

INTERVIEW

For the sake of all who are interested in the area of Portuguese as a Nonnative Language, the current edition of *Matraga* offers a special gift: an interview with two of our renowned pioneers. We are very proud to announce that we have talked to professors Norimar P. Judice and Rosa Marina B. Meyer and asked them four questions about their careers, their opinion on the area's current situation and their expectations for the future of this ever-growing area. We invite our readers to take advantage of this interview as its content can foster and inspire our own careers. Hope you enjoy reading it.

The Editors

TEACHING PORTUGUESE FOR FOREIGNERS IN RIO DE JANEIRO/BRAZIL: an interview with two renowned pioneers.

Alexandre do Amaral Ribeiro
Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro

As a country, where a hundred of cultures live together since always, it seems there is no reason for Brazil's domestic and foreign policies not to acknowledge the importance of Brazilian Portuguese Language diffusion. Current discussions and efforts for promoting internationalization in many areas recognize the role of language teaching for the accomplishment of such a goal. How to internationalize without fostering language teaching and intercultural studies?

This is definitely not a new issue in Brazilian history scenario. Since colonization, when natives and immigrants had to deal with the learning and implementation of Portuguese language, up to contemporary international policies, we have been a real melting pot of a wide range of cultures. Formed by many Diasporas, Brazil's soft power is strong enough to stamp its mark in the modern world. For all that, Brazilian language and educational policies have given not great attention to the relevant role of the teaching of Portuguese language for foreigners and its consequences for the improvement of the economy, international relations, education etc. Quite the contrary, two pioneers of Portuguese for Foreigners have always believed in the area and as real eager beaver have opened way to its growth.

They are Norimar P. Judice and a Rosa Marina de Brito Meyer. Their careers show their efforts and great contribution to the area's consolidation, especially, but not only, in Rio de Janeiro. Professors at Fluminense Federal University (UFF) and Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio) respectively, they are on the bases of the foundation of both the International Society of Portuguese for Foreigners (SIPLE) and the Association of Teachers of Portuguese for Foreigners (APLE-RJ). As their work is very vast, we are proud of having interviewed them and invite our reader to know a little bit more about the history of Portuguese for Foreigners in our country.

Alexandre Ribeiro: *You are known as two of the pioneers of the “Portuguese as a Foreign/Second Language” area in Brazil, especially, in Rio de Janeiro. How do you analyze the trajectory of this area in relation to its challenges and acknowledgement?*

Norimar Judice: The field in Brazil has faced ups and downs along the way in different periods, on account of the variations of the political and economic projection of the country on the international scene. In the 1990s and 2000s, for example, this projection was quite positive, resulting in a greater interest in our language and culture. Having followed this trajectory closely since the 1980s, in 2001 we created, together with Patrícia Almeida, the research group Brazilian Portuguese for foreigners: studies and testimonies on the constitution and consolidation of the field with the purpose of looking more deeply into this object of study. A body of research in line with theoretical frameworks of Historiography and Social Representations has been developed within this group with a focus on the trajectory of the field from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century.

The progressive development of the field in Rio de Janeiro, largely due to the efforts of the higher education institutions in the region in which the field is situated (PUC-Rio, UFF, UFRJ, UERJ), has placed our state in a special position in the national scene. In the second half of the twentieth century and in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, even in the face of the variations of Brazil's insertion in the international community, we successfully handled the constant challenges that came up and were able to: a) elaborate innovative materials for teaching the language and the Brazilian culture, taking into account the different profiles of our foreign students; b) turn our institutions into research and teacher education centers, expanding the activities of the field in undergraduate and postgraduate programs, inserting it in specific department sectors; c) organize public exams in order to make up a teaching body; d) set up teaching and research centers; e) promote local, national and international events to present the academic production of the field; f) publish books and periodicals of the field, adding our production to those of other teaching and research centers; g) support national and international policies and actions related to the diffusion of our language and culture (for instance, participating in international cooperation and exchange program agreements, in teacher

education actions in the Mercosur countries, and in the development and application of the Celpe-Bras proficiency exams); h) host international associations of professionals from the field, such as the International Society of Portuguese as a Foreign Language - SIPLE, and create local associations such as the Association of Teachers of Portuguese for Foreigners of the State of Rio de Janeiro - APLE-RJ - to organize and consolidate the field and contribute to the continuing education of teachers. It is not enough to train teachers to act in different contexts of our field of education; it is also necessary to offer them professional recognition.

