

REFLECTIONS ON BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE



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Abstract: This article will approach concepts such as hegemonic language and heritage language from the linguistic and also political perspective, based on the answers of a questionnaire answered by emigrant Brazilian parents. The reports concern the linguistic choices of their home environments and the relationships that these choices suggest. These analyses will be based on Cummins (1983), Cho (2000), Flores and Melo-Pfeifer (2014), and Łyskawa, Maddeaux, Melara, and Nagy (2016), heritage language researchers; also in Souza (2010b), and Souza (2016) highlighting the specificities of the teaching context of Portuguese as Heritage Language. Culture, language, and identity are correlated concepts that blend into their definitions. We notice that migrant families living in multilingual environments have linguistic choices to make that are reflected not only in language learning but also in cultural enrichment and in the negotiation of identities that are constructed during linguistic interactions. Recognizing the heritage language as a valuable asset, in addition to giving the speaker a possibility of openness to future professional opportunities, makes a difference in the lives of these speakers concerning communicative ability and how to deal with the culture and roots of the family.

1. Introduction

The additional language³ teaching currently has two fronts of work whose importance is growing: the teaching of a foreign language for refugees and the heritage language (HL)⁴ teaching. At a time when so many families need

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³ “a language acquired later than SL.” (Flores, 2013, p.10). (All translations are responsibility of the authors, unless otherwise specified.)

⁴ “Heritage language generally refers to the community ethnocultural language which is not necessarily the child's first-learned language or even used in the home.” (Cummins, 1983, p.7).

to leave their places of origin with no date to return, the losses that come with the sometimes rough cut of cultural, social and linguistic roots have repercussions on the lives of those individuals that go beyond the initial shock and need for adaptation. Learning a language becomes a survival strategy for adults, but doing so may paradoxically mean a personal defeat - the conviction of staying in a place that is not originally theirs and that they have not always chosen can be extended or permanent.

Children generally go through this process more naturally, acquiring the language in which they communicate in the environment outside their own home while developing their ability to communicate with parents and other relatives in their family mother tongue. When they grow up in an environment where no one speaks their mother tongue, they tend to abandon the use progressively, to the point where there is a belief of having forgotten their language completely.

This article will address some social and cultural aspects that interfere in this process. For this, the discussions will be based in Cummins (1983), Cho (2000), Flores and Melo-Pfeifer (2014), and Łyskawa, Maddeaux, Melara, and Nagy (2016), heritage language researchers. Also, Souza (2010b), and Souza (2016) highlighting the specificities of the teaching context of Portuguese as Heritage Language, due to its non-hegemonic position in the linguistic panorama and the consequence of this characteristic for the involvement of HL students. According to the data of Weiss (2017), Weiss, Dutra, and Fonseca (2018), and Weiss and Dutra (2019), the children's exposure to the heritage language gives them an advantage when they later become interested in retrieving that ability. From this observation, the possibilities of valuing the different phonological variants of the languages spoken by HL students will be discussed. The success of this pedagogical practice as a motivating element of the student to devote himself to the task of learning Portuguese as HL is the primary goal.

In order to understand the context of heritage language, it is relevant to think first of what the existence of hegemonic languages means.

2. Hegemonic Language

The concept of hegemony used here comes from the works of Gramsci. According to the Italian thinker, hegemony consists of the moral and intellectual leadership of one group over another, achieved by persuasion through ideology and therefore consented. The non-hegemonic group is considered minority and gives the values conveyed by the other group the status of common sense, helping to maintain it. Thus, any different behavior will be perceived as resistance or rebellious. In Coutinho's words (2011), "hegemony can be defined as the ability of a social group to determine the meaning of reality, to exercise its intellectual and moral leadership over the whole of society. The struggle for hegemony - for the organization of culture

- is, in this sense, a struggle, for the articulation of values and meanings that compete for the political-ideological direction of individuals. This battle of ideas should be though dialectically as a struggle for the systematization of cultural forms (i.e., of languages expressing such representations and contents).” (Coutinho, 2001, p. 2)

Thus, hegemonic languages are those that in a given community are not only spoken by the majority of individuals but are endowed with greater prestige as a vehicle of culture in that society, to the detriment of others whose presence occurs marginally, closed in specific spaces.

