

# Foreign language teaching and LGBTQIA+ identities: a literature review from a Southern perspective

*Ensino de línguas estrangeiras e identidades LGBTQIA+: uma revisão de literatura em uma perspectiva do Sul*

*La enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras y las identidades LGBTQIA+: una revisión bibliográfica desde la perspectiva del Sur*

## ABSTRACT

There is a growing interest in research that discusses the teaching of foreign languages from a critical conception of teaching, enabling language classes to be spaces for the critical formation of subjects, questioning unequal power relations and social injustices, including, for example, combating prejudice against LGBTQIA+ people. With this scenario in mind, this article presents a literature review of the main studies that discuss the relation between foreign language teaching and LGBTQIA+ identities. The article is divided in two parts: the first part presents the main topics and concepts for research on the area of language teaching and sexuality, whilst the second part highlights the main challenges and concepts of research in this area that aims to have a Southern perspective.

Key-words: Foreign language teaching; linguistic education; sexuality; Queer Theory.



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Danilo da Silva Solera

[danilo.solera@gmail.com](mailto:danilo.solera@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4623-1003>

Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, São Paulo, Brasil

## RESUMO

Há um crescente interesse por pesquisas que discutam o ensino de línguas estrangeiras a partir de uma concepção crítica de ensino, possibilitando que as aulas de línguas sejam espaços de formação crítica dos sujeitos, questionando relações desiguais de poder e injustiças sociais, incluindo, por exemplo, o combate ao preconceito contra pessoas LGBTQIA+. Com esse cenário em mente, este artigo apresenta uma revisão de literatura dos principais estudos que discutem a relação entre o ensino de línguas estrangeiras e as identidades LGBTQIA+. O artigo está dividido em duas partes: a primeira parte apresenta os principais tópicos e conceitos para a pesquisa na área de ensino de línguas e sexualidade, enquanto a segunda parte destaca os principais desafios e conceitos das pesquisas nesta área que visam ter uma perspectiva do Sul.

**Palavras-chave:** Ensino de Línguas estrangeiras; educação linguística; sexualidade; teoria queer.

## RESUMEN

Existe un creciente interés en investigaciones que discuten la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras a partir de una concepción crítica de la enseñanza, posibilitando que las clases de idiomas sean espacios para la formación crítica de sujetos, cuestionando las relaciones desiguales de poder y las injusticias sociales, incluyendo, por ejemplo, el combate a los prejuicios contra las personas LGBTQIA+. Con este escenario en mente, este artículo presenta una revisión bibliográfica de los principales estudios que discuten la relación entre la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras y las identidades LGBTQIA+. El artículo se divide en dos partes: la primera presenta los principales temas y conceptos para la investigación en el área de la enseñanza de idiomas y la sexualidad, mientras que la segunda parte destaca los principales desafíos y conceptos de la investigación en esta área que pretende tener una perspectiva del Sur.

**Palabras clave:** Enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras; educación lingüística; sexualidad; teoría queer.

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### Correspondência:

Nome por extenso do autor principal  
Rua XXX, número XXX, Bairro XXX, Cidade, Estado, País.

### Direito autoral:

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## INTRODUÇÃO

As argued by Tommaso Milani and Michelle Lazar (2007, p. 308-309) in the article “Seeing from the South: Discourse, gender and sexuality from southern perspectives”, the term Global South “encapsulates the conflation between geographical positionality and political marginality, as well as captures the complexity of contemporary postcolonial conditions”. According to the authors, a Southern perspective goes beyond shedding light on the cultural and political context of production of knowledge of the South (although that is in itself a foundational aspect of the importance of knowledge produced in the South), but also to align theoretically with the knowledge produced theoretical discussions around “a set of concepts and approaches that have been labelled ‘southern theories’, ‘theories from the south’, or ‘southern epistemologies’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Connell 2007, 2014; de Sousa Santos 2014; Mignolo 2009; Miskolci 2014)” (Milani; Lazar, 2007, p.309). In their article, the authors explain the difference between these terms, but they adopt the terms “Southern perspectives” and “viewpoints” in favor of the aspect of vision encapsulated in them. Thus, based on these authors, a Southern perspective on an issue entails the recognition and valorization of the knowledge produced by authors in the Global South and the theories they created around the concept of “Southern theories”, which are often based on problems and knowledge often ignored by the Global North.

