursive perspective of Bakhtin and his Circle in understanding the subject as a social, historical and ideological being. In other words, the focus is on training apprentices for the labor market (a reductionist view) and not on the world of work (a broad and in-depth view).

Thus, thinking about human and integral education based on access, permanence, and guaranteeing learning rights means, first and foremost, understanding each context, each learner and the place from which they enunciate, how they are constituted in their formative journey in the dialogical (Bakhtin, 1979/2011) and dialectical (Freire, 1996/2019) relationship with the other. It's about looking at the learner as a conscious human being, active in the society in which they are inserted and in the different social spheres (family, work, religion, among others), moving away from the notion of a commodity subject to be consumed by the neoliberal labor market.

### *The English language in focus in the BNCC: specificities and controversies*

First of all, it should be noted that the English language appears in the BNCC, which associates it with the exercise of citizenship and the critical formation of basic education students. This is because the teaching and learning of the English language has been seen as necessary in order to open up the possibilities and appropriation of future knowledge, allied to the continuity of the individual's studies, as can be seen specifically in the following excerpt:

the study of English can give everyone access to the linguistic knowledge necessary for engagement and participation, contributing to students' critical agency and the exercise of active citizenship, as well as expanding the possibilities for interaction and mobility, opening up new paths for building knowledge and continuing studies. (Brazil, 2017, p. 239, our translation)

It is important to establish a conceptual shift: according to Mariana Taís Mallmann (2018), the use of the term "*lingua franca*" in the BNCC is not a mere detail. This is because, by mobilizing this concept, the document disassociates itself from the premise that it is addressing a language that belongs to some countries that have it as their mother tongue. Thus, it is "a language that belongs to the world, and ends up being common to people everywhere, making communication possible" (Mallmann, 2018, p. 17, our translation). From this point of view, the shift from the concept of "foreign language" to the concept of "*lingua franca*" means that English language



teaching is geared towards the needs of communication and interaction in a globalized world, mediated by digital technologies and new/other literacy practices involving English.

According to the BNCC (Brazil, 2017, p. 68, emphasis added, our translation), social practices involving digital culture and (multi)literacies include

not only helps students to participate more effectively and critically in contemporary language practices, but also allows them to think of themselves as more than just a “language user.”

Kalantzis *et al.* (2020) call this “language user” nomenclature designers. This is because “language, as a process of constituting subjectivity, marks the individual trajectories of subjects who are also made social by the language they share” (Geraldi, 2015, p. 123, our translation), in/by and with the practices of orality, reading and writing (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2020; Rojo, 2013).

In this way, the *lingua franca* is the language that several people, regardless of their mother tongue, use to communicate with each other. It is, therefore, a language that provides access to an increasingly globalized, multisemiotic, inter/multi/translingual world (Rojo, 2013), marked chronotypically by the uses that subjects make in different social spheres and in different contexts of spoken and written use, for example. According to the BNCC’s changes to English language teaching, English language teaching and learning cannot be anchored in a Eurocentric, hegemonic, validated, legitimized standard,

whose speakers serve as role models, nor is it a variant of the English language. From this perspective, the uses made of it by speakers all over the world, with different linguistic and cultural repertoires, are welcomed and legitimized, which makes it possible, for example, to question the view that the only ‘correct’ English - and the only one to be taught - is that spoken by Americans or Britons. (Brazil, 2017, p. 241, our translation)

This paradigm of the “correct” English to be taught goes back to a controversy in the context of teaching in language schools and colleges around the world. From this perspective, the closer the pronunciation of English is to that of northern hemisphere nations, the more “adequate” the individual’s proficiency would be. However, proficiency gives way to another term: linguistic competence, which in turn is associated with speakers’ understanding of each other. This deconstructs the idea that only validated, hegemonic, and institutionalized reading, writing, and speaking practices are legitimate since these “marginalize and deny local experience” (Street, 2003, p. 3). In this way, the linguistic and cultural repertoires of individuals who speak English around the world are taken into account, and not just a standardization of the language in relation to the countries whose inhabitants have it as their mother tongue.

In the meantime, Table 1 shows some substantial changes related to English language teaching before and after the publication of the BNCC.

