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The linguistic borders of asylum: Perspectives of integration and reception in the Portuguese language classes offered by the Portuguese Refugee Council

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The linguistic borders of asylum: Perspectives of integration and reception in the Portuguese language classes offered by the Portuguese Refugee Council

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1. Introduction

Contemporary international migratory movements increasingly impact the political, social, and economic order of States. Although they contribute in multiple aspects to the destination societies, these flows of people also motivate several challenges related to their integration[1] in the host community, triggering important demands for Human Rights. In this paper, we approach integration through the importance of learning the language of the host country as a key element for human dignity[2], highlighting the concepts of Portuguese as a Host Language (PHL) and emphasizing the peculiarities of language teaching in the context of forced migrations[3]. We review this theme through the results of the case study carried out in the Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) classes offered by the Portuguese Council for Refugees (CPR). The choice of CPR's language programme as a case study was made due to the recognised importance of the organisation and the remarkable partnerships it maintains with the Portuguese government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Portugal. Moreover, CPR has been the main responsible for the development of language actions for the refugees and asylum seekers[4], under projects co-financed by the Portuguese State and the European Social Fund[5].

Our main goal was to reflect on the local language as an effective agent for the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Portugal, identifying the specific needs and difficulties that may hinder the identity construction

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[1]   Despite the absence of a consensual definition of what integration means, both worldwide and within the European Union (whose Member States define their own policies on this issue), for the development of this work, we will use the term integration to designate the dynamic and two-way process of mutual accommodation between newcomers (immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, beneficiaries of international protection) and the population of the host Member State. European Commission. *European Union Glossary.* Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/integration_en (accessed 2 April 2022).

[2]   According to Flores, the greatest violation of Human Rights consists in preventing any individual, group or culture from fighting for its more general ethical and political objectives, among which, the equal access to the necessary or required goods to live in a dignified way. See J.H. Flores, *A (re)invenção dos direitos humanos,* Florianópolis, Fundação Boiteux, 2009, pp. 113-114.

[3]   To determine our space of study, in this paper, forced migrations are associated with refuge, situations where people, with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country situations. European Commission. *European Union Glossary.* Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/refu gee_en (accessed 2 April 2022).

[4]   In the European Union context, an asylum seeker is a third-country national or stateless person who has made an application for protection under the Geneva Refugee Convention and Protocol in respect of which a final decision has not yet been taken. European Commission. *European Union Glossary.* Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/asylum-seeker_en (accessed 2 April 2022).

[5]   Information available at: https://cpr.pt/protocolos-e-acordos-de-cooperacao/ (accessed 2 April 2022).

of these individuals in the host society. To this end, we highlight the conception of Portuguese as a Host Language (PHL), emphasizing the particularities of this language teaching modality and its relevance in the scenario under study. In the sequence, we expose the results obtained in the field research carried out in the CPR and, from the perspective of multiple subjects and with an interdisciplinary scope, we analyse the relevance that the Portuguese language teaching/learning process has in the integration process of refugees and asylum seekers in Portugal. Through a qualitative approach, we present and discuss the information collected through different research instruments (participant observations, questionnaires, and interviews), report how the local language is in fact being carried out and what resources are being used for a real linguistic integration. We also demonstrate elements and practices that can serve as facilitators and others that, from our perspective, may complicate the full integration of refugees in the community and, consequently, compromise the migration process with a humane and emancipatory approach, in the light of Human Rights.

2. Language challenges inherent in forced migration and the concept of Portuguese as a Host Language

From the understanding of language through its sociological bias, as a social phenomenon that emerges in the collectivity[6], we consider the capacity for self-determination that the mastery of the local language entails as one of the essential tools of human dignity, providing freedom, autonomy, and minimum conditions for the maintenance of a decent life. It might be said that language is a tool that can enhance or restrict access to rights or social inclusion of refugees, who are often conditioned to a certain type of proficiency[7]. The use of language is a human rights issue, and, in the context of migration, language skills assume particular importance as an instrument for the integration into the host societies, in situations ranging from easier access to the labour market, to residence permits and the acquisition of the nationality of the country of destination[8].

Notoriously, one of the first challenges for refugees and asylum seekers when settling is communication, which turns the language of the receiving country into a fundamental aspect for survival. In host institutions, as a rule, high priority is given to the acquisition of the local language since it is understood to be a means for expression and autonomy and may avoid situations of exploitation and dependence[9]. The difficulties with the language in the host societies can take on dramatic proportions when it impairs these people to access the labour market, educational rights and essential operations, such as regularizing their migration status, getting medical care, accessing assistance programs, income distribution, etc[10]. These communicative situations, however, demand beyond linguistic knowledge and structures, they encompass specific attitudes, such as the ability to see from the perspective of others and the respect to speech appropriateness in the interaction with diversity. Thus, in the context of forced migrations, there is an urge for practices not only directed to the learning of the language access codes, but also to the development of a critical consciousness and skills for social life[11].

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[6] For Bakhtin, the structure of enunciation is purely social. See M. Bakhtin, *Marxismo e filosofia da linguagem*, São Paulo, Hucitec, 2004, p. 127.

[7] In this regard, research by Helen Dempster and Karen Hargrave suggests that learning the language of the host country is one of the key parameters by which the 'success' of refugee and migrant integration is likely to be measured. According to the study, three-quarters of respondents from ten European countries placed "being able to speak the national language" as the main determinant of national identity. Other markers of "successful" integration mentioned in the study include sharing local customs and traditions, respecting national political institutions and laws, paying taxes and contributing to the local economy. See H. Dempster & K. Hargrave, "Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants", *ODI Working Papers,* the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2017, p. 14. Available at: https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents11600.pdf (accessed 2 April 2022).

[8] See P. Jerónimo, "Português língua de integração em contexto de migração *In* e *Out*", *in* V. B. Furtoso *et al.* (eds.), *Anais Simpósio SIPLE 2017*, Londrina, SIPLE, 2018, pp. 263-274. Available at: https://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/handle/1822/54767 (accessed 2 April 2022).

[9] See P. Freire, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, São Paulo, Paz e Terra, 2011, p. 74.

[10] See I. Piller & K. Takahashi, "Migration, Language and Human Rights", *in* R. Wodak *et al.* (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Sociolinguistics,* London, SAGE publications, 2011, pp. 583-597.

[11] One should not understand language only as something whose meaning is stabilized and available to anyone who masters the linguistic code, taken simply as a set of signs that is structured in a systematic way. See C.A.M Borba, "(Des)entedimentos e integração: o acesso à língua pelo imigrante forçado", *Revista Memorare*, Volume 7, No. 2, 2020, pp. 234-248. Available at: http://www.portaldeperiodicos.unisul.br/index.php/memorare_grupep/article/view/9762/5335 (accessed 2 April 2022).

Learning the national language of the host country is a priority and should be accessible from the initial stage of the refugee integration process. It is important to highlight that some aspects may strongly influence in the process of acquisition of the host country language for these individuals, though. Among them, we should mention: a) the similarities and typological differences that exist between the mother tongue and the target language; b) the previous level of education of refugees and asylum seekers; c) the cultural environment of the original country; d) adaptation to new behaviours and habits of the host country; e) physical health; d) mental health; f) issues related to a new social identity[12]. It should also be added that refugees and asylum seekers need stability in their new social environment, with clear educational and professional perspectives, usually coming from people with similar backgrounds to their own or from people who have lived in the host countries for a longer time[13]. This is because all sociocultural ties established between the subject and their origins are abruptly shattered, and the first interactions between the refugee and the host country might, in some cases, be permeated by doubt and uncertainty.