3. Heritage Language

What does a language mean to be an inheritance? The concept of a heritage language is yet to be established more unanimously. The area of the study itself is recent, and the name itself arouses some controversy.

Cummins (1983), in the Canadian context, suggests heritage language as any language other than English or French. Flores and Melo-Pfeifer (2014) point to the multidisciplinary character of the concept. Cho (2000) says that a heritage language is a language associated with a person's cultural background. The author emphasizes that HL acquisition and maintenance can be an essential part of identity formation and the development of HL in ethnic minorities can help the individuals maintain a strong sense of identification with their ethnic group. Thus, maintaining HL in a community has cognitive, social, and cultural benefits. (Cho, 2000, p. 369).

Van Deusen-Scholl (2009) observed a dramatic shift in foreign language studies from the European languages toward the less commonly taught languages outlined by the “interest by speakers of immigrant languages in studying the languages of their ancestors”, thus, “the issue of heritage language instruction has gained prominence in the fields of applied linguistics and language pedagogy” (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2009, p. 211). Łyskawa, Maddeaux, Melara, and Nagy (2016) describe HL as “a case in which the dynamics of two languages in contact are unbalanced. The ubiquitous dominant language of the community may affect the heritage language, even if the latter is acquired first (L1).” (Łyskawa, Maddeaux, Melara & Nagy, 2016, p. 219).

The concept of a heritage language is linguistic, but also inherently political. In determining that an individual has a language as a heritage, it implies that it is a minority language in that community where s/he is embedded. Thus, the relevance of that language outside the family environment is little or null.

Finally, the identification of the individual with that language and, therefore, the conditions that make its maintenance something relevant is given for particular reasons, not social reasons. In saying that language is a heritage, it is considered to be, in a way, conceived as an individual property

- something owned. If a language is, in its soul, social, what is the point to maintaining this knowledge, other than for social purposes? On the other hand, by heritage, the language holds the connection with a community to which the individual belongs. If s/he feels (or comes to feel) connected to this society, to that culture, to that place, language becomes a means of communication again; no longer an everyday trivial transparent tool, but a tool of identity with another place, situated not in their daily life in the community, but in their personal world. The heritage language, thus, becomes the language of remembrance, *Lengua del Cuore*. It should not be by chance that many people after childhood - in the youth or even in the grown-up life, is interested in the language. At that moment of life, the rush of independence cease; moreover, there is less influence of those who claim this language/culture was somehow inferior and unworthy to learn since it is irrelevant, uninteresting, or even dangerous to the intellectual capacity to learn the hegemonic language.

When one moves from his country, s/he is in a more delicate situation regarding the language of the place that is left behind. Far from the cultural references of its home community, s/he makes choices that can be seen as in a gradient. At one extreme of this continuum are those who, in complete resistance to the society that surrounds them, transform their home or community into a small enclave in which the aboriginal culture remains. Language, religion, traditions, habits, everything, whenever possible, remains as such, and when the community is massive, this endurance is substantially more straightforward. At the other extreme, there are those who promote the complete erasure of the original culture, in a total accommodation to the surrounding culture. Between these two boundaries, each one suits themselves properly, according to their beliefs, their affections, and their memories.