As for the recognition of the field over these decades, we were not able to go very far, but we have perseverance and awareness, and we know there is still a lot to do.

Rosa Marina de Brito Meyer: I started my career teaching Portuguese to international students back in 1970, when I was still attending the second year as an undergraduate student. Later I realized that I had participated in the building of a whole new field of teaching and researching the Portuguese language. As stated by the prominent scholar Francisco Gomes de Matos in *paLavra* no. 13 (Meyer 2004:9), “PL2 groups began to be constituted (in PUC-Rio), as of 1969.” Along the following decades, until the end of Century 20, different types of classes were offered in a variety of institutions to incoming speakers of other languages, widening the field. But it was a slow progression: the research line “Portuguese as a Second Language: description and teaching” was created in 1993 only, more than 20 years later. It finally gained broad attention as a consequence of the Federal government’s effort in internationalizing Brazilian universities on the first decade of 21st Century. Nevertheless, despite being taught in a larger number of locations, PL2/PLE is still found as a research area in a too scarce number of institutions.

Alexandre Ribeiro: *Despite the origins of Portuguese as a Foreign/ Second Language may be related to Brazil’s colonization and the start of this area’s professional practice be associated to the 1950s, hundreds of beginners came out the last few years as this area happened to be seen as a new job opportunity and research field in Brazil. How do you see this boost and its implications for linguistic and educational policies?*

Norimar Judice: As our field emerges today, due to the persistent activity of many people and some national policies of diffusion of the Brazilian Portuguese language and culture (even though the necessary support for the development of the actions involved does not always follow), the number of young people who have interest in the field as a new job opportunity has increased, and this is very promising. Some of them, however, moved by their enthusiasm, make hastily incursions as teachers of Portuguese for foreigners. The university centers that have the field established and consolidated should, along with the professional associations, adequately accommodate and direct the growing interest and the praiseworthy enthusiasm of these students, preparing them and guiding them appropriately through the practice of teaching. The university should be in charge of offering student teachers solid basic education, which requires, as well as the building of solid knowledge about the Brazilian Portuguese (considering their variations in use), knowledge of reading and writing skills, about the Brazilian culture in different manifestations, and the knowledge of teaching approaches and new literacy skills related to new technologies. The associations are responsible for promoting actions that support continuing professional development that will, in turn, result in professional recognition. The governmental institutions should implement linguistic and educational policies that create a favorable framework for education and professional practice in this field.

Rosa Marina de Brito Meyer: Brazilian Portuguese had always been appealing to speakers of other languages due to personal interest for our arts – popular music, photography, painting etc; also, the triad soccer – carnival – beach plus a Brazilian girlfriend or boyfriend were the main reason why people considered learning our language. The rise of Brazil as an important world player in the turn of 20th to 21st Century gave new meaning to the teaching/learning of Portuguese and to researching it as a second or foreign language. There was a moment when more than 100 American universities offered Portuguese classes. Unfortunately, though, our economy slowed down, our international presence became less relevant and consequently classes have been cancelled here and abroad. This move shows very clearly that the importance of a language in the international scenario is due to the political, commercial and economical importance of the country where it is spoken, not the opposite.