Although the interest in learning the language may initially be related to the search for sustenance, it is not only the workspaces that articulate the relationships so that people in refuge situations can integrate and live in a community. The communicative needs of a non-native and recently arrived adult are peculiar and generally condition a quality integration, since socialization problems are generally associated with language difficulties, a weak command of the official language and a failure to decode the daily culture and conventions in the insertion community. As a result, not knowing the language prevents the individual from fully integrating into not only into professional, but also social and cultural life[14]. Then, for refugees and asylum seekers, the appropriation of the language of the host country is not merely an end, but a means of integration, since it is linked to a set of local knowledge, as well as with the possibility of becoming a citizen of that place, culturally and politically aware, participating as a subject of that same society.

In this context, the concept of Host Language has been consolidated and its founding proposal is oriented towards action, daily interaction, living conditions and social conventions. Under this prism, it privileges areas that promote sociocultural awareness, professional knowledge, interpersonal relationships, and favours mutual help and the overcoming of stereotypes through interaction. The host language´s main objective is the production and circulation of linguistic-discursive knowledge capable of promoting capacities, once the process of teaching/learning the host country language cannot disregard that the target audience is also the bearer of a linguistic-cultural capital that should not be ignored, but rather preserved, valued, and used in the formal learning space. Therefore, the language classroom should be the space for reflection on society in which students´ previous knowledge, experiences, and worldviews interact and interrelate in order to produce enriched multicultural competences[15].

PHL differs from PFL, above all, because of the specificities of its learners, whose cultural and ideological background is characterised by the social context of the refuge. Thus, for the PHL, the non-linguistic and contextual factors must be considered, as well as the psychosocial conditions of the language learner, mainly because of the stress of the forced migratory movement and the estrangement of family and cultural ties[16]. For this reason, the interest in teaching a host language, both in theoretical approaches and in their applications, has been expanding as the migratory flows increase, accompanied by the need to develop ways of public intervention to promote the

[12] See H. Vusyk *et al.*, "Problem of Linguistic Integration: The Social and Linguistic Adaptation of Refugees in the Modern International Space", *Journal of History Culture and Art Research,* Volume 8, No. 3, 2019, pp. 220-233. Available at: http://kutaksam.karabuk.edu.tr/index.php/ilk/article/view/2209/1585 (accessed 2 April 2022).

[13] See T. Fritz & D. Donat, "What migrant learners need", *in* Jean-Claude Beacco *et al.* (eds.), *The Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants,* Council of Europe, 2017, pp. 163-168. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/the-linguistic-integration-of-adult-migrants-lessons-from-research-l-i/168070a67f (accessed 4 April 2022).

[14] See M. J. R. Grosso *et al., O Português para falantes de outras línguas: o utilizador elementar no país de acolhimento*, Lisbon, Ministério da Educação, 2008, p. 11. Available at: https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Basico/Documentos/portugues_falan tes_outras_linguas.pdf (accessed 4 April 2022).

[15] See M. J. R. Grosso *et al., O Português para Falantes de Outras Línguas: O Utilizador Independente no País de Acolhimento*, Lisbon, Ministério da Educação, 2008, p. 9. Available at: http://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Basico/Documentos/portugues_ falantes_outras_linguas1.pdf (accessed 3 April 2022).

[16] See R.S. Amado, "O ensino de português como língua de acolhimento para refugiados", *Revista da SIPLE*, No. 2, 2013. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272394920_O_ensino_de_portugues_como_lingua_de_acolhimento_para_refugiados (accessed 3 April 2022)

social integration of refugees and their families. From this perspective, language policies[17] are influenced by how the language acquisition process is conceived and how the actors involved are characterized, what makes the study of its contextualization quite relevant in this process[18].

It is important to highlight, nonetheless, that the Portuguese Language classroom is not capable of covering all aspects inherent to the reception of migrants. Ideally, PHL should be taken as a component part of a more comprehensive reception policy, thus calling upon other actors responsible for promoting integration and social participation. It is essential that the teaching/learning of PHL is linked to a network of actions that constitute an integrated reception policy which meet the diverse demands of migrant populations, such as housing, food, employment, and security[19]. Therefore, when dealing with the host language, one handles a critical, plural, intercultural-oriented language proposal, which moves away from an assimilationist[20] vision of integration. We refer, therefore, to the learning of a new language as an ally in the process of adaptation and belonging of the person who learns in a new environment, which is not, initially, their home.

Language proficiency is one of the most powerful means for the integration, both at an individual level (guarantee of autonomy) and at a collective level (social harmony). This is why there is no full and complete citizenship, in the sense of access to rights and duties, without the possession of the language of the country where one lives[21]. Having this in mind, we reiterate that the teaching of a host language to refugees or asylum seekers presents specificities which are not the same as the teaching of a foreign language in other contexts, since the interests of linguistic analysis are manifested beyond the limits of the structure, and with much greater emphasis on the relationship among the utterance, the reality, and the speaker. It is evident that the adoption of a more pragmatic conception of language, oriented towards the analysis of discursive phenomena, can substantially contribute to the teaching of the Portuguese language in the context of the reception of refugees. Therefore, the concept of a host language is presented as a form of action and social transformation, which promotes the individual's right to learning and (self) development[22].

3. Case study from the language programme provided by the Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR)

3.1. Case study design

The Portuguese Council for Refugees was established in the early 1990s and nowadays it is a well-established non-governmental organization, with over 70 employees and several ongoing projects in partnership with various entities[23]. Currently, CPR has facilities in the city of Lisbon and in neighbouring municipalities. However, the two spaces of direct interest to this research are the Refugee Reception Centre 2 (CAR2) and the Bela Vista meeting

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[17] Language policies usually appear diluted within cultural, educational, inclusionary or exclusionary policies. They often appear as technical, scientific, rather than political decisions, and thus the power relations of these decisions are erased. See G.M. Oliveira, *Políticas linguísticas como políticas públicas,* Instituto de Investigação e Desenvolvimento em Política Linguística da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2001, pp. 1-2. Available at: http://docplayer.com.br/6934526-Politicas-linguisticas-como-politicas-publicas.html (accessed 3 April 2022).

[18] See T. S. Ferreira e S. Melo-Pfeifer, "Política linguística e ensino de português para a Diáspora", *in* P.F. Pinto e S. Melo-Pfeifer (eds.), *Políticas Linguísticas em Português*, Lisbon, Lidel, 2018, pp. 240-255.

[19] See H.R.E. Camargo, *Diálogos transversais: narrativas para um protocolo de encaminhamentos às políticas de acolhimento a migrantes de crise*", Campinas, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2019, pp. 182-187. Available at: http://www.repositorio.unicamp .br/handle/REPOSIP/335052 (accessed 3 April 2022).

[20] The gradual process by which a <u>minority</u> group adopts the patterns of behaviour of a majority group or <u>host society</u> and is eventually absorbed by the majority group/host society. European Commission, *European Union Glossary*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home -affairs/pages/ glossary/assimilation_en (accessed 3 April 2022).

[21] See M.H.S.F. Ançã, "Língua portuguesa em novos públicos", *Revista Saber (e) Educar*, No. 13, 2008, pp. 71-87. Available at: http://repositorio. esepf.pt/bitstream/20.500.11796/924/2/SeE_13LinguaPortuguesa.pdf (accessed 3 April 2022).