The repercussions of the relationship between this disjointed individual and the new community go from his responses to local food to his motivation to learn the language of the environment. Many factors interfere in this relationship. Among them, it can be mentioned the insertion of this individual in the community - the smaller the insertion, the less chance of learning what identifies him with this community, even the detachment and the sense this is not necessary for his daily life. An example of this kind of situation is foreigner older people, already retired from the working relationships: many never utter a word in the community language, staying inside their homes and depending on other family members to interact to the outside world. Flores and Melo-Pfeifer (2014) discuss this relationship between the valorization of the heritage language and its maintenance: “the recognition and appreciation by the communities (host and origin) are essential for the maintenance of HL as a family and as a link between members of the migrant community (Ise, 2001), and are essential for

understanding the profile of HL learner. Moreover, because social representations undoubtedly and inevitably influence intercultural encounters and thus the appreciation and recognition of the languages of other communities; it is fundamental to study the images of HL, not only by the host communities but also of immigrant communities, as these can influence their use and transmission.” (Flores & Melo-Pfeifer, 2014, p. 23). The authors also point at the emotional aspects of heritage language speakers and their heritage language: "this affective and emotional load can be positive or negative, influencing aspects such as motivation, linguistic anxiety, the perception of competences or the learning strategies; or, in short, having a positive or negative impact on the skills and performance in HL. " (Flores & Melo-Pfeifer, 2014, p. 23 and 24)

An example of this way of thinking has been observed in communities formed by international students in Brazilian universities. Their coexistence with Brazilian people is mostly within the university. In many cases, they teach classes and lectures in their native language, and at this point, it is noticeable when their native language is considered prestigious and makes the speaker accepted in the community. Thus, when considered to be understood and accepted in that situation, it is common the belief that there is no need to develop linguistic skills in order to communicate in the majority language. Besides, there is the fact that their original culture is very different, and there is a rejection of many of the habits of the surrounding culture. When this is the case, it is likely to a group of foreigners from the same country isolate themselves, use their mother tongue to communicate with one another, with no interest in learning the language of the community in which, after all, they are not contained indeed. Cunha and Mota (2013) define this group formation as a transplanted community, which “refers to that community which, originally being formed by immigrants and their descendants, still cultivates their language and customs. Within this community, there is an expectation of overcoming impasses caused by the threats of loss of identity, fragmentation of experience, and many other disruptive phenomena caused by migration.” (Cunha & Mota, 2013, p. 90)

In the case of people who move from one country to another with all the family, the story can be different. Sometimes the adults are not interested in the language of the community. However, this situation shifts when the children are born: unlike parents, children do not feel attached to family culture by remembrance, but only by tradition from home. While they are kids and have their lives restricted to the community members, they will use the same language spoken in the environment. It becomes their first language, their mother tongue in the sense of the language of initial acquisition and the sense of the mother, the family. As Flores and Rato (2016) previously observed: "HSs [heritage speakers] tend to be primarily exposed

to colloquial registers of the HL, and thus, have reduced contact with more formal registers provided by schooling.” (Flores & Rato, 2016, p. 162).

From the moment that the children move out of the family community and takes contact with the outside life, their language of communication happens to be quickly that of the surrounding community. The school, if monolingual, will reinforce this tendency by demanding fluency in the hegemonic language and contact with people outside the family will also be in that language. Even when the community forms a cultural enclave, this child will grow up in a different environment: at least bilingual. As Flores and Rato (2016) point out: “when an HL child starts to be exposed to the societal language (e.g., through schooling), contact with the HL becomes more reduced and is often restricted to communication within the family, a situation that lasts until adulthood.”(Flores e Rato, 2016, p. 162).

What happens next will depend on what status the minority language has in the surrounding community. If it is a prestigious language, considered essential, fascinating, wealth mark, it will be in the interest of the children to maintain the language of the parents, even if at unrestricted levels of mastery. If, however, this language is stigmatized because it is spoken in a discredited community, children tend to use only within the family or no longer use it. Over time, the lack of practice makes its usage increasingly tricky, and the mother tongue can be forgotten. Spite of being less frequently documented, cases in which heritage speakers lose complete contact with their HL do exist as Weiss, Dutra, and Fonseca (2018), and Weiss and Dutra (2019) previously showed.

The first community cares about maintaining the language that unites it, but time makes what was the primary means of communication between those members progressively to a way of maintaining a community more remembered than lived. The language of the grandparents, of the relatives who are in another country, becomes a memory, but not a necessity.