I choose to start this article by referencing Milani and Lazar’s work not only because their article illustrates well the contributions of the South to the studies of the relation between gender, sexuality and language in the field of Sociolinguistics, but also because their definition of South effectively conveys the problems and contributions of research in the South in the area of sexuality<sup>1</sup> and language teaching, which is the scopus of this article.

Similarly to Milani and Lazar’s article, many other studies have helped us to understand the places LGBTQIA+ identities occupy in our society and how these places have changed recently (Borba, 2015; Ferraz, 2014, 2016, 2019; Ferreira; Sene, 2018). Borba (2015), for example, explains that we have experienced a great profusion of new identities that emerge or reveal themselves, and the human sciences have sought to study them from different fields (sociology, psychology, anthropology, language studies). Nevertheless, it is clear that the boundaries between identities are increasingly blurred, since we still try to characterize them based on binarisms, and anyone who “escapes” the dichotomy of heterosexual man vs. woman is considered “deviant” (Borba, 2015, p. 95). Similarly, Ferraz and Miquelon (2020, p. 95) argue that heterosexuality was historically constructed as the central, acceptable, and expected sexuality, while all other sexualities were considered deviant, and demonstrate how this leads to the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ people.

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<sup>1</sup> It’s important to note that, as explained by (Piscitelli, 2009), the studies of gender and sexuality are intrinsically related. Due to the necessity of defining a scopus, this article will favor the discussion of matters of sexuality and language. However, due to that intrinsic relation between gender and sexuality, I will sometimes make reference to gender as well. I will always consider both social traits as inseparable.

Ferreira and Sene (2018), in turn, argue that we are living in a time when we have a great diversity of ever-changing identities in classrooms, and this can cause strangeness for those who live identities that for so long were (and still are) considered the norm to be followed.

For a long time LGBTQIA+ identities were invisibilized or minoritized and, although, nowadays, they are increasingly present in different places in our society, including schools (which generates conflicts and tensions since heterosexuality still occupies a central place), the current historical context is a daunting one for the promotion of policies and discourses aimed at the rights of LGBTQIA+ people (Saunton; Borba, 2021, Ferraz; Miquelon, 2020). In Brazil specifically, for example, even though we have experienced some progress in recent decades through a cycle of citizenship and the conquest of rights, in which the LGBTQIA+ population has reached an unprecedented level of visibility and political strength (Quinalha, 2022, p. 130), public policies and debates aimed at visibility and respect for diversity ended up having the paradoxical effect of creating fertile ground for prejudiced discourse, which takes advantage of Brazil's homophobic and sexist nature (Saunton; Borba, 2021). This phenomenon is by no means confined to Brazil, as the "anti-gender offensive (Saunton; Borba, 2021; Silva, 2020; Vianna; Bortolini, 2020)" seems to be a transnational agenda against the promotion of debate, practices and, most importantly, political policies, that aim to be more progressist and inclusive in terms of gender equality, diversity of identities and a view of gender as a social construct (in oposition to a view of gender as a natural phenomenon, i.e. sex determines the gender).

While this complex context calls for education that moves beyond heterocentric thinking, the challenges for educators and researchers are numerous. Many education professionals are still afraid, do not understand the importance of, or do not know how to provide an education that takes into account sexual or gender diversity; the lack of research in this area only contributes to a scenario of uncertainty (Nelson, 1999); teachers can often feel uncomfortable when faced with homophobic discourse in the classroom (Ferraz, 2014); and many teachers find it troublesome to deal with differences in the classroom, usually as a result of a homogenizing culture focused on rational aspects of the subjects' education (Jesus, 2016). Taking Brazil as an example, Saunton and Borba (2021) show that the lack of teacher training and public policies for education focused on LGBTQIA+ identities has promoted a scenario in which many teachers are, actually, *opposed* to social advances for LGBTQIA+ people. There is an urgent need for discussions that promote greater visibility and equity between diverse sexual and gender identities, criticism of discourses of prejudice, and tools that enable teachers to act in a way that corresponds to the current world in which we live. As it will be more thoroughly explained later in this article, critical language teaching approaches have also drawn attention to the importance of including the themes of gender and sexuality, more specifically LGBTQIA+ identities, in language classes, in order to account for the need of a more inclusive and just education, as well as teacher education that supports the needs of teachers.

This article thus aims to present a literature review of research on foreign language teaching and LGBTQIA+ identities, especially considering the role that sexual identities might play in language teaching. In the first section I discuss the research topics and concepts favored by scholars in the field; in the second section I highlight the contributions and main challenges faced by researchers in the Global South, especially in Brazil, and how their studies might differ from research conducted in the North, with an emphasis on the questioning and reconceptualization of *Queer Theory*, and the main paths some scholars are taking to overcome the theoretical challenges of the production of knowledge in the South.

