

Article

THE EMPIRE OF LANGUAGE: FROM THE RISE OF VERNACULARS TO THE SCHOOLING OF PORTUGUESE

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to relate the institutionalization of Portuguese as a school subject to the process of construction of the cultural and linguistic identity of European kingdoms, as well as their imperial expansion, when language began to be imposed on conquered peoples until it became a reason of State, between the 16th and 18th centuries. Thus, based on a comparative analysis of the pre-textual elements of some compendia and legislative pieces of the time, and with support from the educational, linguistic and cultural historiography on the subject, we propose a decolonial periodization of the schooling of the Portuguese language in four phases: 1) Language as a means of identity affirmation of European kingdoms; 2) Portuguese as an object of literacy, conversion and grammatization; 3) Portuguese as an obligatory component of the First Letters; 4) Portuguese Grammar as introductory content to Latin.

Keywords: colonization, language teaching, history of education, Portuguese language.

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O IMPÉRIO DA LÍNGUA: DA ASCENSÃO DOS VERNÁCULOS À ESCOLARIZAÇÃO DO PORTUGUÊS

RESUMO

Este artigo busca relacionar a institucionalização do português como conteúdo escolar com o processo de construção da identidade cultural e linguística dos reinos europeus, bem como de sua expansão imperial, quando a língua passa a ser imposta sobre os povos conquistados até tornar-se uma razão de Estado, entre os séculos XVI e XVIII. Assim, a partir de uma análise comparativa dos elementos pré-textuais de alguns compêndios e peças legislativas da época, e com suporte da historiografia educacional, linguística e cultural acerca da matéria, propomos uma periodização descolonial da escolarização da língua portuguesa em quatro fases: 1) a língua como meio de afirmação identitária dos reinos europeus; 2) o português como objeto de alfabetização, conversão e gramatização; 3) o português como componente obrigatório das Primeiras Letras; 4) a Gramática portuguesa como conteúdo introdutório do latim.

Palavras-chave: colonização, ensino de línguas, história da educação, língua portuguesa.

EL IMPERIO DEL LENGUAJE: DESDE EL AUGE DE LAS LENGUAS VERNÁCULAS HASTA LA ESCOLARIZACIÓN DEL PORTUGUÉS

RESUMEN

Este artículo busca relacionar la institucionalización del portugués como contenido escolar con el proceso de construcción de la identidad cultural y lingüística de los reinos europeos, así como su expansión imperial, cuando la lengua comenzó a imponerse a los pueblos conquistados hasta convertirse en una razón de Estado, entre los siglos XVI y XVIII. Así, a partir de un análisis comparativo de los elementos pretextuales de algunos compendios y piezas legislativas de la época, y con el apoyo de la historiografía educativa, lingüística y cultural sobre el tema, proponemos una periodización decolonial de la escolarización de la lengua portuguesa en cuatro fases: 1) la lengua como medio de afirmación identitaria de los reinos europeos; 2) El portugués como objeto de alfabetización, conversión y gramaticalización; 3) El portugués como componente obligatorio de las Primeras Letras; 4) Gramática portuguesa como contenido introductorio al latín.

Palabras clave: colonización, enseñanza de lenguas, historia de la educación, lengua portuguesa.

INTRODUCTION

Although it is common to return to the myth of Thoth, the Egyptian god who invented writing according to Plato (1975), or to sacred books in order to address the origin of writing (Havelock, 1995; Ong, 2002), its definitive predominance over oral social forms only occurred during the Renaissance, understood as an intellectual and cultural movement extending from 1300 to 1600, consolidated through print culture and colonization. Its universalization therefore depended on the “tyranny of the alphabet,” to use the expression of Walter D. Mignolo (1989), since it operated through the violent imposition of the language of the court over subjects and conquered peoples, whether for the affirmation of dynastic and territorial identities against rival kingdoms, or for the expansion of empires, the conversion of gentiles, and the glorification of the king’s court language, as proclaimed in the prefaces to their grammars by Elio Antonio de Nebrija (1441–1522), in *Gramática de la Lengua Castellana* (1492); Fernão de Oliveira (1507–1561), in his *Grammatica da Linguagem Portuguesa* (1536); and João de Barros (c.1496–1570), in *Grammatica da Língua Portuguesa* (1540).

In this context, language became one of the most effective devices for marking the specificity of European kingdoms and principalities. In the preface to his *Elegantiae linguae Latinae* [Elegances of the Latin Language], written between 1435 and 1444, Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457) argued that the Kingdom of Aragon should adopt the language of Castile—that is, of the court established in Castile—as its language of culture. Gonzalo García de Santa María (1447–1521), in turn, in *Las vidas de los santos religiosos o Vitas patrum*, whose second edition dates from 1493, wrote that the Kingdom of Toledo, as the habitual residence of kings and courtiers, held primacy over Andalusia, whose language was infested with Moorish terms. This condemnation of Arabisms, which coincided with a movement glorifying Latin—the sacred language of the Vulgate Bible—finds a precursor in Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), who in *De vulgari eloquentia* (1302–1305) sought to justify the court’s role in establishing the standard of the “vernacular language” (Apud Asensio, 1960, p. 402–405).