If this happens when a heritage language is spoken in a community that has relevance to a minority group, it is not difficult to imagine the struggle in maintaining the heritage language when only one parent speaks that language, in an external community that does not recognize it as desirable and prestigious.

4. Form about Brazilian Portuguese heritage speakers

In order to understand and explore a little more about how to act concerning the Portuguese language of Brazilian emigrants and their descendants, who, in this case, are (or could be) Brazilian Portuguese heritage speakers, we have created a form online. Composed of questions about the linguistic choices of the family and the scenario in which they live in the diasporic reality, and written in Portuguese, the questionnaire had direct and straightforward questions, intending to leave Brazilian mothers and fathers at ease to respond

and share a little their realities. The primary purpose of the form was to socially, culturally, and linguistically map these individuals to develop a comparative analysis between them.

Twenty-eight people in total answered the form. We realize that the way these mothers and fathers recognize their Brazilian identities determines the linguistic choices of the family environment. Also, the relations of the Brazilian parent with the Portuguese language and the Brazilian culture directly implicate the relationship of children with the heritage language.

Culture, language, and identity are related concepts that blend into their definitions. Migrants and their children, who are born or grow up in different countries than their parents, experience cultures, languages, and multiple identities. Ana Souza (2010) points out and exemplifies the concept of multiple identities, which “is based on the assumption that identities are not fixed but socially constructed (Rao, 1999). (...) One could see identity as a big box full of cards representing many different options. Some may be negotiable, others contested and others may be found to be non-negotiable. Although the cards are interconnected, only the relevant ones are taken out of the box according to context and participants.” (Souza, 2010, p. 98).

From the answers of this form, it is possible to develop socio-cultural and linguistic analyses of these Portuguese HL speakers, their parents, and the relationship of all with the Portuguese language.

5. Outcomes

This section will present the results obtained from the analysis of the answers given in the form and, later, we will comment on the findings of this investigation and its implications. The questions covered the geographical, social, economic, and linguistic aspects of these participants, as detailed below.

At first, the participants were asked their first name and their city of origin. Out of the 28 respondents, 2 are men, and 26 are women. Most of them are from the southeast region of Brazil: São Paulo (9 answers), Minas Gerais (5 answers), Rio de Janeiro (5 answers) and Espírito Santo (1 answer); from the northeast region: Rio Grande do Norte (2 answers), Alagoas (1 answer), Bahia (1 answer), and Paraíba (1 answer); from the South region: Rio Grande do Sul (1 answer), and Paraná (1 answer); of the Center-West of Brazil, Goiás (1 answer).

Participants reported that they left Brazil when they were between 16 and 40 years of age. United States (1 answer), Peru (1 answer), and Sweden (1 answer).

Among the twenty-eight participants, 16 are married to Brazilians, and 12 are married to foreigners from various origins (North American, Belgian, Spanish, French, English, Iranian-Canadian, Japanese, Swedish). Moreover,

the number of children varies between a child (12 answers), two children (14 answers), and three children (2 answers). The descendants are mostly children, some adolescents and a young one, aged between seven months to 22 years. Regarding the educational level of the parents, the vast majority (19 answers) indicated graduation, followed by post-graduation (5 answers), high school (2 answers), technical course (1 answer), and kindergarten (1 answer). It is likely that the latter intended to refer to the child's educational level. As for the economic level, the participants reported that their family fit the following levels: middle class (11 answers), upper middle class (8 answers), working class (6 answers), and lower middle class (3 answers). Although we know that the economic level can be defined differently, according to the development of each country, the expectation of the answers was based on the class division of Brazil. No participant defined their family as an economic upper class.

The next questions are related to the language choices made in their family environment. Participants, in the vast majority, reported using Portuguese with their spouse (18 answers). The other language used in the family context is that of the foreign partner - English (6 answers), Spanish (2 answers), Swedish (1 answer), and Japanese (1 answer). It is interesting to note that only 16 among these participants are married to Brazilian partners. We can, therefore, notice that the Portuguese language is used in the family environment even with foreign partners.