[22] See P. C. C. Arantes & B. Deusdará, "Português para refugiados: aliando pragmática e discurso em resposta a uma demanda concreta", *Revista Digital do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da PUCRS*, Volume 8, No. 1, 2015, pp. 45-59. Available at: https://revistaseletronicas.pucrs.br/ ojs/index.php/eletronica/article/view/19621/13415 (accessed 3 April 2022).

[23] Information available at: http://cpr.pt/historia/ (accessed 4 April 2022)

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offered by the Portuguese Refugee Council
Pollynne Cavalcante Holanda

room[24]. CAR2 is the place where most of the Portuguese language classes were held at the time of this research. It is located in São João da Talha, in the municipality of Loures, 17 kilometres away from Lisbon, and it was opened in December 2018. It has the capacity to accommodate 90 people (60 adults and 30 unaccompanied children) and it is now the largest refugee reception centre in Portugal[25], under United Nations the resettlement programmes[26]. The Bela Vista meeting room is a space in Lisbon which received a group for Portuguese language classes three times a week. These students were mostly asylum seekers.

Our visits to CPR to carry out data collection took place over a month, between 10 February 2020 and 9 March 2020[27], when we carried out observation of approximately 10 hours of lessons, six hours in CAR2 and four hours in the meeting room in Lisbon. We observed four different groups, two of them in literacy level and two others at level A1 on the *Common European Framework of Reference* for Languages (CEFR)[28]. The duration and frequency of classes varied from one hour and thirty minutes to two hours, two or three times a week. Our performance in the classroom was based on recording the attitudes and reactions manifested by the teacher and the students during the exposition of the contents and the activities. The direct observation of the lessons also allowed us to get closer to the subjects' perspective, an important target in the field of social research. As we followed their daily experiences *in loco*, we tried to grasp their world view, the meaning they attach to the reality around them and to their own actions[29].

During the time we spent in the institution, we also attended a drama session, with about 25 participants, which took place on 19 February 2020. The two-hour session used multiple group dynamics, improvisations, and songs for the purpose of practicing and consolidating various language structures, within the thematic areas of the programme. These meetings happened once a week, on Wednesday mornings. On the same date, we also attended a professional cultural orientation session whose theme was job interview. It lasted an hour and thirty minutes, and it was organised and conducted by the institution's integration technician. On this occasion, there was the participation of an Arabic interpreter, who translated the explanations and contents of the slides presented in Portuguese. These sessions took place weekly, every Wednesday afternoon. We were also invited to accompany a group of approximately 60 people, including men, women, and children, on 25 February 2020, in a visit to the municipality of *Torres Vedras* and introduce the group to the city's traditional carnival, as an example of a cultural event[30]. In all the situations mentioned above, we carried out participant observation[31] and after each session we drew up qualitative

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[24]   CPR also has the Refugee Reception Centre 1 (CAR1) and the "Children's Space" in Bobadela/Loures, as well as the Reception House for Refugee Children in Lisbon.

[25]   In this space, refugees have accommodation, spaces for socialising and leisure and multidisciplinary support in a transitory period, between their arrival and the first moments of integration in the country, between 3 and 6 months.

[26]   In the area of international protection, Portugal takes in refugees in the context of a resettlement process from third countries.

[27]   It should be noted that this study was conducted at a specific point in the history of the Portuguese as a Foreign Language programme of the Portuguese Council for Refugees and cannot account for the programme at any other time.

[28]   The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) organises language proficiency in six levels, A1 to C2, which can be regrouped into three broad levels: Basic User, Independent User and Proficient User, and that can be further subdivided according to the needs of the local context. Available at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions (accessed 4 April 2022).

[29]   See M. Ludke & M. Andre, *Pesquisa em educação: abordagens qualitativas,* São Paulo, EPU, 1986, p. 26.

[30]   After the sightseeing, lunch with typically Portuguese dishes and the parade watching, the group met the Mayor of Torres Vedras, who sponsored the activity.

[31]   The methodological option for participant observation responds to the objective of proceeding, within the observed realities, to an adequate participation of the researchers, in a "non-intrusive" manner, and in order to reduce residual variability, namely the repression of overflowing emotions or behaviours performed, as well as their artificiality. The observers, being led to share roles and habits of the groups being observed, are thus in favourable conditions to observe situations, facts and behaviours which would hardly occur, or which would be repressed or even adulterated, in the presence of strangers. See L. Mónico *et al.*, "Observação Participante enquanto metodologia de investigação qualitativa", *Atas - Investigação Qualitativa em Ciências Sociais*, Volume 3, 2017, pp. 724-733. Available at: https://proceedings.ciaiq.org/index.php/ciaiq2017/article/view/1447 (accessed 6 April 2022).

descriptions, taking narrative notes[32] in the field diary[33]. The other two data collection instruments used in this study were the structured questionnaires with closed-ended statements[34] and the semi-structured interviews[35] .

Regarding the questionnaires, after identifying the main nationalities present in the institution[36], we produced the surveys in different languages, Portuguese/English/French and Portuguese/Arabic, the latter model being designed with the assistance of the translator who provides services for CPR. The sample of students chosen to answer the surveys was selected considering that the only existing classes at the time of data collection were literacy groups and level A1 on the CEFR scale. Taking this into consideration, we decided to formally apply them only to the two A1 classes, counting on the participation of 22 people, 12 students from CAR 2 and 10 students from the group belonging to the meeting room in Lisbon. The questionnaire was directed, but applied with a certain flexibility, adapting to the circumstances, as well as to the level of understanding and subjectivity of the participants, who received information and explanations about the research before giving their consent to participation. Thus, we designed a structured questionnaire, composed of 15 items and using a five-point *Likert*-type scale[37] (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). In addition to the simplicity of its application, another advantage presented by the Likert scale was the possibility of perceiving different levels of intensity of opinion regarding the topics in question, making it possible to know the degree of conformity of respondents in relation to a given statement[38]. The questionnaires were applied on paper, in the presence of the researcher and the teacher, at the beginning of March 2020.

As a complementary strategy to broaden understanding and compensate for the limitations of applying the closed questionnaires, on 4 March 2020, we asked for permission to participate of a professional integration activity at CAR2. The aim was to talk to the participants, who were also Portuguese Language students, and obtain more information and clarification about their perceptions. With the help of the Arabic Language interpreter hired by

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[32] In short, they are notes made by the researcher about the field observations, conversations, interpretations and suggestions that take place in the research field and that can be used in the future to complement information from other sources. See D.K Rees & H.A.B de Mello, "A investigação etnográfica na sala de aula de segunda língua/língua estrangeira", *Cadernos do Instituto de Letras*, No 42, 2011, pp. 30-50. Available at: https://seer.ufrgs.br/cadernosdoil/article/view/26003 (accessed 6 April 2022).

[33] Following Meihy's recommendations, we used the diary/field notebook as a practical script with notes rich in detail and including information such as "when contacts were made, what stages were taken to reach the person interviewed, how the recording went, possible incidents along the way". In addition, according to the author, "the field notebook should function as an intimate diary in which are recorded even the problems of acceptance of the ideas of the interviewees, as well as any theoretical reflection arising from debates on aspects of the subject". See J. C. Meihy, *Manual de história oral*, São Paulo, Edições Loyola, 2005, p. 187.