In the Portuguese case, as territories were retaken from Muslims after the Reconquista, especially after the Battle of São Mamede in 1128, the language spoken by Afonso Henriques (c.1109–1185) and his court gradually distanced itself from Galician (Sousa; Silva, 2018, p. 9) until it acquired written form through a pre-lexicographical production based on medieval bilingual glossarial lists (Latin-vernacular), common throughout medieval Europe as didactic instruments for the teaching and learning of Latin. As Calvet (1987) noted, this situation gave rise to a kind of war among languages, a discursive conflict in which antiquity was demonstrated through proximity to Latin. This mythification of Roman glory, initially elaborated by Italian humanists, produced a “noble emulation,” for it became an enriching element for any monarch wishing to expand his empire through the imposition of his language (Asensio, 1960, p. 400–401).

As Rome became a political model to be followed by kingdoms that sought not only to eternalize their respective languages in official documents and literary works, but also to expand

territorially by imposing their language upon overseas peoples, Latin became the structural and conceptual basis for the formalization and systematization of European vernaculars, in a phenomenon that Sylvain Auroux (1992, p. 65) calls “grammatization,” defined as a “process that leads to describing and instrumenting a language on the basis of two technologies that remain, to this day, the pillars of our metalinguistic knowledge: grammar and the dictionary.”

THE DECLINE OF LATIN AND THE RISE OF VERNACULARS

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, *Gramática de la Lengua Castellana* by Elio Antonio de Nebrija was regarded as the first vernacular grammar in Europe, but it is now known that other comparable works had been produced earlier, such as grammars of Irish (twelfth–fourteenth centuries), Icelandic (twelfth century), Provençal (thirteenth–fourteenth centuries), Welsh, French (1409), and Italian (1437–1441) (Auroux, 1992, p. 14). Likewise, when Nebrija wrote that language had always been the companion of empire, he was taking up assumptions already present in the work of the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla and the Aragonese jurist Gonzalo García de Santa María (Asensio, 1960). His grammar, however, established a new perspective: the issue was no longer merely the formation and unification of European kingdoms, which sought to affirm themselves through political and linguistic differentiation from neighboring or enemy realms, but rather imperial expansion made possible by colonization. This view was embraced and developed by the Portuguese grammarians Fernão de Oliveira, in *Grammatica da Linguagem Portuguesa* (1536), and João de Barros, in *Grammatica da Língua Portuguesa* (1540), works that supported Portugal’s religious and military enterprise in its expansionist projects (Lemos; Franco, 2019).

Although the grammatization of the vernaculars depended on the structure and conceptual elements of Latin grammar—from their alphabetization, that is, the phonetic transcription of speech sounds through the Latin alphabet, to their later consolidation—it was accompanied by a movement of reform and even rejection of Latin. We may therefore say, with Benedict Anderson (2008, p. 44–46), that the gradual decline of the “sacred languages” brought about the officialization of the “vernacular language.” In any case, until the sixteenth century, at least in the Portuguese case, the dignity or quality of the vernacular was proportional to its greater or lesser proximity to Latin grammar, as evidenced by two Dialogues from the period, both articulated in opposition to Castilian and published in two distinct moments: one during the rise of Portuguese colonial policy and the other during its decline, on the eve of the Iberian Union (1580–1640): *Diálogo em louvor da nossa linguagem*, by João de Barros, published in 1540 and appended to his grammar; and *Diálogo em defensam da língua portuguesa*, by Pero de Magalhães de Gândavo (1540–1579), published in 1574.

In the case of the latter, although clearly modeled on João de Barros and employing many of his arguments in favor of the nobility of the Portuguese language—because it was closer to Latin than Spanish—the author suggested an affinity between languages and genres,

claiming that each language possesses a style more proper to itself. On that occasion, he established the first literary canon of the Portuguese language, composed of the following authors: Francisco Sá de Miranda (1481–1558), João de Barros, Heitor Pinto (1528–1584), Lourenço de Cáceres, Francisco de Moraes (c.1500–1562), Jorge Ferreira, António Pinto, Luís de Camões (c.1524–1580), Diogo Bernardes (1530–c.1605), António Ferreira (1528–1569), and André de Resende (c.1500–1573) (Apud Hue, 2007, p. 73–75).

In the seventeenth century, the defense of teaching in the vernacular came to be accompanied by various criticisms of the traditional teaching of Latin and, above all, of Latin grammar, a fundamental component of the trivium within the seven liberal arts of the Middle Ages, due to its complexity, the length of time required for study, its perceived uselessness, and especially its didactic difficulty, since it was taught in Latin. Among those who voiced such criticisms were the Portuguese author Amaro de Roboredo (c.1580–1653), in *Methodo grammatical para todas as linguas* (1619) and *Porta de Linguas* (1623); the Czech thinker John Amos Comenius (1592–1670), both in *Didactica Magna* and *Janua Linguarum*, published in 1631 (Leite; Siqueira, 2024; Assunção; Fernandes, 2007); and the English writers John Milton (1608–1674), in *Of Education* (1644), and John Locke (1632–1704), in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693).