What language do you use most often to talk to your husband/wife?

28 respostas

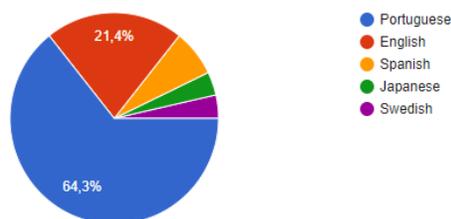


Figure 1: Google Forms response graph. Question title: What language do you use most often to talk to your husband/wife?. The number of answers: 28 answers.

The next question refers to the previous one, from the other point of view, since it concerns the language used by the partner with the participant. As mentioned, 16 of these participants are married to Brazilians; therefore, the Portuguese language is used among couples in the vast majority (18 answers). However, once again we can remark that, within these answers, there are two couples formed by a Brazilian and a foreigner who use the Portuguese language to communicate with each other, which again

contributes to the development and interest of the children’s heritage language within that family environment. Besides, the foreign partner using the Portuguese language shows how it is possible to value the minority language, even in restricted spheres. Some partners use the English language (6 answers), Spanish (2 answers), Swedish (1 answers), and Japanese (1 answer). These data can be seen in the following graph.

What language does your husband/wife most often use to talk to you?

28 respostas

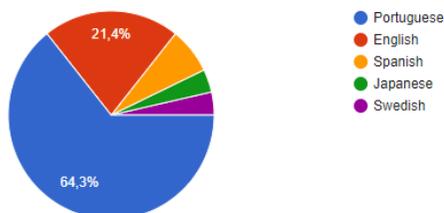


Figure 2: Google Forms response graph. Question title: What language does your husband/wife most often use to talk to you?. The number of answers: 28 answers.

When asked about the language used with the children, the Portuguese language is predominant (26 answers), English language (1 answer), and Japanese language (1 answer). We can assume that this is the central question of the questionnaire and the answers reveal that these Brazilian parents, in their vast majority, when communicating in Portuguese with their children, contribute to the affection and maintenance of the heritage language of these speakers.

What language do you use most often to talk to your children?

28 respostas

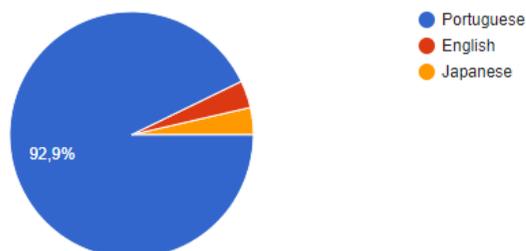


Figure 3: Google Forms response graph. Question title: What language do you use most often to talk to your children?. The number of answers: 28 answers.

Next, we present the linguistic use from the perspective of the children with the participant parent. According to the graph, when communicating

with the participant, the children use the Portuguese language (17 answers), English language (4 answers), Japanese language (2 answers), and Spanish language (1 answer). We also have the report that the children still cannot speak (4 answers). It is notable that, although 26 participants reported using the Portuguese language with their children, only 17 reported that their children use the language with both parents. It is not to say that these children are not becoming Portuguese heritage speakers since it is common for "proficiency in HL to present varying levels, and acquisition/learning experiences are diverse" (Flores & Melo-Pfeifer, 2014, p. 18) as previous research has shown.

What language do your children use most often to talk to you?

28 respostas

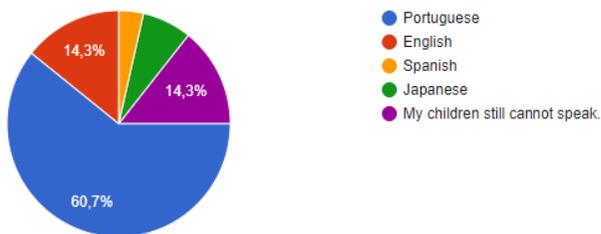


Figure 4: Google Forms response graph. Question title: What language do your children use most often to talk to you?. The number of answers: 28 answers.

