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LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND THE TRANSLATION PROCESS AS A GUARANTEE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

A DIVERSIDADE LINGUÍSTICA E O PROCESSO DE TRADUÇÃO COMO GARANTIA DE DIREITOS HUMANOS

LA DIVERSIDAD LINGÜÍSTICA Y EL PROCESO DE TRADUCCIÓN COMO GARANTÍA DE DERECHOS HUMANOS

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ABSTRACT: This article sought to analyze the importance of linguistic diversity and the translation process as a guarantee of human rights. It is a study with a qualitative approach based on documentary research. The results indicated that studies in the field of Language Sciences and Education are still in their infancy regarding the discussion on the relationship between linguistic diversity and human rights. It is considered that it is necessary to value linguistic diversity by understanding it as a basic human right, especially when considering the context from which the individual who is away from their home originates, for whatever reason. It also emphasizes the importance of welcoming this person, particularly in public spaces, where essential rights such as access to security, health, and education must be guaranteed for their individual and collective well-being.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic Diversity. Translation. Human rights. Identities.

RESUMO: *Este artigo buscou analisar a importância da diversidade linguística e o processo de tradução como garantia de direitos humanos. Trata-se de*

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um estudo com abordagem qualitativa, baseado em pesquisa documental. Os resultados sinalizaram que os estudos na área das Ciências da Linguagem e da Educação são incipientes em relação à discussão sobre a relação entre diversidade linguística e direitos humanos. Considera-se que é preciso valorizar a diversidade linguística, compreendendo-a como um direito humano básico, considerando o lugar de onde se constituiu/constitui o sujeito que está fora de seu domicílio, por qualquer motivo que seja. Ressalta-se ainda a importância do acolhimento dessa pessoa, especialmente em ambientes públicos, em que é necessário garantir os direitos essenciais, como o acesso à segurança, à saúde e à educação, para seu bem-estar individual e coletivo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Diversidade Linguística. Tradução. Direitos Humanos. Identidades.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo buscó analizar la importancia de la diversidad lingüística y el proceso de traducción como garantía de derechos humanos. Se trata de un estudio con un enfoque cualitativo basado en una investigación documental. Los resultados señalaron que los estudios en el área de las Ciencias del Lenguaje y de la Educación son incipientes en relación con la discusión sobre la relación de la diversidad lingüística y los derechos humanos. Se considera que es necesario valorar la diversidad lingüística comprendiendo la como un derecho humano básico, pensando en el lugar de donde se constituyó/constituyen el sujeto que está fuera de su domicilio, por cualquier motivo que sea. Se resalta además la importancia de acoger a esta persona, especialmente en entornos públicos, donde es fundamental garantizar los derechos esenciales como el acceso a la seguridad, la salud y la educación para su bienestar individual y colectivo.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Diversidad Lingüística. Traducción. Derechos Humanos. Identidades.*

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ARTIGO SUBMETIDO AO SISTEMA DE SIMILARIDADE

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Introduction

This article addresses the topic of "Linguistic Diversity and the Role of Translation," a recurrent yet still complex subject within the fields of Linguistics and Education. It presents reflections on the act of translation, specifically in relation to Human Rights. It is important to highlight that among the various approaches to translation, one in particular emphasizes the critical aspect inherent in the relationship between the translator and the reader/listener/speaker. These actors are active participants in the process: the one who translates and the one who reads or speaks. Regarding translation as a social practice, this article argues that, in contemporary translation approaches, the act of translating is inherently interdisciplinary, as insights from Psychology, Anthropology, and other fields serve as important references for translation practice. Furthermore, translation requires the professional to continuously expand their worldly knowledge, which contributes directly to their role in engaging with the reader or listener.

For the development of this article, a qualitative research approach was adopted, with a focus on interpretive and subjective aspects as central to the analysis. Data were collected through a review of studies available in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Google Scholar, and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) repositories.

The reflection presented in this research—namely, on linguistic diversity—is particularly justified by its relevance to Human Rights, specifically regarding individuals' right to speak and read in their mother tongue, even when such languages belong to minority populations in territories that are not solely geographic but also academic and scientific. In this context, *língua(gem)*[3] (language) is understood as a dialogic, social action that shapes individuals. These individuals are social, historical, and ideological beings (Geraldi, 2013[1991]). From this perspective, we understand that it is through verbal interaction (Geraldi, 2013[1991]) that knowledge must be shared in its original language, ensuring balance, the construction of full citizenship, and, above all, dialogue between languages and cultures (Geraldi, 2013[1991]).