In Portugal, although no grammar of the Portuguese language was produced in the seventeenth century, the period was highly fertile in the production of Orthographies and was marked by the activity of scholars from the Society of Jesus and the Coimbra Course. The Jesuits had made major advances in language studies since the publication, in 1572, of the *Arte da Grammatica Latina* by Father Manuel Álvares (1526–1583), which became a compulsory reference for the teaching of Latin throughout Europe and a symbol of Jesuit instruction until it was banned in 1759 by Marquês de Pombal (1699–1782). Meanwhile, in 1615, Amaro de Roboredo published his *Regras da Orthographia Portugueza* and a *Verdadeira Grammatica Latina para se bem saber em breve tempo, scritta na lingua Portuguesa com exemplos na Latina*; and in 1634 Bento Pereira (1605–1681) composed the great lexicographical monument *Prosodia in vocabularium bilingue, Latinum, et Lusitanum digesta...*, to which a *Thesouro da lingua portugueza* was added from 1661 onward. Before being prohibited by the Pombaline reform of 1759, the work was reissued several times, up to 1750 (Assunção; Fernandes, 2007; Verdelho, 1995).

It is therefore unsurprising that in the eighteenth century criticism of the teaching of Latin based on Álvares's grammar became commonplace not only in the discourse of Portuguese men of letters such as Luís António Verney (1713–1792) and Ribeiro Sanches (1699–1783), but also in the controversy between Jesuits and Oratorians triggered by the publication of *Exercícios de Lingua Latina e Portuguesa acerca de diversas causas* (1711) and the *Novo methodo da grammatica latina* (1752), prepared for the schools of the Congregation of the Oratory at the Royal House of Nossa Senhora das Necessidades, which included a critical prologue pointing out the errors of Manuel Álvares's grammar.

THE CONSTITUTION OF PRIMARY LETTERS

According to Jean Hébrard (1990, p.65–66), before the advent of schooling, the “elementary forms of knowledge” that were taught did not constitute “subjects,” but rather different facets of the ordinary practices of written culture, whether as support for Christian doctrine or as instruments required for the performance of functions and occupations demanded by state bureaucracy and by the new social order. For a small portion of individuals, such knowledge—often acquired in the domestic sphere—served as a preliminary or introductory stage to classes in the Humanities or higher studies. Thus, the configuration of the “school form,” in the expression of Guy Vincent, Bernard Lahire, and Daniel Thin (2001), depended not only on the figure of the master, but also on the constitution of a specific space and the organization of groups of pupils. In Portugal, it was only from the eighteenth century onward that the teaching of writing and arithmetic were added to reading as basic components of primary instruction, to which orthography, elements of grammar, and lessons in civility and Christian doctrine would gradually be added. This development may be illustrated by the publication of *Nova escola para aprender a ler, escrever, e contar*, by Manoel de Andrade de Figueiredo (1670–1735), printed in Lisbon in 1722.

Although published in 1722, the book had been written at least four years earlier, since the licenses of the Holy Office, the Ordinary, and the Paço date from 1719. As Almada (2011) observes, it is a typographical jewel, containing forty-six engraved images, including letterforms resembling the type banks of present-day text-editing programs on computers or smartphones; visual poems; ornamental texts; drawings by the author of pen types exemplifying cursive, bastard, lined, and antique hands, as well as the proper way to handle them; in addition to the illustration preceding the title page, which depicts the banner of Dom João V (1689–1750) with a panoramic view of the Terreiro do Paço in the background, and a portrait of the author at the age of forty-eight, dated 1721 and of unknown authorship.

One point worth noting in the dedication to the monarch is the fact that Figueiredo showed full awareness of the importance of his work for the “glory of the Nation,” given its common “utility,” since through it everyone would know how to “perfectly write the relevant virtues and heroic deeds of Your Majesty.” Likewise, in the “Prologue to the Reader,” he states that what had led masters of other nations to publish books of this kind was “love of the fatherland,” and that the Portuguese, being inferior to no other people, had failed in this regard either because they avoided the labor involved or because they feared criticism. The author thus demonstrates firm conviction in the innovative character of his work, especially in the teaching of writing—that is, of the techniques and procedures associated with alphabetic and numerical scribal activities in metropolitan and colonial Portuguese society of the period. He offered the public, in a systematized form, the rudiments required by beginners in clerical or commercial bureaucracy, but also by those who would perform technical or artistic functions in ornamental handwriting or typography (Figueiredo, 1772, p.iii–iv).

Indeed, no other manual of the period taught so clearly, and with the aid of drawings and illustrations, the proper use of the pen for pedagogical, technical, or artistic purposes. Not even Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651–1719), in his *Conduite des Écoles Chrétiennes*, whose first edition dates from 1706. According to Hébrard (1990, p.95, 101), before the eighteenth century there was no Catholic “doctrine” for “first learnings” capable of articulating catechesis with traditional clerical and mercantile cultures, thereby establishing the sequence of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Although the *Cartinha* (1539) by João de Barros had offered a systematic reflection on the teaching of reading and writing, it did not explore the skills related to reckoning. Thus, only when commercial instruction came to be regulated by the state, under the Pombaline reforms in the second half of the eighteenth century, would arithmetic be institutionalized as a basic component of the *Escolas Menores*, especially because of the new configuration of Portuguese society both in the kingdom and in the colonies.

Returning to Manoel de Andrade de Figueiredo, his compendium is divided into four “Classes or Treatises” supplemented by a “Regimen” concerning both the selection of masters and the preservation of schools “in the highest perfection and virtue.” The first treatise is dedicated to teaching reading in the “Portuguese language” with “ease,” in accordance with the Enlightenment pedagogy of the period, by means of rules intended to prevent beginners from making mistakes in reading and writing. The second presents the various scripts “currently in use,” whose rules the curious reader may learn in order to write them perfectly. The third is devoted to “Portuguese orthography,” considered highly valuable by the author because he had seen papers worthy of praise for their craftsmanship but marred by the errors with which they were written. The fourth, finally, is reserved for arithmetic, not only because it belongs in schools, but also for those who might wish to learn this art later in life “without submitting themselves to a master” (Figueiredo, 1722, p.iv–v).