The next question is about the language the partner uses with the children. Here it can be seen how, in these familiar environments, not only Portuguese as HL is being developed, but other HL as well. The Portuguese language (16 answers) is used by the spouses who are also Brazilian, English (2 answers), French (2 answers), Swedish (1 answer), Dutch (1 answer), Japanese (1 answer), Persian (1 answer) are used by the spouses who speak those languages, respectively.

What language does your husband/wife most often use to talk to your children?

28 respostas

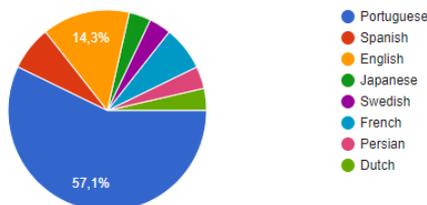


Figure 5: Google Forms response graph. Question title: What language does

your husband/wife most often use to talk to your children?. The number of answers: 28 answers.

From the children's point of view, it was asked about their linguistic choice when communicating with the participant's partner. As in the previous question, some children cannot speak yet (4 replies). However, the answers varied somewhat from the answers concerning the spouse's point of view, which were: Portuguese (14 answers), English (5 answers), Japanese (2 answers), Spanish (1 answer), Swedish (1 answer), and Dutch (1 answer).

In a comparative analysis, we have: for the 16 answers of one of the parents who use Portuguese with their children, in turn, 14 answers of children using the same language with them. For two answers of a parent using Spanish with children, only one answer of a child using language with a parent, the other answer reported that the child still cannot speak. The use of Swedish remains on an equal footing (1 answer). The Japanese language (2 answers) is used by the children with one of the parents and vice versa (see chart above) and also, according to another answer, by the children with both parents, while these parents use Portuguese with them. The same happens with English; children use English with both parents (while parents use Portuguese among themselves and with their children), so for the four answers of spouses who speak English with their children, there were five answers of children who also do so. One answer of the spouse using Persian with the son who, in turn, does not speak yet. One answer of the spouse who uses the Dutch with the children, who uses Portuguese with everyone in the house. Two answers of spouses speaking French with their children, while only one answer of children using French with the partner of the participant (the other corresponding answer is the child using English).

Although language negotiations can be varied and complex within a multilingual family environment, it is noticeable that the language used by a parent to talk to their children is not always the same as these children use to talk to this parent. Also, some children choose the native language of each parent to interact with each parent. Again it shows the children's proficiency in dealing with the HLLs they have. According to Ana Souza's previous studies: "These children, recognize the importance of their linguistic repertoire in linking to their heritage, family and community" (Souza, 2010b, p. 98). Our participants' children demonstrate to recognize not only their multiple identities, making these linguistic selections in the familiar environment, but they also demonstrate to negotiate these identities and linguistic choices in the interaction.

What language do your children most often use to talk to your husband/wife?

28 respostas

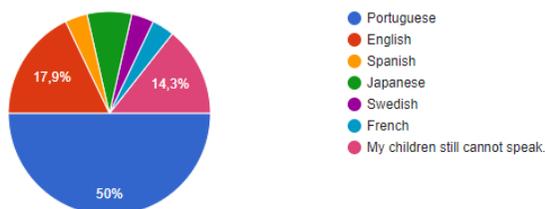


Figure 6: Google Forms response graph. Question title: What language do your children most often use to talk to your husband/wife?. The number of answers: 28 answers.

The next question was about the interaction between the children of the participants when it was not their only child. Again, there are answers about children who cannot speak yet (4 answers). Still, there are the only children that correspond to 5 answers. The Portuguese language is used by most (11 answers), English language (6 answers), and Japanese language (2 answers).

What language do your children use most often to talk to each other?