**Table 1:** Changes to the BNCC in relation to the PCN

	As it was in the PCN	How it looks in the BNCC
<b>Language status</b>	Foreign Language	<i>Lingua Franca</i>
<b>Document organization</b>	Four axes of content are divided into world knowledge, systemic knowledge, text types, and attitudes.	The axes are: orality, reading, writing, linguistic knowledge, and the intercultural dimension.
<b>Communicative practices</b>	The document's emphasis was on reading and writing practices.	The BNCC reconsiders this position and broadens it by treating language discursively, including other dimensions (including skills) that are so important for developing students' linguistic-discursive competence through English.
<b>Objectives</b>	Learning a foreign language was mainly related to the integral development of the student's literacy—learning to read texts written in another language was the focus.	By proposing the teaching of English in this new configuration, with an emphasis on its formative character and from a perspective of conscious and critical language education, the BNCC brings the student's vision of multilearning.
<b>Contents</b>	<p>A technical view of English teaching prevailed, with the study of the language focused on its linguistic structures and vocabulary.</p> <p>There were no clear guidelines for classwork that would enable the content of the living language. As a result, in academic circles, English classes were based on a standard language from hegemonic countries.</p>	<p>There has been a broadening of the approach to language in order to provide more real exposure to the language through a variety of authentic texts and multimedia and to work with different genres, which bring real language use practices closer to the classroom, according to local needs.</p> <p>Language is understood as an expression of culture. Hence the idea of a world language and the orientation and encouragement to work with various inductive sources - the English of various places and its variants.</p>

Source: prepared by the authors based on Trevisan (2021, n.p.).

As far as the *status of the language* is concerned, replacing the foreign language perspective with the notion of *lingua franca* is a substantial difference, given that one of the main elements of English language teaching in the BNCC is interculturality. Hence, the specificity of considering the different linguistic and cultural repertoires of English speakers around the world and not just the standardization of the language. Thus, an ideal model of the speaker is replaced by the consideration of a more real, tangible speaker who interacts and situates themselves in the world through the appropriation of English as a *lingua franca* and no longer as a foreign language.

It is also worth noting that Torres and Terres (2021) analyzed the concept of language in the latest version of the BNCC (2017). For the authors, it is possible to consider four of the six competencies for the English language curriculum component for elementary school with regard to ways of conceptualizing language since competencies 5 and 6 do not deal with this issue. Thus, the 4 competencies that refer to



language concepts are:

1. Identify the place of oneself and the other in a plurilingual and multicultural world, reflecting critically on how English language learning contributes to the insertion of subjects into the globalized world, including the world of work;
2. Communicate in English through the varied use of languages in print or digital media, recognizing it as a tool for accessing knowledge, broadening perspectives and possibilities for understanding the values and interests of other cultures, and exercising social leadership;
3. Identify similarities and differences between the English language and the mother tongue/other languages, linking them to social, cultural, and identity aspects, in an intrinsic relationship between language, culture, and identity;
4. Elaborate linguistic-discursive repertoires of the English language, used in different countries and by different social groups within the same country, in order to recognize linguistic diversity as a right and to value the heterogeneous, hybrid, and multimodal uses emerging in contemporary societies. (Brazil, 2017, p. 246)

Torres and Terres (2021) point out that there is a difference in the specificity of competencies regarding the conceptual explicitness of language. In this way, the authors separated out competence 3, which they believe is associated with a conception of language that sees it in relation to identity and culture.

Conceiving English as a *lingua franca*, as already mentioned, means transferring characteristics of the speaker's mother tongue to the second language, such as the accent, for example, which can be considered an aspect of identity. In this way, by no longer aiming for the pronunciation of a native speaker, the subjects imprint their own way of speaking when speaking English as an additional language, with the aim of being intelligible, thus creating a relationship between language, culture, and identity. (Torres & Terres, 2021, p. 6475, our translation)

Thus, when it is stated that there is an "intrinsic relationship between language, culture and identity" in competency 3, it is argued that English as a *lingua franca* should not be taught as something that refers to a specific and homogeneous American or British context, since the intercultural aspect of appropriating the language, which is *lingua franca* and therefore shared, should be considered, making it alive, heterogeneous and free among speakers.

In turn, competences 1, 2 and 4 consider language as a product of social interaction, "enabling the construction of ideological systems, the signification of the world and social protagonism, in other words, language as a system in constant reformulation through the pro-

cesses of social interaction between speakers” (Torres & Teles, 2021, p. 6474, our translation). Thus, the use of expressions such as “plurilingual and multicultural world,” “varied use of languages,” “tool for accessing knowledge,” “exercise of social protagonism,” “different countries and different social groups,” for example, denotes the existence of meanings that displace the English language, thinking of it not as something that needs to be appropriated from a linguistic systematicity that comes from a few places “of origin” (as in the case of nations that have English as their mother tongue), but as an instrument of access to new knowledge that allows the exercise of citizenship and acting in the world from the appropriation of a language other than the mother tongue, but which can be used by subjects from different cultures for increasingly heterogeneous social interaction purposes.