In the “new school” imagined by him, Manoel de Figueiredo envisions a heterogeneous class not only in terms of advancement in studies—as shown by the presence of monitors and beginners—but also in relation to the purposes for which instruction or elementary technical knowledge was acquired in primary education, as in the two professional groups he exemplifies: clerks and accountants, holders of elementary knowledge that was already necessary for the Portuguese empire even before the institutionalization of the Aula de Comércio in 1759, and before clerks became the teachers of reading and writing for Indigenous populations in the State of Brazil, one year after the Directory Law of 1757 (Souza, 2019). The treatises on scripts, Portuguese orthography, and arithmetic discuss in detail the method proposed for each of these contents, although they do not yet provide any graded sequencing or division of pupils into distinct classes according to age, sex, ability, or professional or academic prospects. The author recognizes that his instructions and warnings are more suitable for private or individualized teaching, but he states that they may also be observed “in schools,” as these were conceived in his time, when the state had not yet intended to manage institutions of this kind.

Such a limitation is hardly surprising when one considers that the principal philosophers and educational theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—with the possible

exception of John Amos Comenius, in *Didactica Magna* (1631), and John Milton, in *Of Education* (1644)—conceived education as something privately directed toward princes and nobles in general, as in the case of John Locke, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693); and even Alexandre de Gusmão, in *Arte de crear bem os filhos na idade da puericia* (1685); or Father Manuel Bernardes, in *Discurso sobre a educação* (1722). In this regard, exemplary is the case of *Apontamentos para a educação de hum menino nobre*, by Martinho de Mendonça de Pina e Proença (1693–1743), printed in Lisbon in 1734 and dedicated to Manoel Teles da Silva. In its prologue, the author explains that his initial intention had been to “translate into the vernacular” the lessons of the best writers who had treated this “important matter,” but confronted with the difficulties of translation and differences in customs, he decided to compose his own notes so that, in his absence, others might oversee the education of his children and so that parents living in the provinces, ignorant of the proper method, might also benefit from them.

An important point in his “Prologue” concerns his criticism of the teaching of Grammar, something which, as we have seen, had already become commonplace among men of letters in the previous century. For the author, the severe punishment associated with the study of Grammar had the effect of driving away “most noble youths, and making them hate books.” He justified this argument not only through the authority of Charles Rollin (1661–1741), Saint Augustine (354–430), the “distinguished grammarian, critic, and philosopher” Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558), and “Lok”—that is, John Locke, his greatest influence—but also, and above all, through his own experience of “teaching publicly for so many years,” armed with the “invincible force of clear reason” (Proença, 1734, p.xvii–xviii). Thus, he maintained that it was impossible to learn the rudiments of the grammar of a language one did not know, whose unfamiliar terms were difficult to retain in memory. This was the same criticism that would be made little more than two decades later, when the decree of June 28, 1759 reformed the teaching of the Humanities and condemned the method practiced for at least two centuries by the Jesuits.

However, although the need to create schools for reading, writing, and arithmetic was a consensus among the men of letters of the period, until roughly the middle of the eighteenth century there was still no consensual expression in Portuguese referring to this kind of instruction. Thus, when the state came to regulate it in 1772, it called such institutions *Escolas Menores* (Minor Schools), rather than *Estudos Menores* (Minor Studies), the latter referring to the teaching of the Humanities (Latin Grammar, Greek, Hebrew, Rhetoric), according to the decree of June 28, 1759. The expression *Primeiras Letras* (Primary Letters), in turn, appears in the compendium *Instrução de principiantes, e novo methodo de se aprenderem as primeiras letras para o uso das escolas da Congregação do Oratorio na Casa de N. Senhora das Necessidades*, first published in 1750, according to Adão (1995, p. 36), although in the digital holdings of the National Library of Portugal only a 1780 edition survives, printed in Lisbon by the Royal Typographical Office with the license of the Royal Censorship Board and Royal Privilege.

The book is divided into five “Letters,” summarized in the same “Warning,” apparently addressed especially to teachers. In the first, four alphabets are presented: small round, small cursive, round capitals, and cursive capitals. The second deals with isolated syllables, so that pupils might begin joining letters together. The third is dedicated to isolated nouns, but only those referring to “Dignities, Courts, and similar matters,” and not to “the proper names of men,” so that boys might acquire some erudition in addition to reading ability. The fourth treats of connected passages, composed of the prayers most commonly used in the Church—the Lord’s Prayer, Hail Mary, Salve Regina, and the Creed—so that they might be memorized and speech might be more easily adjusted to written characters, as well as “spoken passages to written ones.” The fifth letter, finally, “consists of a compendium of the Geography of Portugal and the lives of its Kings,” accompanied by reading exercises intended to awaken in pupils “the appetite to know the things belonging to their Fatherland.” The teaching of writing would only begin after the beginner had become versed in the lesson of History, or whenever the teacher deemed appropriate, “according to the talent and progress of each one.” For this purpose, engraved copy sheets in handwriting style were to be used, becoming the first handwritten letters to be read by boys. By copying and transcribing them, they could, in the same exercise, learn “to read good and bad handwriting: the good of the model from which they write, the bad that they themselves make,” thus saving much labor and time. Once they were writing fluently, the teacher would then have them read “various and more difficult hands,” so that they might understand them easily (*Instrução...*, 1780, p.iv–viii).