It's worth noting that this article does not aim to reference every research on the topic that has been published. Rather, its purpose is to highlight some papers and books that are either mandatory reading, novel research, and/or present interesting discussions that can help other researchers to start researching the topic. The main goal is to foster dialogue among scholars who agree that language education should promote a more equal society in terms of sexual identities through the lens of southern theories.

## 1. FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LGBTQIA+ IDENTITIES IN A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

### 1.1 Queer studies and the socio-discursive construction of gender and sexuality.

A plethora of research studies on sexuality and gender rely on *Queer Theory*, as it is often useful to explain and theorize gender and sexuality as a socioconstruct, in opposition to sexuality and gender as a natural phenomenon (Nelson, 1999, 2005. Moita-lopes, 2006; Moita-Lopes; Fabricio, 2020, to name a few examples). The *Queer Theory*, often (but not only) associated with the work of Judit Butler, has become a cornerstone for research that deals with sexual identities. In "Gender Trouble", Butler theorizes that sexual identities and gender are not facts, but acts that we perform. For Butler (2019), who starts from a discussion of the feminist movement, it is important not only to criticize and deconstruct the unequal power relation between men and women, but also to deconstruct the very cultural and social structure that establishes genders and places heterosexual men at the center. As Rea and Amancio (2018) point out, however, we find mention of the use of queer (a term that until then had been used as a pejorative way to refer to the LGBTQIA+ community) in the work of Gloria Anzaldua (2012 apud Rea; Amancio, 2018) as a form of self-identification and the creation of a non-conformist identity in relation to the norm, on the margins, or, using Anzaldua's own concept, Mestiza, that is, an "assumption of the place of frontier and encounter of identities". Thus, the term queer is, first and foremost, a term that has been re-signified as an identity, being, at the same time, a political, academic and militant movement.

In "Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of 'sex'", Butler (1999) develops the concept of performativity to explain the unnatural connection between sex and gender, and that gender and

sex become “matter” through discourse. Butler (1999) argues that gender is not merely a cultural expression of sex, as was once thought during some moments of the feminist movement. Rather, gender and sex have an *effect* on the world through regulatory norms, these being social practices. Butler realizes that there is a relation between sex and gender to be explained and discussed, albeit constructed through discourse and cultural aspects, since “sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs” (Butler, 1999, p. 110). It is clear from Butler’s work that it is important not only to criticize and deconstruct the unequal power relation between men and women, but also to deconstruct the very cultural and social structure that institutes gender and places heterosexual men at the center (Butler, 2019).

The concept of performativity is fundamental to understanding Butler’s thinking, as it argues that gender is performed by the subject through cultural practices and discourse. In other words, it is through cultural practices themselves, such as haircuts and clothing, that gender is constructed, or rather, performed. Thus, Butler demonstrates that the roles, characteristics, and, above all, powers attributed to gender are artificial, since they are discursive and therefore not natural, albeit strictly linked to sex and the duality of the sexes, since they are performed based on the perception of the sexes of individuals.

The Queer Theory has value to scholars for many reasons. According to Nelson (1999), the word queer not only sums up the various sexual identities included in the LGBTQIA+ acronym, but also makes it possible to problematize the fixed notion of sexual identity. Borba (2015, p.95), for example, points out that, “with the advent of queer theory, non-normative identities have been discussed from a new and liberating perspective” (author’s translation), since it allows us to think about sexualities beyond the traditional perspectives, those which are still based on the binarisms man/woman and straight/homo, and that fail to make visible identities that don’t fit into these categories.

Thus, “the different institutions and social practices are constituted by genders and are also constitutive of genders. These practices and institutions ‘manufacture’ subjects” (Louro, 1997, p. 25). Therefore, language has a regular and constitutive power to perpetuate and solidify the structures that sustain these regulatory activities. It is worth pointing out that this process is meticulous and, as Guacira Louro (2008, p. 18) points out, it is always “unfinished”, since it is ongoing and happening all the time. In other words, gender and sexualities are always and constantly under construction - and regulation - culturally, socially, and linguistically.