28 respostas

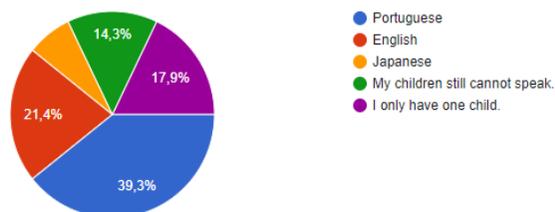


Figure 7: Google Forms response graph. Question title: What language do your children use most often to talk to each other?. The number of answers: 28 answers.

The sample presented here was collected from the goodwill of people who completed the questionnaire. Therefore, it can be argued that these people are already interested in promoting the Portuguese language in their homes and are, in some way, aware of their role as promoters of the language. For this reason, we have advanced the questions to understand a little more about the ways they promote the Portuguese language in their home. It is what we will see in analyzing the next issues.

The following questions are about the family’s relationship with the

society in which they live, the contacts with the Brazilian culture, the importance of the children learning Portuguese, and what is done to encourage the children to learn the HLs.

When asked about the existence of any Brazilian community, we obtained 21 affirmative answers, one negative answer, and six answers in which they said they did not know for sure. These 21 respondents positively reported that the insertion of the family into local Brazilian communities was done through social groups of friends (22 answers), religious groups (5 answers), cultural groups (theater, music, dance) (4 answers), NGO Abrace (1 answer). None answered that the interaction was done through sports groups (soccer, capoeira). It is important to remark that in this question, the choice of more than one item was allowed.

The contacts with the Brazilian culture take place through movies, music, soap operas, and Brazilian TV channels. Participants also reported on how these activities are often done: with their partner or children, or even with the whole family.

Check the activities you do on your own or with other members of your family.

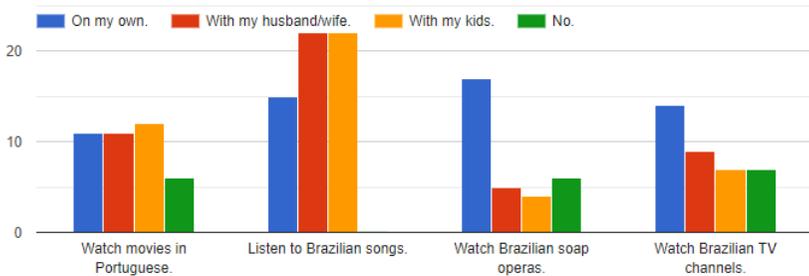


Figure 8: Google Forms response graph. Question title: Check the activities you do on your own or with other members of your family.

Their opinion about the meaning of their children learning the Portuguese language reveals significantly about the value they give their mother tongue. Some of the answers are available below: “Portuguese is my first language, and it is their connection with our family that lives in Brazil. It is also the connection with my identity that I want my daughters to know and understand.”; “Portuguese is their mother tongue.”; “Because we are Brazilians.”; “It’s important to cultivate our roots.”; “So that they have the professional advantage of maintaining a second language, to maintain a little of the Brazilian root and also to help in the relationship with the family that is in Brazil.”; “So they can communicate with my family and learn more about

their culture of origin.”; “Because the more languages they speak, the better. As I know Portuguese, that’s what I teach.”; “The Portuguese language is part of our identity. Part of our family does not speak another language. Also, bilingualism is important.”; “Because it is the tongue of my heart.”; “To maintain its roots, it is part of its identity. Moreover, it facilitates communication with the Brazilian family.”; “To communicate with the family in Brazil and to know more than one language.”; “To insert them in our culture, to a future with more possibilities of employment and travel, so that they can communicate with the family of Brazil.”; “Because they are Brazilian.”; “Because they have relatives who only speak Portuguese and because Portuguese is their roots too.”; “The more languages she can speak, the better.”; “Yes, it’s primordial to me.”; “It is their heritage language, and it is important to speak at least two languages.”; “Because it’s a heritage language.”

In these answers, there are potential data for a more accurate analysis. In this article, we highlight the knowledge of the heritage language concept - which does not always happen, the idea that with the language other intangible values, such as roots, family, are preserved. Besides, we recognize a pragmatic and functional view because the language will possibly be used to communicate with family members and to be a difference in the professional future of these children.