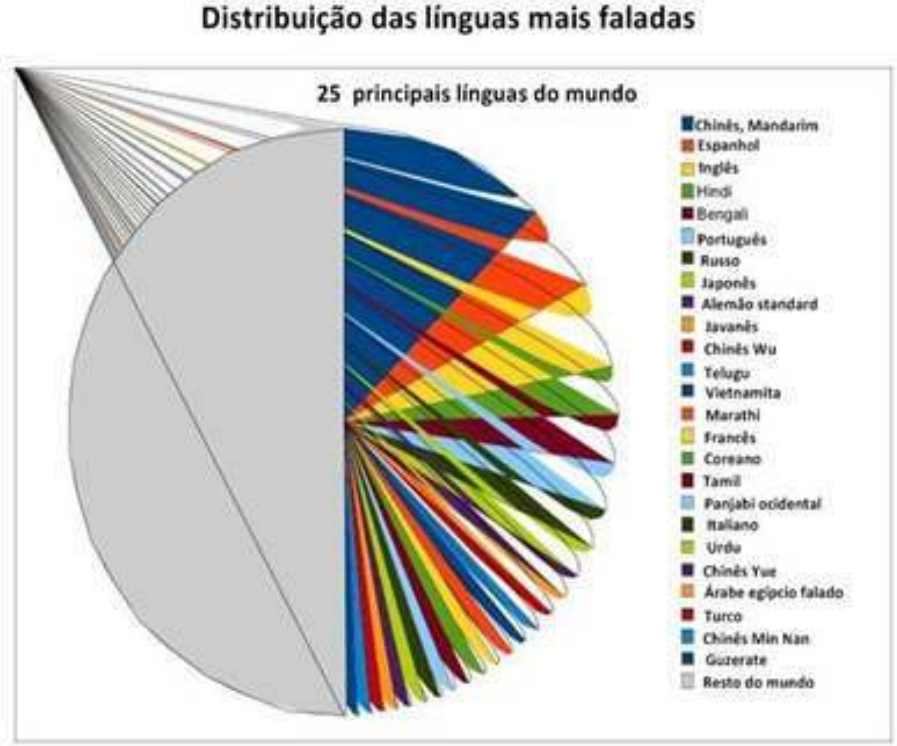
This article aims to analyze the importance of linguistic diversity and the translation process as a safeguard of human rights.

[3] The term *língua(gem)* adopted in this article is coined by Gerald 2013 1991 , as it conceives *língua(gem)* as something broader and more complex, constitutive of the subjectivity of the individual, of the human being.

Linguistic Diversity

Linguistic diversity is a fundamental aspect of human culture. It is through language that the emotions, oral history, habits, and customs of a population are expressed. While there are numerous languages spoken around the world, it is difficult to establish an exact number. However, the infographic presented in Figure 1 provides an overview of their global distribution. It shows, for example, that the most widely spoken language is Mandarin.

Figure 1. *Distribution of the Most Spoken Languages*[4]



Note. Tessiturae.wordpress (2012).

In this context, translation studies represent a significant benefit for diverse communities. The practice of translation is primarily related to, through, about, and with *língua(gem)*, encompassing spoken, textual, and symbolic forms (e.g., signs, colors used as indicators). It is the translator's responsibility to be capable of recognizing the textuality present in these materials in order to convey the message to the interlocutor with greater credibility.

Researchers emphasize the importance of world knowledge for recognizing the different "voices" within texts and speech. It should be noted that texts are considered sociocommunicative events, as readers and authors interact and co-construct meaning (Geraldi, 2013[1991]).

[4] Translation of text from top to bottom: Distribution of most spoken languages; Top 25 languages in the world; Chinese Mandarin; Spanish; English; Hindi; Bengali; Portuguese; Russian; Japanese; Standard German; Javanese; Chinese Wu; Telugu; Vietnamese; Marathi; French; Korean; Tamil; Western Panjabi; Italian; Urdu; Chinese Yue; Spoken Egyptian Arabic; Turkish; Chinese Min Nan; Gujarati; Rest of the world.

Additionally, translation involves understanding the other's position of speech/enunciation and the constitutive subjectivity (Geraldi, 2015) of that other, in order to render the translation as close as possible to what was intended to be written, spoken, or expressed.