Hence, through the lens of the *Queer Theory*, both gender and sexual identity are social-discursive constructions maintained through institutions (such as family, church and, mostly important for this article, the school). *Queer theory* has significantly bridged gender and sexuality studies with language studies by emphasizing the role of discourse in constructing identities and social realities and, consequently, created a fruitful space and support for critical approaches to language teaching. As Rodrigo Borba (2015, p. 96) points out, if gender is a discursive construction

maintained through institutions, it is undeniably important to think about gender through language studies, since language has a regular and constitutive power to perpetuate and solidify the structures that sustain these regulatory activities.

## 1.2 The main areas of interest for research on sexual identities and Foreign language teaching

As argued by many scholars (Liddicoat, 2009; Ferraz, 2014, 2016, 2019; Freitas; Pessoa, 2019), if foreign language teaching is to be relevant today, it is crucial that the topics covered in class dialogue with the issues on the agenda in our society. According to them, it is no longer enough for the teacher to know the syllabus of the subject, but they need to be aware of the inequalities in the world so that the classes remain relevant and **provide a truly transformative education**. It is in this effervescent scenario of change that discussions on gender, especially those that seek to problematize stereotypes and fixed social roles, promote greater gender equity, and deconstruct prejudices in relation to dissident gender identities, such as trans people, are gaining prominence in language teaching.

The **deviation from more traditional perspectives of language teaching**, often restricted to linguistic aspects are, at the same time, a challenge and subject of interest for scholars interested in the relation between sexuality and Foreign language teaching (Ferraz, 2019; Jesus, 2020; Ferreira; Sene, 2018; Silva; Dias; Bezerra, 2021). As Danié de Jesus (2020) argues, the difficulty of understanding gender and sexuality relations in English language classes is the result of a view of communicative language that is still present in many English language teacher training courses, as opposed to a view of language as a socio discursive practice that allows for the construction of identities and the transformation of social practices. The construction of a theoretical approach in favor of language classes as a space for critical education and the development of citizenship is indeed a challenge for scholars, as traditional views of language teaching are still in debate. Thus, if on one hand the inclusion of a discussion about sexual identities is more than welcome when considering a critical view of language teaching, on the other hand, it is still a work in progress, especially when considering teacher education. As Ferraz<sup>2</sup> (2019) argues, for a long time, topics such as politics, religion, and sexuality were avoided in foreign language classes to make everyone feel comfortable.

An indispensable scholar who helps one understand the role of sexuality and LGBTQIA+ identities in Foreign Language teaching is Cinthya Nelson (1999, 2005, 2015). Much of Nelson's work is about **how sexuality is present, even if unintentionally, in foreign language classes**.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that Ferraz (2019) defends the concept of Language Education, in opposition to "Language Teaching", in order to highlight the conceptual difference of both views. According to the author, Language Education better encompasses the historical, cultural, philosophical, and linguistic change of these new critical understanding of what language teaching and learning (much to what is described in this page) are proposing.

Nelson demonstrates, through narratives and practical examples in the classroom, that when language teaching, especially (but not only) foreign languages (the researcher's field of study), does not aim to problematize gender issues, it ends up validating stereotypes and fixed roles.

Nelson (2015) emphasizes that we need to think about teaching that is more aware of the specificities of queer people, in order to diversify curricula, deal with prejudice and bullying in language classes. According to the author, the presumption of heterosexuality is the (cultural) habit of assuming that people are heterosexual until they reveal that they identify differently. Similarly, compulsory heterosexuality (Nelson, 2015) refers to society's expectation and pressure for individuals to assume a heterosexual identity, corroborating the maintenance of central and acceptable identities. Although at first these concepts seem unrelated to the field of education, they result in **the erasure of “divergent” identities from the curriculum and pedagogical practices**, since it is expected or assumed that everyone at school conforms to the heterosexual identity. Nelson (2015) presents a clear example to illustrate these issues when she describes a teacher who assumes the heterosexuality of a female student. During a Spanish grammar exercise, the teacher corrects the student's vocabulary and gender usage to align with heteronormative expectations for a girl—unaware that the student was indeed referring to her girlfriend. Although not every language is gendered as Spanish, her insights shed light on how language classes are never sexually neutral, even when discussions regarding sexuality aren't the main topic.

Nelson (2015) also argues that we need to think beyond “de-sexualized” (or strongly heterosexualized) language studies in order to allow students to actively participate in, and, foremost, critique the discourses that circulate in our society in relation to sexuality. The scholar demonstrates how teaching focused only on grammatical structures, vocabulary, and communicative skills fails to “account” for the discursive, cultural, and social reality of students, and therefore proves to be limited and increasingly less relevant to students' needs.