Finally, it was asked what they do to encourage their children to maintain this interest and learning of the Portuguese language and Brazilian culture. The answers are as follows: “We speak Portuguese.”; “Movies, readings, short stories.”; “I only speak Portuguese with my daughters, read books, listen to music, watch cartoons. We have Brazilian friends.”; “I speak in Portuguese; they attend Portuguese classes on Saturdays, annual trips to Brazil.”; “I speak, I sing, I tell stories in Portuguese, and I let her watch cartoons in Portuguese.”; “Daily conversations at home, conversations on the phone, videos called with family and friends from Brazil, reading Brazilian works.”; “Books.”; “We try to only speak Portuguese with them, we listen to Brazilian songs, and they are also enrolled in a bilingual English-Portuguese school.”; “I speak exclusively in Portuguese, read books in Portuguese, organize play-dates with children of other Portuguese-speaking families.”; “I talk to them about everything and a little more. We read every day, even for 5 min. We have books and magazines all over the house. They are already dawn with Monica magazines in hand. But what I consider most important is dialogue. They tell me everything in a nutshell. Naturally, they like to talk. If we are in a group that only speaks English, with me, they speak Portuguese, automatically.”; “We only speak Portuguese at home; sometimes we sing children’s songs in Portuguese, and sometimes we watch Bita and Luna.”; “I speak with him in Portuguese, and we listen to music and watch videos of cartoons in Portuguese.”; “Speak only in the language, watch movies, listen

to music, watch TV, and read.”; “Speak to her only in Portuguese, read books in Portuguese, listen to music in Portuguese.”; “Books. Jokes. Movies.”; “I talk a lot, I read, I watch a movie, I listen to music, I sing, I play, and I call the family of Brazil for FaceTime, so they talked in Portuguese with my son.”; “I speak only Portuguese and encourage the study of the Portuguese language.”; “Talking to them in Portuguese. Spending time with family in Brazil.”; “I speak Portuguese.”; “I only speak Portuguese with them.”; “Reading and watching cartoons in Portuguese, friends, and conversational wheels.”; “We use Portuguese at home for our conversations.”; “I talk to her in Portuguese, and I buy magazines, books.”; “We read books, and we listen to music.”; “I speak Portuguese with them all the time.”; “Sing, cartoons and lots of talks.”; “Books, visit Brazil, Brazilian and Portuguese friends.”; “Not much ... I wish I could encourage more.”

We highlight the fact that the activities done in Portuguese are personal, homemade. The heritage language is something familiar, because they are children or because there is a limitation of the possible real uses of languages in that circumstance. The cultural artifacts - music, books, and cartoons, are apparent in several answers, so are the presence of the Brazilian family, that is possible through the use of technology or travel. Three answers contain references to activities outside the home - two families send their children to a bilingual school, and one organizes activities with other children in the same condition. In agreement with Ana Souza (2010b), “it is important to highlight the impact the school has on the children’s learning experiences and links between their language learning and processes of social identity construction. Indeed, the Brazilian Portuguese school may be the main site where mixed-heritage children interact with other children in the heritage language. For this reason alone, the role of the school in the maintenance of Brazilian Portuguese deserves to be highlighted.” (Souza, 2010b, p. 107).

6. Final Considerations

Throughout this article, from the analysis of a questionnaire answered by Brazilian members of families with children and adolescents who have Portuguese as their heritage language, we learned a little of the dynamics of the use of that language within the family context in which it is inserted.

The answers reveal stories of effort to maintain the language, in contexts in which it competes with an external, hegemonic language, and in contexts in which it also competes with another language that may also be the heritage language of children born in the diaspora.

We believe that the analysis presented here can be replicated in different contexts. Moreover, we believe that the answers can support more in-depth studies and also promote initiatives to support these families.

To assume that the heritage language is a precious commodity that can make a difference not only in the individual’s ability to communicate; but in

the way s/he deals with their families and personal roots will prompt more families to have the determination to keep this costly, but rewarding initiative.

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