Although the author(s) of the *Instrução de principiantes* did not deal specifically with arithmetic, they acknowledged its importance, affirming that it would be useful to print “a brief and clear directory” on the subject. Furthermore, teachers were instructed to teach boys to count, beginning with the easiest multiplication tables and then proceeding to the four principal operations. The “utility of the method” is evident in the organization of the chapters of the book. All dedicate a section to “Examination” and conclude with an admonition, beginning with a “Brief Description of Portugal.” The remaining sections are devoted to the lives of Portuguese kings, beginning with Count Henry (1066–1112) and extending to the “Life of King José I,” also including “Memories for the compendium of the life of Queen Maria I and King Pedro III” (*Instrução...*, 1780, p.ix–x). Until the end of the eighteenth century, only two other compendia employed the expression *Primeiras Letras*, according to the survey carried out by Adão (1995, p.532–535): *Eschola popular das primeiras letras dividida em quatro partes. Parte primeira. Orthoepia ou boa pronunciação, e leitura da lingua portugueza*, published in Coimbra by the Royal University Press in 1796 and written by Jerónimo Soares Barbosa (1737–1816); and *Methodo para ensinar as primeiras letras, e para ler, e escrever a Escritura Portuguesa com perfeição*, by Paulino Manuel Roiz Franco, rejected by the Royal Censorship Board on March 3, 1772.

THE PRINCE'S LANGUAGE AS REASON OF STATE

To historicize the process through which Portuguese became a school subject, it is necessary to return to the sixteenth century, for it was then that the language of the prince, or of his court, became a fundamental component of the enterprise of expanding faith and empire through colonization. This development triggered the production of Primers (*Cartinhas*) and Catechisms specifically directed toward peoples conquered in Asia, Africa, and America. Although few sixteenth-century Primers or Catechisms have survived, it is known that the oldest printed example of the genre is anonymous and dates from 1502 (Cepeda, 1992), and that the first catechism published in Portuguese was the *Cathecismo Pequeno...* by Diogo Ortiz de Vilhegas (1457–1519), printed in 1504.

The *Cartinha para Ensinar a Ler, com as Doutrinas da Prudência Adjunta Uma Solfa de Cantigas para Atiçar a Curiosidade* (1554), by Friar João Soares (1507–1572), seems to have been the most frequently reprinted compendium of the genre (Castelo-Branco, 1971). Yet the most innovative work was the *Cartinha para aprender a ler* (1539), by João de Barros, written when he was Factor of the Casa da Índia. It presented the letters of the alphabet accompanied by illustrative drawings, a pedagogical resource that would only be explored more than a century later by John Amos Comenius. As Araújo (2008, p. 8) explains, Barros's *Cartinha* was published one year before the *Diálogo da Viciosa Vergonha* and the *Gramática da Língua Portuguesa*, which included the *Diálogo em Louvor da Nossa Linguagem* (1540).

From a chronological standpoint, in the Portuguese case the first Primers and Catechisms were followed by the first Grammars. These, in turn, preceded the Orthographies that began to appear in the second half of the sixteenth century, such as *As regras que ensinam a maneira de escrever a orthographia da lingua portuguesa* (1574), by Pero de Magalhães de Gândavo, the first work of its kind, and *A Ortographia da lingua portuguesa* (1576), by Duarte Nunes de Leão (c.1530–1608), both of which drew attention to the importance of learning—and later teaching—writing. Dictionaries appeared last, the first example being the *Dictionarium latino lusitanicum & vice versa lusitanico latinum* (1570), by Jerónimo Cardoso (1508–1569).

The production of Primers and Catechisms in the vernacular was interrupted after the Council of Trent in 1563, in favor of compendia—especially Grammars and Catechisms—in Indigenous and African languages, intended to facilitate and accelerate the conversion of gentiles to Christianity (Mecenas, 2020). In this new format, alphabetization—that is, the teaching of letters as an introduction to reading and Christian doctrine—was replaced by a predominantly oral pedagogy based on the repetition of Catholic songs and chants, since such compendia were for the exclusive use of priest-teachers, who were required to learn the general languages. In Portuguese America, this situation continued into the eighteenth century and was prohibited only with the publication of the *Directorio que se deve observar nas Povoações dos Índios do Pará e Maranhão* on May 3, 1757, whose effects were extended to the State of Brazil on August 17, 1758.

The *Directorio*, besides representing a new phase in colonization by regulating the labor and ways of life of Indigenous populations, also constituted an initial attempt to establish schools of Primary Letters in place of the spiritual, temporal, and pedagogical control exercised by the Society of Jesus. On the one hand, the law innovated by changing the meaning of colonial education from the conversion of souls to the “Civilization of the Indians,” a term introduced by Pombaline legislation (Santos, 2012, p. 226), prohibiting the use of the general languages and making Portuguese a compulsory school subject. On the other hand, it revived the sixteenth-century ideal of the alliance between language and empire, present in both Primers, Catechisms, and Grammars. This is evident in the long sixth paragraph of the law, which may be regarded as an early example of imperial language policy in Europe.