[34] Constructing a questionnaire basically consists of translating research objectives into specific questions. It is the answers to these questions that will provide the data required to describe the characteristics of the research population or test the hypotheses that were constructed during the planning of the research. In the case of structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions, respondents are asked to choose an alternative from those presented in a list. They are the most commonly used, because they confer greater uniformity to the answers and can be easily processed. See A.C. Gil, Métodos e técnicas de pesquisa social, São Paulo, Atlas, 2008, pp. 121-123.

[35] In semi-structured or semi-directive interviews, the questions derive from a previous plan, a script which defines and records, in a logical order for the interviewer, the essentials of what is intended to be obtained, although, in the interaction, the interviewee will be given great freedom to respond. With regard to the choice of people to interview, we chose those who, due to their experience of daily life, their responsibilities, status, etc., are involved in or in very close contact with the problem to be studied. See J. Amado (ed.), *Manual de Investigação Qualitativa em Educação*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2014, pp. 208-215.

[36] Syria, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Sudan, South Sudan and Ukraine.

[37] This measurement is most commonly used in the Social Sciences, especially in surveys of attitudes, opinions and evaluations. In it, the respondent is asked to evaluate a phenomenon on a scale of, usually, five alternatives: applies completely, applies, neither yes nor no, does not apply, definitely does not apply. Depending on the underlying theme, the alternatives may, in addition to the dimension "applies", follow dimensions such as "good-bad" or "agree-disagree". See H. Gunther, "Como elaborar um questionário", *Planejamento de Pesquisa nas Ciências Sociais,* Brasília, UnB, 2003, p. 26.

[38] "The issue is how to quantify these subjective preferential thinking, feeling and action in a validated and reliable manner: a help is offered by Likert scale. The original Likert scale is a set of statements (items) offered for a real or hypothetical situation under study. Participants are asked to show their level of agreement (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) with the given statement (items) on a metric scale. Here all the statements in combination reveal the specific dimension of the attitude towards the issue, hence, necessarily inter-linked with each other". See A. Joshi *et al.*, "Likert Scale: Explored and Explained", *British Journal of Applied Science & Technology*, Volume 7, No. 4, 2015, p. 397. Available at: https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Likert-Scale%3A-Explored-and-Explained-Joshi-Kale/0c51c9713d00c9cef0c91d14f7cfb3f5650ce9e9 (accessed 7 April 2022).

the institution to provide services in the referred session, we organised a kind of focus group[39] and projected onto the board the same *Likert* scale used in the questionnaires applied in class. After the sentences were read by the researcher in Portuguese, the interpreter translated them and the ten participants gave their opinions by reference to the scale values, but also made additional comments, which were noted down by the researcher in the field diary. The debate among the participants allowed the issues addressed to be further problematised, in a dynamic typical of a group discussion.

Along with the application of the questionnaires and conducting the focus group, the interviews were part of the last stage of data collection so that it was possible to formulate the questions with some prior knowledge of the environment and the dynamics of the institution. To carry out this phase of the research, two professionals were selected: the PFL teacher and the CAR2 integration technician. We also interviewed a former student of the institution, who came from Eritrea and had been living in Portugal for eight years, as we were interested in knowing the experience of students from previous groups and trying to understand how the learning of the local language was reflected in his life in Portugal, after attending CPR classes. For each interviewee, an interview script consisting of open questions was prepared, so that they could better develop their answers based on their knowledge and experience on the subject. The individual interviews were conducted face-to-face, in early March 2020, and they were voluntary and confidential, having been recorded with the interviewees' consent and, subsequently, transcribed.

The empirical research conducted at the institution produced a large body of information and given the qualitative nature of the study, we defined content analysis as the most appropriate way to examine the data collected during the investigation. Adhering to Bardin's teachings, our analysis was carried out following the ensuing phases: 1) pre-analysis; 2) exploration of the material; 3) treatment of results, inference, and interpretation[40] .

3.2. Presentation and discussion of results

3.2.1. Class observations

As a participant observer in the classes, we noticed a positive, cooperative approach and a harmonious and cordial learning environment, based on reciprocal dialogue and respect. Students helped each other when they had doubts in understanding an instruction or an expression nor were there any discriminatory incidents or displays of prejudice, racism, or xenophobia. The classes had approximately 15-20 students and some family members studied together. Moreover, it was common for the teacher to review what had already been studied, either in the same activity or in previous lessons and these repetitions seemed especially important to help students memorise and make connections with the contents previously seen. Students would often talk to each other in Arabic, English and French to check if they could understand well or ask questions about the concepts taught in class. In these situations, the teacher tried to call attention to the use of Portuguese, helping students to make connections among these languages. When unable to translate, especially into Arabic, the teacher made much use of body language, which seemed to work quite well for the understanding of the group.

3.2.2 Students

The profile of students who attend the Portuguese language classes at CPR is quite diversified. On their arrival, interviews are conducted to analyse the linguistic situation of each individual and the criteria for the organisation of the classes obeys to the level of knowledge of the language. In the classes, mostly composed of men, we observed a great plurality of ages and nationalities, coming mainly from Middle Eastern and African countries. From conversations with CAR2 professionals, as well as from close observation of the environment and interactions inside and outside the classroom, we also noticed a multiplicity of religions, trajectories, expectations, types and durations of

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[39]   The work with focus groups allows us to understand processes of construction of reality by certain social groups, to understand daily practices, actions and reactions to facts and events, behaviours and attitudes. Thus, it is possible to gather information and opinions on a particular topic with a certain amount of detail and depth, without the need for prior preparation of the participants on the subject, because the aim is to raise aspects of the issue at stake that are considered relevant, socially or individually, or to bring out new questions on the particular topic, as a result of the exchanges carried out. See B.A. Gatti, *Grupo focal na pesquisa em Ciências sociais e humanas,* Brasília, Líber Livro, 2005, pp. 11-13.

[40]   See L. Bardin, *Análise de conteúdo*, São Paulo, Edições 70, 2016, pp. 123-131.

The linguistic borders of asylum: Perspectives of integration and reception in the Portuguese language classes
offered by the Portuguese Refugee Council
Pollynne Cavalcante Holanda

migratory processes, professional activities and education levels. On this last topic, it is worth stressing that the students really had very different backgrounds: several did not attend school in their childhood or did not have enough time to achieve sufficient literacy in their mother tongue; some attended school and could read and write, but at a low level, in their mother tongue; others had higher academic and professional qualifications. In any case, many of the PFL programme participants are plurilingual and speak two, three or four languages, although some cannot write in any of them. We also noticed a certain anxiety with language acquisition on the part of some students, who usually presented themselves as participative, interested and motivated. However, some students with greater learning difficulties needed more attention and support, which was promptly attended to by the teacher, who strived to create a very welcoming classroom space but that, at the same time, had a responsible and professional environment. In addition, we observed that adult learners with well-developed personalities and accumulated life experiences usually want their previous individual experiences to be acknowledged and somehow explored in class[41].