In another paper, Nelson (1999) proposes that queer theory should be used to think about **how curricula and pedagogical practices can become more inclusive and respectful**, since it problematizes all sexualities. Thus, pedagogical work would not only include discussions about civil rights and teaching to accept certain sexual identities, but also analyzing cultural and discursive practices, and how these relate to all sexualities. One of the most important contributions of this paper is the view that, instead of demanding answers or deep knowledge, queer theory helps educators to question the gender and sexuality norms, which would support educators who feel unprepared for inclusion: “Pedagogies of inclusion thus become pedagogies of inquiry” (Nelson, 1999, p. 373). Therefore, the aforementioned themes “how sexuality is present in foreign language classes”, “the erasure of “divergent” identities from the curriculum and pedagogical practices”, and “how curricula and pedagogical practices can become more inclusive and respectful” are all prominent topics that research on LGBTQIA+ identities and language teaching should consider.

**Inclusive curriculum design** is indeed of interest to many inquiries in the area of language teaching (Liddicoat, 2009; Freitas and Pessoa 2019; Jesus, 2016, Sene, 2019), and in the area of education as a whole (Louro, 2004, 2008, to mention a few<sup>3</sup>). Freitas and Pessoa (2019, p. 148-149), for example, argue that we need to think about pedagogies that “problematize the suffering of those on the margins: not just for them to speak in class, but that can interfere in the curriculum to reduce subalternization”. This way, LGBTQIA+ identities shouldn't appear just at specific moments, such as special units focusing on diversity and gender equality, but permeate the entire curriculum and school structure. As reiterated throughout, many of these studies rely on *Queer Theory* on their analysis and arguments.

All these pedagogical changes discussed so far entail an urgent need for research on teacher education. **Critical teacher education** that accounts for the everchanging profusion of identities in the classroom and in our society, to promote a more just education aimed at equality and to go beyond the teaching of the linguistic aspects only of language is discussed by many authors (Sauntson e Borba, 2021; Jesus, 2012, 2016, 2020; Freitas; Pessoa, 2019), especially in the light of a lack of discussions regarding gender and sexuality in the school. Thus, “It is no longer enough to ‘know’ and/or ‘master’ the syllabus: we need to adopt attitudes that enable us to act beyond this technical and disciplinary field (Zeichner; Liston, 1996), in order to bring our work closer to the needs of a world structured on inequality” (Freitas; Pessoa, 2019, p. 146).

**Silencing** in curricula is another important concept and theme of inquiry for scholars. As Sauntson and Borba (2021) point out, we can understand silencing as practices that erase certain topics from discussions and a “lack of commitment” to them. According to the authors, various studies indicate that we experience a strong silencing of LGBTQIA+ identities in schools, since curricula, environments, practices, and discourses are designed around heterosexuality. Thus, although debates on sexual and gender diversity are scarce, homophobic discourse is recurrent, so language education that promotes criticism of homophobia and the recognition of the existence of LGBTQIA+ identities in a more positive and humanized way is extremely necessary.

Finally, **teaching materials and how they portray or exclude sexual identities** are also the subject of research by some authors (Tilio, 2012; Souto Junior, 2013, Page, 2016). As Tilio (2012) points out, for example, English teaching materials often do not include LGBTQIA+ sexual or gender identities, so that, even if in a subtle way, education ends up contributing to the construction and maintenance of the two concepts mentioned above (presumption of heterosexuality and compulsory heterosexuality), and therefore of the very structure that maintains relations of power and marginalization between identities. Straight sexual identities are often present at school, it's just the other identities that are erased (Sauntson; Borba, 2021).

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<sup>3</sup> The work of Guacira Louro is essential for gender and sexuality studies in Brazil.

All the aforementioned studies show is that the area of gender/sexuality in language teaching requires more research and debate. Although some of the scholars mentioned in this section come from or study from a perspective of the Global South, the next section discusses more deeply the main challenges and contributions of the Southern perspectives to the area.

## 2. THE SOUTHERN TAKE ON LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LGBTQIA+ IDENTITIES

Although some of the studies mentioned above may be conducted by researchers from the Global South, as mentioned above, the Southern look in research is a ethical and theoretical position that entails more than just the place of origin, but also concepts, bibliography and interests that characterize research conducted in the South through Southern lens. Thus, in this section, I will highlight some aspects of research on LGBTQIA+ identities and language teaching conducted from a Southern perspective.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, **research in the Global South emphasize local problems** or how the topic and questions of research are connected to problems faced by communities in the South. This is the result of a reaction to theories and frameworks being “imported” (sometimes carelessly<sup>4</sup>) from the Global North. Therefore, it is not sufficient for scholars to reference and value the production of studies from the Global South (although that is a foundation for research that aims to bring a Southern perspective on any subject), but the **research must take into account the factors of a given locality or context**.