With regard to the *organization of the document*, the teaching of English cannot be reduced to reading, interpreting and problem-solving, which means that the BNCC emphasizes comprehension and oral production of the language, with or without face-to-face contact, taking into account, for example, circumstances associated with interaction between texts and readers and the production of texts. In this way, speaking, reading and writing activities are encouraged, as long as they take place in a contextualized way, mediated or not by digital technologies, considering the learner’s place of enunciation.

In this sense, by assuming its *status* of lingua franca – a language that materializes in hybrid uses, marked by fluidity and open to the invention of new ways of saying, driven by pluri/multilingual speakers and its multicultural characteristics – the English language becomes a symbolic asset for speakers all over the world. (Brazil, 2017, p. 242, our translation)

Therefore, the social practices inscribed in the digital world, i.e. (multi)literacies, end up promoting social/digital/cultural interaction between these language users or designers (Kalantzis et al., 2020). Furthermore, “the English language enhances the possibilities of participation and circulation – which bring together and interweave different semiosis ..., in a continuous process of contextualized, dialogical and ideological meaning” (Brazil, 2017, p. 242, our translation), which allows learners to have autonomy and awareness in the face of these learning processes with others.

In relation to *communicative practices*, contact with the language in actual situations of use is considered, rather than focusing on artificial examples of language use. That’s why, when it comes to teaching, we need to take into account texts produced in English that circulate in the spheres of social communication around the world. This is also why the construction of meanings includes questions of interculturality, based on the distinct and plural uses of English by speakers with heterogeneous linguistic and cultural repertoires. Therefore, not only

the standard or culturally and economically valued variety used by wealthy social classes and native speakers is privileged (Gonçalves & Baronas, 2013).

With regard to the objectives, English is no longer considered a language external to the speaker, a foreign language, or the language of the other, but a cultural artifact shared by a wider community of speakers, beyond those who have it as their mother tongue, as mentioned above. In this sense, we also consider the inclusion of young people in the digital world, which expands the possibilities of participation through the appropriation of the use of different languages through a continuous process of contextualized meaning, as mentioned in the BNCC and in line with the discussions undertaken by Kalantzis et al. (2020), Rojo (2013) and Street (2003).

It's no wonder that the English language no longer has "owners" but is being shared as a *lingua franca* by ever wider communities of speakers. In this direction, the document itself will consider the varied interaction practices situated in the digital world in the face of (multi) literacies, in which "Conceiving language as a social construction, the subject 'interprets,' 'reinvents' meanings in a situated way, creating ways of identifying and expressing ideas, feelings and values" (Brazil, 2017, p. 242, emphasis added, our translation).

Finally, with regard to the *content*, it can be said that teaching should not be centered on the study of systematized rules. Instead of a technical approach, we advocate the use of a discursive approach to language, which considers inter/multi/transculturality and increasingly hybrid, borderline, mestizo repertoires (Rojo, 2013), based on wide-ranging and varied ways of communicating and interacting in the English language. This has led to different ways of learning and appropriating English, detached from the notion of belonging to a certain region or country, which legitimizes its use in increasingly specific and local contexts.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This text is based on documentary research with a qualitative approach, with the aim of presenting some specific features of English language teaching in the BNCC. Firstly, the historical background to the creation of this document was presented, and then we looked at how elements such as the status of language, the organization of the document, communicative practices, objectives, and content are articulated in relation to the PCN. Considerations are also given to what has changed in practice with regard to these conceptual approaches.

It is clear from this analysis that the substantial change in the notion of *lingua franca*, instead of thinking of English as a foreign language, as it was before, deterritorializes teaching and the very vision of the language, since we no longer think of the appropriation of the language from a specific region, such as the United States of America or England, for example.

In this way, a discursive approach to language is favored, rather than a perspective of appropriation of the linguistic system, since the need to start from real contexts is defended, especially in relation to the production of oral and written texts for specific and global purposes. This is so that, by learning English, individuals can fully exercise their citizenship, starting from a broad insertion into the academic and cultural world, where English is present through the interaction of individuals and cultures that are increasingly wide-ranging and heterogeneous.

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