3.2.3. Teaching performance

During our research time, there was only one effective Portuguese teacher for all classes in the institution, and she was the only students' reference regarding the language. The PFL teacher was very qualified and experienced and she seemed to create a pleasant learning environment, always respecting each student´s individuality and also trying to help with personal difficulties beyond the lessons[42]. She knew the students by name and by history, as well as demonstrated understanding and support for their diverse experiences and life paths. The teacher's emphasis on learner autonomy was palpable through the interactive processes of analysing needs, explaining activities, encouraging active participation in lessons, monitoring progresses, and evaluating outcomes. The teacher also showed a lot of sensitivity when dealing with certain topics that, in a regular PFL class for other audiences would be commonplace, but which, in the students' situation as refugees or asylum seekers, could become sensitive, such as introducing family members or even talking about past situations and/or plans when dealing with their professions. The teacher was always developing strategies to involve and include them as active subjects of the learning process and she definitely played a primary role in the linguistic integration of refugees and asylum seekers hosted by the institution. In this regard, we reiterate the words of Paulo Freire[43], for whom one of the essential tasks of the school, as a centre of systematic knowledge production, is to instigate students' curiosity and criticality. Thus, it becomes possible to encourage them to assume the role of subject of the production of their intelligence in the world and allow teachers to become agents of change and promotion of social justice[44].

3.2.4 Materials and resources

Regarding the teaching materials used in the sessions, the teacher did not use any PFL book available in the market but designed and applied her own materials adapted to the students' needs, creating them especially for the classes. In all the classes we observed, the students were given sheets on paper, whose content was also projected on slides on the board. It was visible the teacher's concern in selecting images that could represent diverse characters (mainly in race and gender) and with which the students could identify themselves. In the classrooms, the physical spaces also had a blackboard for written explanations and other materials such as household objects, leaflets from shops and supermarkets, magazines, and newspapers. The use of authentic materials, working on language skills and cultural information with topics of practical interest and real circumstances, seemed to meet the main needs of

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[41] When we deal with students from cultural minorities, it is important to know and understand their life stories, in order to develop strategies to improve their self-concept and self-esteem. See A. Pereira, *Educação Multicultural - Teorias e Práticas,* Porto, Asa Editores, 2004, p. 34.

[42] We cannot disregard another important aspect of the PHL teacher, which is the position he/she assumes as a collaborator, and many times, even as a representative, of the migrants' causes, acting in the politicization and education of the surroundings, besides pressuring the governmental instances for the promotion of legislations that meet other demands of the migrants, which (go through and) go beyond the issue of learning the Portuguese Language. It is worth saying, still, that these teachers fulfil these tasks overcoming, most of the time, some precariousness of their teaching performance, which is manifested, most of the time, by the lack of training and proper monitoring, lack of infrastructure for classes, among other issues. See A.P.A. Lopez, "O Professor de Português como língua de acolhimento: entre o activismo e a precarização", *Vertentes e Interfaces II - Estudos Linguísticos e Aplicados,* Volume 12, No. 1, 2020, pp. 169-190. Available at: https://periodicos2.uesb.br/index.php/folio/article/view/6680/4882 (accessed 7 April 2022).

[43] See P. Freire, *Pedagogia da Autonomia,* São Paulo, Paz e Terra, 2019, p. 121.

[44] See R. Bizarro *et al., Português Língua Não Materna: Investigação e ensino*, Lisbon, Lidel, 2013, p. 17.

their daily lives. Likewise, the construction of theme-based teaching modules allows them to learn the language and understand its social practices.

The idea of working each class with subjects that are part of the students' reality and are often of immediate use for these individuals, such as finding a job, accessing the health system, going shopping at the supermarket, etc. In this sense, the CPR classes can go beyond language teaching itself and contributes to the integration of the student in society[45]. CPR has the project of a book called *Pessoas* (People), a manual that would present the vision and values of the institution on teaching and learning the Portuguese language, however, at the time of this research, the referred project had not yet obtained funding. After all, we found that most of the PFL teaching materials available in the market are really geared towards other student profiles, mainly professionals, academics, and tourists, so that they do not contemplate the needs of the institution's Portuguese Language learners[46] .

3.2.5. Other field notes

Some aspects of the research that were recorded in the field notes enhanced the understanding of the daily life of the subjects of the community and the school. It was by observing the dynamics of the environments and the students interacting outside the classroom that some other issues became evident. For example, in CAR2 we found that refugees have an extensive support network and, while the classes were taking place, professionals from different areas[47] were dealing with the most varied issues and solving different practical problems. Moreover, we noticed that when students did not attend classes or presented concentration problems or even low performance in the course, these professionals from CAR2 would talk among themselves and try to know the situation to better support the student and, eventually, the family, in their psychosocial needs.

During the breaks we could also observe the social relationships developed by the students. We noticed that most of the refugees in CAR2 were using their mobile phones, commonly to make videocalls with family and friends. The internet and social media seemed to be allies of migrants in the search for contact opportunities in the Portuguese Language, and it was frequent to find them watching videos in this language. However, when there was no intervention of the Portuguese teacher, this language was rarely used and the conversations with colleagues took place in the languages they had the best command of. We also observed that in most cases they kept several of their religious and cultural practices, reaffirming their identity. Furthermore, we noticed that it was usual the collective celebration of small achievements, such as the scheduling of a doctor's appointment, the resolution of a bureaucratic issue at some institution or the receiving of a document.

3.2.6 Questionnaires

The questionnaires were administered to 22 students (eighteen men and four women), aged between 19 and 62, from 11 different countries (Afghanistan, Cameroon, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, Togo and Ukraine) and with living times in Portugal varying between one and seven months. As previously mentioned, to collect the students' opinion, we prepared a structured questionnaire with closed statements, consisting of 15 items and using a five-point *Likert*-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5 = strongly agree).

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[45] See P. P. Valente, "Português como língua de acolhimento para acesso a direitos humanos: políticas linguísticas e reflexões a partir da análise de materiais didáticos para migrante", *Revista Muiraquitã*, Volume 7, No. 2, 2019, pp. 287-306. Available at: https:// periodicos.ufac.br/index. php/mui/article/view/2706 (accessed 8 April 2022).

[46] Diniz and Cruz point out three main teaching methods essential for the development of didactic material aimed at PHL: 1) the communicative approach, which focuses on communication between subjects, starting from tasks of real everyday interactions of students; 2) intercultural teaching that should foster dialogue between the culture of the teacher and the learner, to undo stereotypes and prejudices; 3) critical literacy, which starts from the reading of genres that permeate the everyday life of refugees, for the achievement of a critical consciousness aimed at social transformation. All these methods would use authentic texts, the valorisation of autonomy, the exploration of linguistic-discursive heterogeneity, and the centrality in the student's learning needs. See I. C. Diniz & J.M. Da Cruz, "Elaboração de material didático para o ensino de português como língua de acolhimento: parâmetros e perspectivas", *The Especialist*, Volume 39, No. 2, 2018, pp. 1-11. Available at: https:// revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/esp/article/view/30650 (accessed 8 April 2022).

[47] As examples of the professionals who form the multidisciplinary team of CAR2, we can mention: technicians responsible for the educational and professional insertion of refugees, jurists, psychologists and social workers.