In Brazil, for example, it is fruitless to disregard the complex current political scenario. As mentioned in the introduction of this article, after a wave of increase of social rights based on human rights and social welfare in the 90s and the first decade of the 2000s, we are witnessing the rise of conservative values in society and extreme-right authoritarian politicians, much based on the critique of an anti-gender offensive. Clear examples of this scenario are the discussion of “Escola sem Partido” (“Non-Partisan School”<sup>5</sup>), the opposition to the program “Schools without Homophobia” in 2011, and the election of the extreme-right-wing president Bolsonaro in 2018 (Vianna; Bortolini, 2020; Lemos; Della Fonte, 2023; Gomes; Zenaide, 2020). This does not mean that there have not been any advances on LGBTQIA+ rights or Human rights in recent years, but, as research indicates (Schibelinsk, 2020), it is possible to understand these conservative movements as a response to the advances in progressive politics and way of thinking in some areas. Moreover, as also mentioned

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<sup>4</sup> See the work of Oyéwúmí (2021) for a critique on how concepts being applied with a disregard to a local context can lead to misleading interpretations, for example.

<sup>5</sup> As described by Saunson and Borba (2021, p. 4-5): “Created in 2003 as a parent control association against what they identified as ‘Marxist indoctrination’ at Brazilian schools (a clear reaction to the election of a left-wing president), the ESP movement only gathered political and public momentum after it embarked on the conservative bandwagon against a supposed sexualisation of children in schools which was strategically linked to the political left, fueling a general distrust towards progressive ideas”. Thus, as criticised by many authors, although the movement claims to defend a “neutral school”, it actually targets only one side of the political spectrum.

above, Brazil is only one of the countries facing this change, as examples can be encountered both in the Global South and the Global North.

Considering how the offensive on gender and LGBTQIA+ rights are central for these conservative movements, it has become almost unavoidable to consider this context when conducting research on sexual identities. Examples of research that account well for this scenario are: Gomes and Zenaide (2020)'s study of Brazilian educational guiding documents; Ferraz and Miquelon (2020)'s review on the main attacks to the LGBTQIA+ community by Bolsonaro and how it affects the area of language education, and Saunton and Borba (2021)'s critique on the effects of "Escola Sem Partido ("Non-Partisan School)" movement.

It is also possible to argue that **intersectionality** is an important concept often favored in research on critical approaches to language teaching in the South. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2017), intersectionality arose from social movements, especially black feminists, who realized that social challenges were not only marked by racism or sexism, but by different forms of prejudice and limitations, which required solidarity between subjects. As studies on race, gender and sexuality gained ground in academia, especially in a dispute for space against studies on class, the relation between the different social traits also became increasingly evident in theoretical studies, to the point that an interdisciplinary field began to emerge, which eventually had to be named.

Over the last few decades, the concept of intersectionality has become fundamental to various disciplines (sociology, psychology, economics, and political science, among others) and has consolidated itself as an important theoretical-methodological tool (Collins, 2017). Lélia Gonzales (2020, p. 40) exemplifies this intrinsic relation between how social markers operate in inequalities through the discussion of the social division of labor, a central point for feminism which, from the context of Latin America, for example, could not fail to take into account the "multiracial and multicultural" character of Latin American societies. The same would happen to studies that focus on sexuality, especially LGBTQIA+ identities. Important examples of scholars that deal with the concept of intersectionality in language teaching are: Fabio Bezerra (2023)'s book "Linguística Aplicada Transviada" (which is also mentioned later in this article), that defends the needs of language teaching that view sexuality as intrinsically connected to race and other social identities, and Ferreira and Sene (2018)'s review on research that discuss how language classes help deconstruct stereotypes. It is important to mention that Aparecida de Jesus Ferreira has organized books (2014, 2015) that group studies on the matters of race, gender, and sexuality in language teaching, showing a strong connection between these social identities in her studies.