It has always been an unalterably observed maxim among all nations that conquered new dominions to introduce immediately among the conquered peoples their own language, since it is indisputable that this is one of the most effective means of banishing from rustic peoples the barbarity of their ancient customs. Experience has likewise shown that, in the same measure that the use of the language of the Prince who conquered them is introduced among them, there is also implanted in them affection, veneration, and obedience toward that same Prince.

Since all polished nations of the world have observed this prudent and solid system, in this conquest the opposite was practiced to such an extent that the first conquerors concerned themselves only with establishing there the use of the language they called general—an invention truly abominable and diabolical—so that, deprived of all those means by which they might have been civilized, the Indians might remain in the rustic and barbarous subjection in which they have until now persisted.

In order to eradicate this most pernicious abuse, one of the principal concerns of the Directors shall be to establish in their respective settlements the use of the Portuguese language, allowing in no way that the boys and girls belonging to the schools, nor any Indians capable of instruction in this matter, make use of the native language of their nations, or of the so-called general language, but only of Portuguese, in the manner that His Majesty has repeatedly recommended in orders which until now have not been observed, to the total spiritual and temporal ruin of the State.¹

¹ Translated by the author. Original text: *Sempre foi maxima inalteravelmente praticada em todas as Naçoens, que conquistáraõ novos Domínios, introduzir logo nos Póvos conquistados o seu proprio idiôma, por ser indisputavel, que este he hum dos meios mais efficazes para destrerrar dos Póvos rusticos a barbaridade dos seus-antigos-costumes; e ter mostrado a experiencia, que ao mesmo passo, que se introduz nelles o uso da Língua do Priíncipe, que os conquistou, se lhes radica tambem o affecto, a veneração, e a obediencia ao mesmo Principe. Observando pois todas as Naçoens polidas do Mundo este prudente, e sólido systema, nesta Conquista se praticou tanto pelo contrário, que só cuidáraõ os primeiros Conquistadores estabelecer nelle o uso da Língua, que chamáraõ geral; invenção verdadeiramente abominavel, e diabólica, para que privados os Indios de todos aquelles meios, que os podiaõ civilizar, permandecessem na rustica, e barbara sujeição, em que até agora se conservávaõ. Para desterrar este perniciosissimo abuso, será hum dos principaes cuidados dos Diretores, estabelecer nas suas respectivas Povoaçãoens o uso da Lingua Portuguesa, naõ consentindo de modo algum que os Meninos, e Meninas, que pertencem ás Escolas, e todos aquelles Indios, que fôrem capazes de instrucção nesta materia usem da “Língua propria das suas Naçoens, ou da chamada geral; mas unicamente da Portuguesa, na fôrma, que Sua Magestade tem recomendado em repetidas Ordens, que até agora se naõ observáraõ com total ruína Espiritual, e Temporal do Estado (Portugal, 1758, p. 3-4).*

As can be seen, beyond the myth of Roman glory—the supreme example of an empire that imposed its own language upon newly conquered dominions—there was also the belief that language was one of the most powerful means of eradicating the barbarity or rudeness of conquered peoples. The law assumed that the Other, supposedly lacking a written culture based on the Latin alphabet or any element of Christendom, could be objectified and regarded as barbarous and rude. It thus operated according to the assumptions of coloniality, through alphabetization, or the “colonization of writing,” to use the expression of Walter D. Mignolo (1992, p.311–312). Under the new law, the education of conquered peoples ceased to focus exclusively on Christianity and came to include civilization, understood as a means of making Indigenous peoples not only Christians but also vassals aligned with the values and ideology of the prince and his court. Since this was the example of “all polished nations of the world,” the legislator argued that, in Portuguese America, this civilizing mission had been interrupted by the “first conquerors”—that is, the Jesuits—who had encouraged and established the use of the general language, a “truly abominable and diabolical invention,” designed precisely to deprive the gentiles of civilization and keep them in a barbarous condition.

The only known document concerning the schools of reading, writing, and arithmetic mentioned in the *Directorio*, apart from official appointments of directors and the elevation of villages to towns, is the *Breve instrucçam para ensinar a Doutrina Christã, ler e escrever aos Meninos e ao mesmo tempo os principios da lingua Portuguesa e sua orthografia*. This manuscript was found in the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino together with a provisional directive drafted by Luís Diogo Lobo da Silva, governor of the captaincy of Pernambuco between 1756 and 1763. The *Breve Instrucçam* did not deal with writing or arithmetic, restricting itself to the constitutive elements of a sixteenth-century primer or catechism: rudiments of reading and Christian doctrine, together with instructions for teachers.

In the section concerning the Portuguese language, the lessons follow almost the same structure as the sixteenth-century Primers: Roman letters in their “lowercase” and “capital” forms, vowels, abbreviations, accents, punctuation marks, syllables, nouns, adjectives, and verbs, under which heading students learned personal pronouns, the “three principal tenses”—present, past, and future—the moods—indicative, imperative, optative, and infinitive—and the three conjugations, with infinitives ending in *-ar*, *-er*, and *-ir*. The content relating to Christian Doctrine likewise resembles that of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century catechisms: prayers—the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Creed—the meaning of faith, the act of contrition, the Ten Commandments, the three theological virtues, the fourteen Works of Mercy, the seven sacraments of Holy Mother Church, the seven deadly sins, and the fourteen Articles of Faith (apud Souza, 2019, p.430–471. Translated by the author).