From this perspective, in today's contemporary, neoliberal, and globalized world, translation must regard culture as a key element from a political standpoint. As Ferreira and Gorovitz (2021) suggest, "the translation process is a political act—of resistance and remediation of asymmetries and power relations, which are constructions of a pre-established system of values and norms transmitted by dominant languages/cultures." (p. 2)

Thus, considering linguistic diversity as a cultural aspect, studies highlight the importance of the translator's understanding of their social role in this context. First and foremost, it is essential to recognize that linguistic diversity constitutes a human right, as emphasized by Decree No. 7,387/2010 (Brasil, 2010), which treats languages as cultural expressions and values plurilingualism and multilingualism. *Língua(gem)* is intimately connected to the individual's identity (Geraldi, 2013[1991]; 2015), forming a constitutive part of their relationship with others. Consequently, translators bear a significant social responsibility, as they must appreciate the nuances inherent in the target *língua(gem)* and skillfully render them through, about, and with the source *língua(gem)*. Ezeihuaku (2024) addresses this issue, reflecting on the importance of linguistic diversity in the translation industry: "in today's globalized world, where communication and trade transcend geographical borders, it is essential to recognize and value linguistic diversity" (Ezeihuaku, 2024).

A crucial aspect of the translation process is the translator's solid command of their native language. A robust vocabulary and familiarity with idiomatic expressions enhance the ability to recreate the text in the target *língua(gem)*, especially when employing discourse-level translation techniques. In such cases, the domestication technique provides comfort to the reader, creating the impression that the text was originally produced in their native language.

Another important consideration in translation practice is the interdisciplinary dimension. Having a vocabulary that spans multiple fields of knowledge is essential; disciplines such as Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, and Economics contribute to producing more accurate and robust translations.

Considering the contemporary globalized world, it is also critical to remain attentive to prevailing ideologies. According to the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (Unesco, 1996), many languages are endangered (Altenhofen, 2013; Maher, 2013) or have already become extinct through what Oliveira (2008, 2016) terms *glottocide*—"the killing of languages"—as is the case for many Indigenous languages in Brazil. Therefore, it is necessary to approach language policies as public policies, recognizing that "languages and their uses are connected to all human social action" (Oliveira, 2016, p. 382), that is, to human constitution, identity, and dignity as citizens.

What Oliveira (2016) highlights aligns with Article 7, item 1, of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, which states that "all languages are the expression of a collective identity

and a distinct way of apprehending and describing reality, and therefore should be able to benefit from the necessary conditions for their development in all functions" (Unesco, 1996, p. 6). In this regard, Oliveira (2016) emphasizes that:

> [w]e are experiencing a historical moment in which Language as a Right and Language as a Resource guide part of linguistic policies. … Even more pronounced is the expansion in relation to the internationalization of markets, the flow of people through international migration, and the flows of information and knowledge on the Internet, in digital form. (p. 396)

This also underscores the importance of training translators, even in minority languages, as this constitutes a significant political movement for both communities and states through the creation of educational policies aimed at ensuring their continuity. Garcez and Schulz (2016) discuss this issue in relation to status policies (minority and majority groups), which address the functions of languages in their specific contexts of use:

> [a] language may serve as a vehicle for interaction only within the family and community, without having functions in the operation of institutions and the State in general. This was the case for many immigrant languages in Brazil, which had limited status not only in relation to Portuguese but also in relation to the prestigious variety considered the "standard" of the same "language." (p. 9).

Considering the relevant elements raised thus far—linguistic diversity and plurality, *língua(gem)* as a human right, and the social role of the translator—this research was conducted through readings directly related to the chosen topic to gain a deeper understanding of translation in the field of human rights.

Methodology

The research for this article, framed within a qualitative approach, was conducted in the first semester of 2024 through a documentary investigation based on a review of studies in the SciELO, Google Scholar, and CAPES repositories. The descriptors used were: "linguistic diversity, human rights, English, and translation" to identify texts directly related to the objective of this article. Google Scholar posed some challenges, yielding over 16,000 references. A temporal filter from 2020 to 2024 was applied, yet approximately 16,000 texts remained. To select a manageable sample for this article, the first ten abstracts were read to identify at least three articles that could contribute substantively to the study.

In the CAPES repository, the same descriptors returned a single article, whereas SciELO yielded 78. The same strategy was applied: the first ten abstracts were read, and at least three were selected for inclusion. The search ultimately produced seven articles, four of which were discarded as they pertained specifically to primary school pedagogy. The final selection comprised three studies directly addressing linguistic diversity, human rights, and the work of the translator.