Side by side with the concept of intersectionality and the importance of considering other social identities, **Decolonial studies** are currently being used as a theoretical base by many scholars in the Global South or from a Southern perspective. As described by Curiel (2020), Decolonial studies began with the productions of the Modernity/Coloniality Group, made up of Latin American authors who explain that, although the process of military and economic exploitation of the Americas

and slavery of people in Africa known as colonialism has ended, it has created a cultural, linguistic, and social effect on the bodies and realities of people in colonized countries that is still taking place, which is described as *coloniality*. While Decolonial studies are varied, they favor critique of the current structure in which we live and its relation to coloniality, and defend that the effects of coloniality will be experienced for a long time to come (for example: Quijano, 2000; Walsh, 2012; Mignolo, 2018). According to Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 242):

while the coloniality of power referred to the interrelation among modern forms of exploitation and domination (power), and the coloniality of knowledge had to do with impact of colonization on the different areas of knowledge production, coloniality of being would make primary reference to the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language.

Perhaps the main reference on the relation between coloniality, gender and sexuality is María Lugones, who, in *Coloniality and Gender*, discusses the creation of what she calls the “modern/colonial gender system” in the Americas (Lugones, 2008, p. 77), i.e. the social divisions based on the sex of individuals and the transformation of peoples' social structures as a result of the process of colonization of the peoples of the Americas. According to the author, this process took place concomitantly with a hierarchization of the genders, with men occupying a place of dominance, subjugation of women, and an erasure, or casting to the margins, of ways of interpreting gender in a non-binary way and of sexualities other than heterosexuality. Mignolo (2018) also considers sexism as a pillar of colonial power, alongside racism. Therefore, research that takes a decolonial perspective on gender and sexuality must account for the way gender, race, sexuality, and inequalities are entangled and are part of the process of coloniality.

A major work on sexual identities, gender, and language teaching in a descolonial<sup>6</sup> perspective is conducted by Fabio Bezerra, who published “*Linguistica Aplicada Transviada*” in 2023. Bezerra's foundational book presents a comprehensive review of the contribution of different disciplines (sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and education) to Applied Linguistics studies interested in sexuality/gender matters. Moreover, in this book, Bezerra coins his understanding of “*Linguistica Aplicada Transviada*”, which is not only a cultural “translation” of “*Queer Applied Linguistics*”, but a new conceptualization of an area of studies that articulates and integrates contributions from Intersectionality, Descolonial studies and “*Queer studies*”<sup>7</sup> in Brazil. Although Bezerra (2023) prioritizes academic contribution from authors in Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa throughout his book, he dedicates a whole chapter reviewing contributions of Descolonial

<sup>6</sup> There has been intense debate in the area if the word used to refer to decolonial studies is “decolonial” or “descolonial”. Although the word “decolonial” is more widely preferred in English, the author states in his work his preference for the word “descolonial”. He refutes the argument that “descolonisation” would imply as an erasure of the historical process of colonization, as “descoloniality” does not mean an opposition to the process of *colonisation* but to the process of *coloniality* (BEZERRA, 2023, p. 45). In order to honor his theoretical position, the term is maintained with the prefix “des” whenever mentioning his work.

<sup>7</sup> “Estudos Transviados”, in the original. See below Bezerra's preference for the term instead of the English term.

studies to his conception of Applied Linguistics, while also paying tribute to decolonial forms of art and activism. Not only is “*Linguistica Aplicada Transviada*” a foundational work for scholars aiming to do research on the matters of sexuality (and gender) and language in a decolonial/descolonial perspective, but it is also a remarkable example of decolonial study.

Bezerra’s book directs us to one last topic of paramount discussion which is **the issue of the Queer Theory**. As discussed previously, the *Queer Theory* has become an essential part of gender and sexuality studies, so it is also important to highlight the discussions about the use of *Queer Theory* in research and the consequent use of the term in Brazil and elsewhere in the Global South. Although the use of the term, especially in academic research, is becoming increasingly widespread, to the point that the queer identity is one of the letters in the LGBTQIA+ acronym, there have been growing questions about the diffusion of the term in Brazil and other countries in the Global South. Rea and Amancio (2018) provide an important recap of the term’s trajectory in different countries and list a number of problems arising from this “transit to the South” of the term. According to the authors, it is possible to list, in particular, how the term has gained ground in an agenda of seeking rights that are much more related to the needs of white, upper-middle-class gay men than to all LGBTQIA+ identities. This erasure of other identities in the use of the term, according to the research the authors report, is mainly related to an assimilation of homosexual identity to the norm.