STATEMENTS	1. STRONGLY DISAGREE	2. DISAGREE	3. NEUTRAL	4. AGREE	5. STRONGLY AGREE
1. I like to live in Portugal.	0	0	0	3	19
2. I had some contact with the Portuguese Language before arriving in Portugal.	11	4	4	2	1
3.I think it is important to learn the Portuguese language to live in Portugal.	0	0	0	0	22
4. I feel motivated to learn Portuguese.	0	0	0	2	20
5. I like the Portuguese language classes at CPR.	0	0	0	4	18
6. There are things to be improved in Portuguese language classes at CPR.	2	2	4	7	7
7. I have a good relationship with the Portuguese language teacher at CPR.	0	0	0	3	19
8. I like the materials used in the Portuguese Language classes at CPR.	0	0	0	7	15
9. I live in a Reception Centre.	8	2	0	3	9
10. I live near the Reception Centre.	9	1	0	0	0
11. I like to take classes at the Reception Centre.	0	0	0	2	10
12. I have classes together with a family member.	12	1	0	3	6
13. I have a good relationship with my classmates.	0	0	0	6	16
14. I like the drama classes.	0	0	0	2	10
15. I like outdoor activities, such as historical visits and tours.	1	0	0	3	18

The linguistic borders of asylum: Perspectives of integration and reception in the Portuguese language classes
offered by the Portuguese Refugee Council
Pollynne Cavalcante Holanda

Through a qualitative analysis of the students' answers, the results of the questionnaires allowed us to understand that: the participants enjoy living in Portugal and only few of them had some contact with the Portuguese language before arriving in the country. The results also showed that all the participants of the research consider it important to learn the language to live in Portugal and that they are motivated to learn it, as well as they claim to like the classes, although most of the students recognize that there are things to improve in the courses. Regarding the assertion about the relationship with the Portuguese Language teacher at CPR and the materials used in classes, all respondents seemed satisfied. It was evidenced that, in the students' perception, they also have a good relationship with their classmates. We emphasise that the participants in this survey who lived in the Reception Centre had no objections about having class in the same place they lived, but those who did not live in the Centre said they lived far from the location of the classes. A considerable proportion of the students who responded to the survey said they take classes together with other family members. Finally, the results also show that all those who take acting classes enjoy being in the sessions. Furthermore, apart from one participant in the survey[48], all students stated they enjoy the outside activities, such as historical visits and tours.

3.2.7 Focus group

The focus group included 10 participants (nine men and one woman), aged between 19 and 62, from 6 different countries (Afghanistan, Gambia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, South Sudan) and with living times in Portugal varying from 1 to 7 months. In summary, the outcome of the conversation with the students of the Portuguese language programme in CPR suggested that all those present understood the Portuguese language as a fundamental factor for the integration process in Portugal. Two students said that they had accessed some virtual Portuguese language content before moving to the country, and that they appreciated the idea of arriving being able to speak at least some greetings and expressions. Three others reported that the Portuguese language is very difficult and that it requires a lot of effort to learn it, and one of them revealed that it can be even more complicated because he is often dispersed in class worrying about his family who stayed in his home country. All those present ensured that they liked the lessons, the materials prepared by the teacher and their classmates. They responded enthusiastically that they need to have more outdoor activities, as they loved to see places and learned a lot from the visits. They highlighted the teacher's diligence before, during and after the events, in preparing and explaining all the vocabulary with which they have contact in the external visits. They also said that the teacher is always willing to help, but that she is overloaded. They all unanimously agreed that they need more practice with the language and that they would need more classes per week and, consequently, they would need more teachers. They also mentioned that they would like to have more specific groups for conversation and for a more intensive work of the language, because they are in a hurry to learn. It should be noted in this regard that, in the opinion sheets about the course of the last two classes, completed in August 2019 and December 2019, as well as in the opinion sheets about the last outdoor activities carried out, we verified appreciations and demands similar to those exposed in the questionnaires and in the referred focus group.

3.2.8 Interviews

In this section, we will highlight the main considerations obtained from the analysis of the interviews with the Portuguese teacher, the integration technician, and the former student of the CPR Portuguese language programme, which had the purpose of clarifying or corroborating what was observed in the data collection through the other instruments. At first, regarding the importance of language in the reception process, the teacher argues that the language is decisive for integration, and it is very important in the relationship with the civil society of the host country. According to her, when people do not speak the local language, they start living in a much more domestic space, which directly influences their personal life. Thus, despite recognizing the importance of the language to enter the labour market, the teacher stresses that one should not focus on learning only from a professional point of view. In this regard, the teacher highlighted that in the Portuguese courses offered by the CPR, the sociocultural component is fundamental, as knowing the places of the city and the host country can empower in the integration process.

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[48] The student who disagreed had already shown signs of the dissatisfaction during the event (Torres Vedras carnival). Although participation is voluntary and despite having been shown videos of the party in the preparatory classes for the activity, this student said he felt uncomfortable, as a Muslim, with the style of the celebration.

The former CPR student also confirmed that learning the language of the host country did not happen only in the classroom as he declared that the visits to Lisbon and other cities provided a lot of information about the geography, history and cultural aspects of Portugal and its people. The integration technician also supported the idea that language is not only the basis to get a job[49], since the individual might work but not be able to actively participate in the community where he/she lives. The integration technician also noted that in Portugal (especially outside the city of Lisbon) there are no communities representing the nationalities of the refugees that could help them integrate and provide support in adversities and everyday situations. Consequently, the language represents the possibility to have the autonomy to begin to establish emotional relationships and to feel that they effectively belong somewhere. Moreover, the PFL teacher pointed out that the motivations are diverse, especially in different age groups, but that they usually have to do with the dignity of the person and his/her family. The integration technician, in her turn, attributed the motivation to learn the language to the fact that, in CPR, there is always an attempt to link the subjects that students consider indispensable with the topics of the course programme.

A mong the demotivating factors, the teacher and the integration technician mentioned the lack of emotional readiness of many refugees and asylum seekers to engage with the country and learn the language. This is because most of them go through a complex process of distancing themselves from their origins, often in addition to the estrangement of family ties. A considerable portion of these people are brought by trafficking networks, without previous references about the country. And when they arrive through the resettlement process, it is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that determines that they will be sent to Portugal. In both cases, these long journeys usually culminate in a lack of choice and options. Concerning the obstacles at the institutional level, the PFL teacher underlined the difficulties of a non-governmental organisation in carrying out its projects. According to her, throughout the year of 2019, for example, the institution had six permanent teachers and others were hired within the scope of its various projects. However, at the time of our research, in early 2020, there was only one teacher as effective. Aligned with this idea, the former student of the programme stated that the only negative aspect of the CPR Portuguese language course was related to the insufficient workload[50].

Regarding multicultural coexistence, the PFL teacher mentioned that, as it is normal in any space with people of different nationalities, there may be misunderstandings and segregation situations, but that, in general, the Reception Centre works much more as a space for exchange and learning. She also defended the relevant role of the teacher in this position, also fundamental in the deconstruction of stereotypes and prejudices. Supporting this perspective, the former CPR student stated that even though students had different nationalities, they all felt united by the same circumstances, as they were starting their lives over in a new country together, applying for international protection. About having classes in CAR2, i.e in the same place where they live, the PFL teacher emphasised that it might represent a facilitating element, as people do not have to overcome some barriers, such as dealing with public transportation or inconveniences with the weather. In this respect, the former student confirms the constructive experience. The joint work of the CAR2 team was also highlighted by the two CPR professionals, since the exchange of information and experiences is continuous in the exercise of their activities.

As observed in the statements above, it was possible to recognise that the whole team somehow performs its functions in order to ensure the monitoring of the students' learning process. The integration technician also observed that, in CAR2, some households end up providing the feeling of community and this mutual support allows them to face daily adversities more easily. Moreover, the presence of a multidisciplinary working group can also make the experience more peaceful and beneficial for the residents. The narratives presented suggest the importance of the full support of the receiving institution in the process of acquisition of the new language by refugees and asylum seekers, as well as note the peculiarities and challenges intrinsic to this type of teaching-learning. All these difficulties, nevertheless, did not seem to discourage the interviewed CPR professionals, who show conviction about the purpose of their actions in the institution. On his turn, the former student confirms having obtained in the PFL course classes some of the essential tools to feel integrated in Portugal today.