In the *Instructions for Teachers*, the document stands as vivid testimony to the importance schooling had acquired in the society of the time, as well as to the role of teachers in shaping the “honest man, who speaks correctly, reads with ease, and writes with perfection, because these are the infallible signs that he has been well educated.” Without such abilities—that is, without mastery of these elementary forms of knowledge—a man becomes an “inert subject,”

an object of mockery, ridicule, and contempt, spending half his life blind, since “the man who does not know how to read and write is fit for few things” (apud Souza, 2019, p. 451).

In its final explanations, the document resumes the seventeenth-century argument that it was impossible to learn Latin or modern foreign languages without prior knowledge of the Portuguese language:

The first principles of language are the declensions of nouns and the conjugations of verbs; and it is indeed a most lamentable thing that, in order to learn the Latin language, the French language, or the Italian language—which are today the most widespread—we begin by declining nouns and conjugating verbs, while most men do not know how to do the same in Portuguese, this being the subject that we ought to study with the greatest care, so that we may speak it with perfection.²

If the “Prince’s Language” in Portuguese America had already become a school subject in 1757, once it became a fundamental component of the schools then created—there is no evidence, in that period, concerning the teaching of arithmetic—only two years later, in the metropolis, did Portuguese attain the status of a fully schooled language. With the reform established by the decree of June 28, 1759, the teaching of Latin, but also of Greek, Hebrew, and Rhetoric, was henceforth to begin in Portuguese (Portugal, 1830). In addition to imposing a new method, the law renewed the teaching of the Humanities, aligning it with the linguistic and pedagogical orientations of the Enlightenment then in circulation. From that point onward, the state became responsible for the control and selection of teachers, thereby institutionalizing the teaching profession (Nóvoa, 1991).

In this sense, we may affirm that by the mid-eighteenth century the place of the Portuguese language was consolidated within Primary Letters, given its fundamental role in literacy, understood as an end in itself, since it enabled learners to perform socially relevant functions linked to religious, state, or commercial bureaucracy. In the Humanities, however, its schooling depended directly upon Latin, constituting a supplementary or accessory kind of knowledge, since its principal purpose was to prepare students for the learning of Latin grammar. This became explicit with the decree of September 30, 1770, which ordered that the “Masters of the Latin Language” should instruct their pupils for six months in the *Grammatica Portuguesa* composed by António José dos Reis Lobato. According to the legislator, the compendium had been approved “for the use of the said classes” because of its “method,” as well as its “clarity and good order” (Portugal, 1829, p. 497). According to Assunção (1997, p. 167), António José dos Reis Lobato was in fact a pseudonym of António Pereira de Figueiredo (1725–1797), one of the leading men of letters of the period and author of the aforementioned *Novo methodo de grammatica latina para o uso das escolas da Congregação do Oratorio* (1752–1753).

² Translated by the author. Original text: *Ozprimeyros principios daLingoa, São azdeclinações dosnomes, eazConjugações dozverbos: ehé Couza bem lamentavel, que para aprendermos aLingoa Latina, aLingoa franceza, ou Italiana, que São hoje azmais Vulgares, principiemos declinando nomes, eConjugando Verbos, eque oznam Saybão ozmais doz homens fazer na Portugueza, Sendo amateria, que devemos estudar com todo odisvello, para apodermos fallarCom perfeição* (apud Souza, 2019, p. 472-473).

In any case, the intention of the law was to make the teaching of Portuguese useful to the Portuguese state, both for establishing laws and for persuading subjects of the “truth of Religion,” since “the correction of national languages” was, according to the King, “one of the most worthy objects for the cultivation of civilized peoples.” Moreover, the study of the Grammar of one’s own language, which should proceed “by principles, and not by mere instinct and habit,” would be capable of preventing errors and rudeness, while facilitating the learning of “other different languages.” The decree also referred to the “schools of reading and writing,” criticizing their existing practices through legal disputes and judgments, and ordering that, in their place, teaching should be carried out through printed texts “or manuscripts of diverse nature,” as well as through the small Catechism of the Bishop of Montpellier, Charles Joachim Colbert, translated by the Archbishop of Évora for the instruction of his diocesan faithful (Portugal, 1829, p.497–498). According to Adão (1995, p.243–245), the Catechism of Montpellier was already known in the principal dioceses of the kingdom, since at the beginning of that same year, 1770, the Jansenist journal *Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques* reported that some dioceses of Portugal (Braga, Évora, Coimbra, Faro, Porto, and Viseu) had already adopted it. According to the author, its adoption as the official compendium aimed principally to displace the Roman Catechism, also known as the Catechism of the Council of Trent or the Catechism of Pope Pius V, published in 1566. Its true author appears to have been the Oratorian François Aimé Pouget (1666–1723), superior of the Seminary of Montpellier.

Two years later, when Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo (1699–1782), already bearing the title of Marquês de Pombal, reformed the University of Coimbra, carrying out what Carvalho (1978, p.141–142) considered the crowning achievement of the pedagogical measures of the cabinet of Dom José I (1714–1777) since the secularization of the missions of Grão-Pará, the *Escolas Menores* were finally regulated, and certain elements of Portuguese grammar were incorporated into the studies of Primary Letters, as attested by paragraph five of the Law of November 6, 1772. There, the progression of contents to be taught was established: reading, writing, and arithmetic, with masters being charged to ensure the “proper form of characters,” the “General Rules of Portuguese Orthography,” “whatever is necessary of its Syntax,” in addition to the “four simple species of Arithmetic,” the Catechism, and the “Rules of Civility in a brief Compendium” (Portugal, 1829, p. 613).