The analysis of the collected data followed a qualitative approach, focusing on subjectivity, reflection, and the contextual dimensions of the phenomena examined by the selected researchers.

Results and Discussion

As mentioned above, three texts were analyzed to understand the translator's role in the context of linguistic diversity and human rights. It is important to remind readers that social, political, economic, and historical factors influence *língua(gem)* and must be considered by the translator. Their work is not neutral, nor is language itself. Language is imbued with meanings and value judgments (Geraldi, 2015). Events such as migratory processes contribute significantly to linguistic diversity and plurality across countries and continents. While this study does not delve into the specific factors driving migration, political, economic, and environmental issues are among the primary causes. In this context, the translator assumes a socially relevant role, especially when their practice involves giving visibility to discourses that may otherwise be marginalized. According to the first study analyzed,

> the relationship enacted by translation inaugurates a process of continual recontextualization. It moves and relocates the text, updating the various reception contexts and introducing new modalities of relation and action. These are processes of renewing meanings and signifiers, and of renouncing the principle of equivalence between the parts in favor of the meaning that emerges reciprocally from the very contact/confrontation. Therefore, translation implies an immanent reciprocity—a desire for blending, knowledge, and rapprochement. It is a project of jointly constructing a way to transcend national boundaries (Ferreira & Gorovitz, 2021, p. 5).

According to the excerpt above, the authors attribute to translators the role of strengthening the identity of the other, fostering inclusion, mediating dialogue, and practicing decolonization, in the sense that globalization does not erase colonial and postcolonial histories. The translator perceives the other as the other, not as an invader or an enemy. The authors

emphasize that translation "is never merely the passage between two points; it is a link" (Ferreira & Gorovitz, 2021, p. 14).

In the second study analyzed, social, political, economic, and historical factors influence language and must be considered by the translator. Their work is not neutral, just as the subject is not neutral, given their positionality and formation (Geraldi, 2013[1991]). Considering that Portuguese and Spanish together rank just behind Mandarin in global use (Gorovitz et al., 2020), this alone constitutes a valid argument for introducing linguistic diversity into Brazilian scientific academia. The authors note that powerful imperialist forces, amplified by globalization, have established English as the *lingua franca*.

This situation imposes English on countries, especially those on the periphery, as an official language, thereby rendering them subordinate. Gorovitz et al. (2020) argue that "countries should safeguard the presence of languages in science, promoting the visibility of knowledge not only in hegemonic languages but also in national languages" (p. 78). According to the researchers, linguistic diversity encourages the dissemination of knowledge, fosters democracy and creativity, and places researchers from peripheral countries on the same level as those from Anglophone countries. They advocate that universities should implement programs for teaching Portuguese as a second language.

The third article addresses Linguistic Rights as Human Rights. Oliveira and Silva (2017) discuss the importance of recognizing linguistic rights as human rights by the Brazilian State. Their argument is based on the difficulties immigrants face upon arriving in Brazil in accessing basic public services, especially healthcare and education. The study demonstrates that the Brazilian State neglects the provision of translators in the public sector, leaving voluntary organizations to assume this role. The authors argue that linguistic diversity must be respected, considering the hardships experienced by most immigrants, including war refugees, victims of political persecution, and those living in extreme poverty. Oliveira and Silva (2017) problematize the fact that the public sector offers some Portuguese courses to foreigners as a way to overcome linguistic diversity.

The studies analyzed highlight the importance of translators aligning with social, political, and economic concerns and recognizing that their social function goes beyond merely transferring content from L1 to L2. Translators must foster inclusion, understand social challenges, and position themselves as professionals committed to ensuring linguistic diversity as a human right—the right to fully participate as a citizen.

Final considerations

The research conducted indicates that discussions on the relationship between linguistic diversity and human rights are still in their early stages. Consequently, many social policies tend to reduce this diversity, either through the use of English as a lingua franca or by offering Portuguese language instruction to foreigners.

For us, professionals in training within the field of translation, it is essential to understand the globalized world beyond purely economic considerations and to critically examine the impositions of developed countries (the Global North). It is crucial to recognize the importance of valuing linguistic diversity, including minority languages, to avoid losing part of the remaining human cultural heritage.

Finally, we emphasize the need to value linguistic diversity as a fundamental human right, taking into account the positionality of individuals who are outside their domicile for any reason. Moreover, the importance of welcoming these individuals, especially in public environments, is underscored, ensuring their access to essential rights such as safety, healthcare, and education, thereby promoting both individual and collective well-being.

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