Matebeni (2017) talks about the “queer turn” and how it has taken over African studies on sexuality and gender. Matebeni (2017) demonstrates that, although the term is useful to shed light on the needs of the rights of LGBTQIA+ identities, it argues that the term is not sufficient to encompass some identities related to gender and sexuality in the African continent and in South Africa specifically. In Brazil specifically, the problem dwells in the issue that the term is not connected to the LGBTQIA+ history in the country: since the term *queer* is in English, it does not cause the same impact as it does in many English speaking countries (Pelúcio, 2014). As noted by Bento (2017), the term in Brazil is mostly strictly used in academic contexts in reference to *Queer Theory*, even though, as mentioned previously in this article, the term comes from a political and ethical history of reconceptualizing of a word. Therefore, to summarize, it’s possible to argue that the problem of the origin of the term or the fact that it is not sufficient to describe the plurality, historicity and cultural differences of the LGBTQIA+ in the Global South and it does not have the same controversial and defying denotation that entails the origin and purpose of the *Queer Theory*. This especially true for scholars aiming to take a decolonial stance in their studies, as decoloniality values deinking with traditional northern thinking “through the acknowledgment of ourselves as knowledge producers” (Rosa; Duboc, 2022). In other words, the question is to balance the importance of a useful and previously groundbreaking theory with the production of local knowledge based on local problems, theories, and history.

That being said, there are multiple ways scholars are facing this challenge in different areas. Some authors defend the use of the *Queer Theory* (many of which were mentioned earlier) and, as

Louro (2004) acknowledged, any translation is problematic, and proposes queer movement in Brazil would have “its own marks of our culture” (Louro, 2004, p. 62). Louro (2004) even argues that the subversion of queer theory lies precisely in its aspect of “unintelligibility”, defending that the “strangeness” the term causes in the South should be of a different order. Another route taken by scholars is the coinage of new terms based on the *Queer Theory*. Rea and Amancio (2018, p. 5), for example, are in favor of using the term queer as it is re-signified by *Queer Theory of Colour*. They believe that the new contributions come from theorists who come from a non-white perspective and with decolonial and post-colonial biases could “open up new possibilities for non-hierarchical dialogues with the global South”.

Some other scholars, however, are offering us alternatives in the form of “cultural translations” (Bento, 2017). While Pelúcio (2014) argues in favor of “Teoria Cu”, a term that seems to have gained ground in the area of social sciences, Bento (2017) presents the term Transviad@, which makes reference to “trans”, “viado/a/e” (therefore the use of @ instead of a letter that marks gender), an offensive term to refer to a number of identities in the LGBTQIA+ community, but also includes an allusion to the idea of being “outside the norm” and “transgressive”. All these meanings are encapsulated and conveyed in Bento (2017)’s cultural translation for the *Queer Theory*. This concept is adopted by Bezerra (2023) in his conceptualization of “Linguística Aplicada Transviada. Therefore, it is possible to say that authors are aiming to value *Queer Theory* while reconceptualizing it through local lens and theories. These alternatives and strategies are examples of critical appropriation:

mobilising the notion of the South as a heuristic vantage point from which to interrogate discourses on gender and sexuality – our chosen analytical foci. By highlighting southern perspectives, we do not wish to suggest a ‘radical separateness of Southern theory from Northern’ but ‘a critical appropriation of Northern ideas, in combination with ideas that come from radically different experiences’ (Connell 2014: 527). (Milani; Lazar, 2017)

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this paper, I highlighted the main topics and concepts mobilized by researchers interested in the relation between sexuality, gender, and language, which may contribute to an understanding of the relation between these topics and foreign language teaching. I started by explaining the importance of these topics to language studies, then I highlighted the main areas of interest of research in this area and then I showed the main challenges and interests of research from a Southern perspective in the area.

Before concluding the article, It’s worth noting though that the number of papers from other areas than Language studies mentioned above show, on one hand, how language studies, and especially Critical Applied Linguistics, are currently a space for transdisciplinary work and, on the other hand, the need of more research on how foreign language classes can better account for the

countless LGBTQIA+ people and how language plays an important role in the construction of social realities.

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## O/A(S) AUTOR(ES/AS)

### **Danilo da Silva Solera**

PhD student in Education at the University of São Paulo. He has a degree in Languages - Portuguese and English from the University of São Paulo (2012) and a Master's degree in Education from the University of São Paulo (2020). He is currently interested in research on the following topics: critical literacy, foreign language teaching, and LGBTQIA+ studies.