Alexandre Ribeiro: *How do you assess the tendencies of the area's academic production in terms of its theoretical and methodological milestones?*

Norimar Judice: Theoretical and methodological frameworks are in tune with the reality and ideas of their time. In this era - being one of spaces and time shortened by the new technologies of information and communication, of enormous expansion of speed and the possibilities of knowing and interacting at a distance and in real time, but also, paradoxically, and at the same time, being an era of accumulation of tasks which reduces the time for reflection - new ways of thinking, articulating, systematizing, and acting are emerging. This scenario, which implies a restructuring of the universities, now educating for global citizenship, universal vision, and investing in permanent exchanges of students and teachers with foreign institutions, has a direct impact on our area. As a result, new ways of thinking about organization, new theories, new methodologies and practices are already arising due to this situation. In the universities of Rio de Janeiro, contemporary studies in the field of Portuguese for foreigners, aligned with theoretical frameworks of Interculturalism, Social Representations and Historiography, reflect the intensified cultural exchanges in the world today, the need for reflection on the representations of Brazil and Brazilians internalized by natives and foreigners and presented in the teaching materials, and the importance of knowing the history of the field in order to rethink it in the present and project its future.

Rosa Marina de Brito Meyer: In general, Portuguese L2/LE is studied from an Applied Linguistics point of view. It is a very relevant approach once it covers the main aspects of teaching and learning, building didactic materials, assessing the language. A comparative approach - mainly with Spanish - may also be found in quite a number of institutions. At PUC-Rio, we primarily chose to focus on the Linguistic approach, aiming at describing our language as a second and/or a foreign language, with a Functional theoretical and methodological support. In the first decade of the 21st Century, we added the Intercultural approach to our research, thus enlarging our field of action. As a consequence, the team of PUC-Rio researchers, teachers and graduate students have produced more than 200 articles and 70 thesis and dissertations throughout

roughly 30 decades. Some articles can be read at the “Séries em Português como Segunda Língua ou como Língua Estrangeira” at <<https://doi.org/10.17771/PUCRio.PLE.32903>>; some end-of-course monographies can be found at <<https://www.maxwell.vrac.puc-rio.br/monografia.php?strSecao=consulta&nrsseqprg=130>>; most books, thesis and dissertations are available at <<http://www.dbd.puc-rio.br/sitenovo/#aviso>>.

Alexandre Ribeiro: In your opinion, what is the current situation of Portuguese for Foreigners teachers' education and its future perspectives?

Norimar Judice: The current situation of the teacher education in the field of Portuguese for Foreigners in Brazil has been changing for the better since the 1990s. The universities involved, most of which are located in the Southeast region of Brazil, have played a relevant and continuous role in this development. However, there are still few governmental policies focused on this objective with too few educational actions implemented as a result. As the state of Rio de Janeiro houses four of the institutions involved in the field - from under graduate to postgraduate studies - from there comes an important contribution to the constitution of teaching staff working in universities and in language institutes in Brazil and abroad.

Teacher education in the field of Portuguese for foreigners can greatly benefit from contemporary technologies and approaches. With them, it is possible to act more productively - in extent and quantity - at the same time keeping the focus on quality.

As for prognosticating the future, in times of international instability and national insecurity, it is a task that I find difficult. However, I am sure that the generation of Portuguese teachers for foreigners graduating in Rio de Janeiro and in other states of the country will certainly have the same commitment and better conditions to demand the implementation of policies and to develop actions in this direction.

Rosa Marina de Brito Meyer: Unfortunately, there are few programs dedicated to Portuguese as a Second Language. In general, the misconception that any Portuguese graduate can teach PL2/PLE is widely accepted as true. This is not the case though. Specialized education is needed and it is necessary that specific programs – either undergraduate or graduate – are created. At PUC-Rio we have been

offering the specialization “Formação de Professores de Português para Estrangeiros” since early 90’s with excellent response by the work market. It is not enough to speak Portuguese to be able to teach it to speakers of other languages; it is not enough to have attended a traditional Letters undergraduate course either; it is not enough to have a M.A or a PhD degree in Portuguese or any related area. It is imperative to seek for specialized education in order to properly educate students.

Recebido: 13/09/2018

Aceito: 14/09/2018