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[49] On the issue of integration through work, the integration technician also underlined that it would be interesting to create, similarly to other countries, some specific measures to motivate and hire refugees, i.e. a kind of incentive for Portuguese companies.

[50] At the time of he was a student at CPR, classes were one hour a day, four days a week.

3.3. Identification of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (brief SWOT analysis)

The immersion in the reality of the class environments as well as the proximity of the daily life of CPR's PFL programme provided us with a rich overview of the aspects that could help or hinder the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Portuguese society. Thus, we will present the last part of our analysis in the form of a brief SWOT analysis and focus our comments on the Portuguese language classes in CPR on four perspectives, considering what we understand as: 1) strengths (successes, objectives achieved, benefits, satisfaction); 2) weaknesses (deficiencies, difficulties, failures, dissatisfactions); 3) opportunities (potentials, unexploited capacities, ideas for improvement); 4) threats (obstacles, adversities, opposition, resistance against change)[51].

3.3.1 Strenghts

Given the whole scenario exposed so far, it is possible to point out several positive aspects in the Portuguese language programme offered by CPR that can serve as a paradigm and a case study of good practices for similar projects. Firstly, we stress the fact that the classes were planned for the use of the language in real circumstances, with presentation of relevant information for these individuals, who are migrants with specific characteristics and for whom the learning of a new language goes beyond the mere notion of foreign or additional language, evidencing aspects that make this teaching-learning process different from the others. It was possible to notice, through the nature of the classes, that the focus is really the use of the language in real production circumstances, with emphasis on cultural aspects and the use of varied resources and materials. The choice of themes during the lessons was also directed to situations associated with the routine and the world of work.

The teacher-students relationship is also a point to highlight, as the professional´s intercultural approach was visible, caring and respecting each individual, far from any label or prejudice. Her role seemed to go beyond teaching the language, but to be a supportive reference to which the students turned for advice and answers, also for everyday problems. Consequently, the starting point for lesson planning was the real-life situations experienced by the students in their immigration process, allowing them to practice the language in meaningful situations. The teacher strived to prepare lesson plans that were visually attractive and with themes that effectively contributed to the students' social integration, promoting discussions about cultural and life experiences and focusing on the meaning of the language before dealing with accuracy and precision. The drama classes, the events and festivals dealing with Portuguese traditions and customs, and the various historical and cultural tours corroborated with this social perspective[52].

Furthermore, we also found that, for CAR2 students, finding a predictable and well-structured environment in which they could have a certain routine in class seemed to be especially important after experiencing the most diverse forms of loss of control and predictability over the events in their lives. It was possible to note that intercultural pedagogy was assumed not only by the teacher, but also by the institution. We also recognised the importance of language teaching for refugees on issues related to asylum procedures, labour market, as well as other subjects useful to their living in the host country, as demonstrated in the weekly professional orientation sessions. Thus, we perceive that CPR's Portuguese Language programme offers a humane and emancipatory approach, capable of promoting the integration of the refugee in several aspects.

3.3.2 Weaknesses

The most notable and urgent issue concerning the Portuguese language programme of the institution at the time of our research was, certainly, the shortage of teachers. It was directly related to the impossibility of offering a larger workload and/or a greater number of groups and levels - the main students´ requests. In fact, to develop the teaching programme, it would be necessary to invest primarily in human resources, but the CPR, as a non-govern-

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[51] See S. Cordioli, *Enfoque participativo: um processo de mudança: conceitos, instrumentos e aplicação prática*, Porto Alegre, Genesis, 2019, pp. 135-138.

[52] We perceived the relevance of investigating ethnolinguistic aspects, uniting the language learning process with contact with local cultural elements. Thus, it is possible to connect different strands of social interaction through language and discourse, as identities are also socially constructed and culture-specific. See F. Ferreira-Alves, "'Why don't you ask them yourself?' Immersion into the field of professional translation practice in Northern Portugal (a holistic view)", *in* Rita Bueno Maia *et al.*, (eds.), *How Peripheral is the Periphery? Translating Portugal Back and Forth - Essays in Honour of João Ferreira Duarte,* Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 63-83.

The linguistic borders of asylum: Perspectives of integration and reception in the Portuguese language classes
offered by the Portuguese Refugee Council
Pollynne Cavalcante Holanda

mental organisation for development, suffers from the difficulties of obtaining funding[53], subsidies and donations for its projects. For this reason, since there was not an effective team, the only Portuguese Language teacher of the institution struggled to meet all the demands of the two places/cities where the classes took place (Lisbon and Loures). Also with reference to the teaching staff, we were informed that when temporary people were hired for specific projects, the preparation hours were not considered and only the teaching hours were paid. Another point to be highlighted is that although the outstanding facilities of CAR2, the space in Lisbon is still quite limited. This fact that may not directly hinder the teaching-learning process, but it is certainly not the ideal environment for the classes, since it is originally a meeting room[54]. Besides, as previously noted, there are several relevant educational activities offered in CAR2 which the room does not have the capacity to accommodate, such as the drama classes and professional orientation sessions. Finally, CPR offers a programme that presents the fundamental characteristics of the modality Portuguese as a Host Language (PHL) and not Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) as it is actually called.

3.3.3 Opportunities

Based on what has been discussed in the previous sections on teaching PHL, we reaffirm that this modality presents several challenges distinct from those encountered in traditional language teaching contexts. Therefore, extralinguistic factors must be considered[55] and the new language is learned without being restricted only to the mastery of its forms and its functioning as a system. In this perspective, the results of the research undertaken demonstrated that the institutional support of CPR creates a collaborative environment for students to take better advantage of the Portuguese language programme. There is a visible concern in transacting people for an autonomous life, which was perceptible in the negotiations and search for partnerships with companies, institutions, and municipalities of other cities. The intention of the institution is that, at the end of the CPR support, the individuals might be as independent as possible, mainly regarding work and housing, able to develop their lives in the country.

Regarding the classes and the insufficient number of teachers, it would be possible to seek partnerships with universities and educational institutions in the areas of Languages and Literature to provide training and/or support, as well as offer benefits to attract more volunteers, such as certificates of participation or opportunities for curricular internships. And once the institution would have a larger teaching staff, it could offer more advanced levels and alternative times could be considered, such as in the evening or on weekends, as many adult learners of working age need to interrupt classes when they find employment. Moreover, given that our data collection took place just before the worsening of the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequent social distancing and closure of institutions, we did not have the opportunity to observe whether CPR classes started to take place in the virtual environment. Be that as it may, distance Portuguese language programme could be better developed in the institution throughout the process, regardless of the pandemic scenario.

With online courses in asynchronous format or even live classes, refugees and asylum seekers could have the opportunity to be in contact with the language even before arriving in Portugal. Besides, even those who left CAR2 would have the opportunity to access training and keep studying the language at flexible hours and regardless of where they move to. It should be noted that the investment in virtual classes could even facilitate the adhesion of volunteer teachers and it would be possible to cover a larger number of students with the new *online* classes. About the virtual presence, although the organisation has an excellent *e-learning* platform for training courses, a website with a lot of relevant information and some social networks, we observed that the updates rarely focus on attracting people interested in collaborating for the PFL project, both economically and as volunteers.