As for this latter content, no compendium of the genre was published during the tenure of Dom José I’s minister. Nevertheless, there existed the classical work of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), *De civilitate morum puerilium* (1530), translated into Portuguese as *A cidade pueril*. According to Adão (1995, p. 264), the teaching of Rules of Civility had no place in most classes of reading, writing, and arithmetic, which seems to indicate that only a small number of pupils had the social conditions necessary to practice them within the family or community to which they belonged. Santos (2012, p.232–233), on the other hand, notes that although the men of letters of the period were not unfamiliar with Erasmus, his importance in the Iberian Peninsula was less than that of courtly literature—that is, manuals of courtesy

and courtly behavior—such as *Corte na Aldeia*, the first of this genre in Portuguese, written by Francisco Rodrigues Lobo (1580–1622) and published in 1619.

Already in the preamble to the Law of November 6, 1772, when announcing that the *Escolas Menores* were the place “where the first elements of all Arts and Sciences are formed,” the legislator showed full awareness of their selective character. The regulation was directed to two distinct social groups: those “employed in rustic services and mechanical arts,” who were not destined for higher studies and for whom it sufficed to remain within the exercises of reading, writing, and arithmetic; and those “fit for studies,” who should devote themselves to the “necessary instruction of the Latin Language,” such that only a few would need to be “qualified for Philology” and enter the “Academic Faculties, which make men distinguished in the States” (Portugal, 1829, p. 613). To achieve such aims, the King was to appoint a group of expert chorographers to prepare a “General and Particular Plan and Calculation” of all the districts of his kingdoms and dominions, and of the number of inhabitants who, by prudent estimation, might benefit from the Minor Schools under those criteria. Such a plan, or “map,” would also specify the number of masters required for each of the arts pertaining to the *Escolas Menores*, distributing them among districts, cities, and towns. According to the King, besides the tribunal of the Royal Censorship Board, created by the decree of June 4, 1771 to direct and administer the studies of the Minor Schools of Portugal and its dominions, ministers had also been consulted—“many learned, and many zealous for the service of God and Mine, and for the public utility of My vassals” (Portugal, 1829, p.539, 613).

CONCLUSION

In light of the foregoing, we may affirm that the schooling of the Portuguese language, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, accompanied the slow process through which the Lusitanian kingdom asserted its unification and consolidated itself as an empire, as well as its movement of approximation to and distancing from Latin. It thus became a political factor of fundamental importance for the emergence of three cultural phenomena: grammatization, literarization—or the formation of a vernacular literary canon, as we have seen in Pero de Magalhães de Gândavo—and schooling, the specific object of this article.

In this way, the rise of the vernaculars, together with the growth of metalinguistic production, coincided with the hegemonization of written culture over oral social forms. This process resulted from a situation of confrontation between European kingdoms and their enemies (neighbors or foreigners, Christians or Muslims), but it was also driven by processes of learning and teaching that developed from their rudimentary forms, through pre-lexicographical production prior to print culture—especially Latin-Portuguese bilingual glossaries—to the Primers, Catechisms, and Grammars of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. We therefore propose a periodization of this process in four key moments.

The first moment, prior to colonization and to the emergence of print and the book, was a preparatory period, for it marked the rise of the vernaculars in Europe generally and in Portugal particularly. Here, the language of the prince was one of the most effective devices for marking its specificity in relation to other kingdoms. This phenomenon resulted from contact with an Other hitherto unknown, represented above all by the Muslim enemy.

The second moment coincided with literacy and grammatization in the vernacular and may be dated from 1502, the year in which the oldest surviving primer was printed. Under such circumstances, the language of the prince, or of the court, already mythified as an identity marker of European kingdoms, became a fundamental component of the enterprise of expanding faith and empire through colonization, thereby triggering the production of primers, catechisms, and grammars.

The third moment began with the promulgation of the *Directorio que se deve observar nas Povoações dos Índios do Pará e Maranhão* of May 3, 1757, which, by imposing the “language of the prince” upon Indigenous populations in place of the general languages grammatized by the Jesuits, transformed Portuguese into a reason of state and made its literacy a compulsory school component. In this period, the predominant purpose of teaching was no longer restricted to conversion, but also encompassed the incorporation of conquered peoples into the ideals of the metropolis.

The fourth moment, finally, marked a bifurcation into two stages of the schooling of Portuguese: one related to the teaching of reading and writing, or literacy in the strict sense, and the other to its grammatical elements, especially orthography and syntax. The social aims of this bifurcation were justified in the Law of November 6, 1772 itself, whose preamble explicitly states that it was directed toward two distinct social groups: those “employed in rustic services and mechanical arts,” who were not destined for higher studies and for whom it sufficed to remain within the exercises of reading, writing, and arithmetic; and those “fit for studies,” who should devote themselves to the “necessary instruction of the Latin Language,” such that only a few would need to qualify themselves for entry into higher studies.

Thus, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment—that is, more precisely, from 1502 to 1772—the process through which Portuguese became a school subject completed a first cycle. Its next stage would be to dispute with Latin a hegemonic place in the teaching of the Humanities, especially when Secondary Education became institutionalized in the nineteenth century and taught contents were reconfigured as school subjects, with graded sequencing, progression of contents, new methods, and specific purposes. But that is a matter for another article.

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