Worthy mentioning is also the importance of some material specifically dedicated to this public, since the books available in the market, from our point of view, do not really reflect the reality of PHL students. To that end,

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[53] Funding is a preponderant factor for Non-Government Organizations as it is through funding that projects are implemented and because it is a fundamental condition for the action and subsistence of organisations. See P.M. Ferreira *et al.*, *O papel de Portugal na arquitetura global do desenvolvimento - Opções para o futuro da cooperação portuguesa*, 2015, pp. 82-83. Available at: https://www.imvf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/estudocooperacaoportuguesanet-1.pdf (accessed 9 April 2022).

[54] According to what Verdini argues, the space itself constitutes a formative element, as a reference of attitudes and learning. See A.S. Verdini, *A sala de aula como espaço de leitura significativa*, 2006, s/p. Available at: https://www.yumpu.com/pt/document/read/ 12752367/a-sala-de-aula--como-espaco-de-leiturasignificativa-cereja (accessed 9 April 2022).

[55] See J.C.P de Almeida Filho, *Linguística aplicada*: *ensino de línguas e comunicação,* Campinas, Pontes Editores e Arte Língua, 2002, p.12.

The linguistic borders of asylum: Perspectives of integration and reception in the Portuguese language classes
offered by the Portuguese Refugee Council
Pollynne Cavalcante Holanda

we assume that the investment in the project of the institution's authored Portuguese Language programme manual should be a priority, a fact that could also encourage the adhesion of human resources to the programme, as it represents an ally to the teaching practice. Besides, an aspect that can be better explored is the great positive potential regarding the connection of CAR2 professionals in dealing with the most diverse types of issues involving the students' lives. This practice, which occurs in an unplanned and informal way, usually in the corridors of the institution, and during the team breaks, could be standardized from an internal channel for updates on the situations of the students, since these directly impact on their performance in class. Finally, we also reinforce the need for constant dialogue with the community, as we understand it is essential to listen to the priorities expressed by refugees and asylum seekers in the development and analysis of language proposals and policies aimed at this public and that promote involvement, empowerment and capacity building[56].

3.3.4 Threats

Based on what has been analysed and discussed in the previous sections and bearing in mind that refuge is not a process that ends when one arrives at the destination, it is relevant to discuss how the adaptation difficulties of refugees and asylum seekers need to weigh in the planning of a PHL course. It is crucial to ponder that language learning may not be a priority for students in the face of all the other more urgent (and non-linguistic) needs related to their survival in the new host country, their vulnerable emotional states and their plans for building a new life. In the case of spontaneous applicants, for instance, their pace of learning may also depend on the response of the Portuguese authorities to their asylum application. From this perspective, we infer that their curiosity and openness to learn a new language is conditioned to several external circumstances. It is also worth mentioning that many refugees and asylum seekers who have arrived in Portugal did not necessarily choose the country. Therefore, the assumption that these individuals would identify with the country of adoption in terms of political, cultural and language cannot be taken as a guarantee, as movements are dictated more by the circumstances of the countries of origin than by the desire to establish a new life in a specific place[57].

It is also important to highlight that, although the Portuguese teacher in CPR is very qualified and experienced and during our whole stay in the institution represented an excellent example of dedication and good practices, fully meeting what was presented above about the specificities of PHL teaching, it seemed to us that such a posture is not the most common in this teaching context. When broadening the discussion, we realised that, in general, teachers working in the PHL area, as they are mostly volunteers from civil society, do not necessarily have previous experience in language teaching, especially in the context of hosting. As a result, despite the lack of linguistic policies that help in the training of professionals for language teaching in this conjuncture, the qualification and empowerment of professionals for the reception of this public is urgent and, besides their technical training, they should also be essentially oriented to cultural and social diversity.

The contact with the local population was another visible difficulty in this scenario because it was rare and mainly restricted to the CAR2 staff and some other very specific situations. Integration seems to be very limited and difficult to access, since, in view of the arduous process they went through and the prejudice they may suffer in the host country, refugees and asylum seekers tend to be cautious in their relationships. Finally, we believe that it is also necessary to reflect that the teaching of Portuguese as a Host Language demands a critical and constant examination in order to avoid an approach of assimilation of the language and all the inherent cultural aspects. In fact, integration does not mean cultural homogeneity and it is necessary to maintain and reinforce the differences of each ethnic group and develop cultural exchanges[58]. A pluralistic perspective on integration enables refugees and asylum seekers to maintain their cultural values while also learning the language and aspects of the host culture.

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[56] In this regard, Maher points to three courses of action in her proposal for any so-called emancipatory project aimed at minority/minority groups: politicization or political empowerment, education of the surroundings, and advances in legislation favourable to these groups. See T. J. M. Maher, "A educação do entorno para a interculturalidade e o plurilinguismo", *in* A. Kleiman & M. Cavalcanti (eds.), *Linguística Aplicada: suas faces e interfaces,* Campinas, Mercado de Letras, 2007, pp. 255-270.

[57] See N.L. Patarra, "Migrações internacionais: teorias, políticas e movimentos sociais", *Revista Estudos Avançados da USP,* Volume 20, No. 57, 2006, pp. 7-24. Available at: https://www.revistas.usp.br/eav/article/view/10143/11726 (accessed 10 April 2022).

[58] See F.L. Machado, *Contrastes e Continuidades: Migração, Etnicidade e Integração dos Guineenses,* Oeiras, Celta, 2002, pp. 67-68.

The linguistic borders of asylum: Perspectives of integration and reception in the Portuguese language classes
offered by the Portuguese Refugee Council
Pollynne Cavalcante Holanda

4. Concluding Remarks

Taking into consideration the process of refugees´ integration in Portugal from the perspective of language learning and the concept of Portuguese as a Host Language, we believe we have achieved the objectives of the study by presenting some specificities of Portuguese language teaching in the context of refuge and providing references for more targeted practices. We also found that the planning of a PHL programme aimed at this groups should be differentiated from its conception and the perspective of intercultural education should guide the actions of teachers, students and other actors involved in the process. The research revealed that the PHL classes should be based on an approach that is useful for the community, aiming at their access to basic rights, such as work, housing and education as well as communicative skills to solve daily issues, in a context where they can directly learn about their new social reality. The political-pedagogical proposals of these classes should focus on communication and interaction activities and respect each person´s singularities in the learning process.

In our case study, we noticed that most of the students strived to engage in the learning process and the whole institutional environment of CPR seemed to be sensitive to other non-linguistic needs, mainly related to the instabilities of transition to an autonomous life in a new country. This is largely because refugees and asylum seekers face several challenges simultaneously, as they need to adapt to the customs of the new society, face difficulties in bureaucratic procedures and work within a new social environment. Although they recognise it as fundamental to learn the Portuguese language, students often fail to prioritise the study of the language. We also found that refugees and asylum seekers at different stages of their journeys may present diverse language learning needs. Identifying these needs is essential to design support tools to help restore their self-confidence, foster their willingness to make plans, and increase their motivation and interest in communicating in the language of the host country, encouraging their autonomous learning processes. Moreover, the students seemed particularly motivated when others showed interest in learning about their living habits, reinforcing the idea that it is necessary for refugees and asylum seekers to be given ways to access the language, community and cultural aspects of the host country without having to renounce their origins to make room for the dominant culture.

On our part, we would also like to emphasise how remarkable it was to join the CPR students in various activities which guided us to the peculiarities of the Portuguese language learning process. In all these situations, it was possible to recognize the contact with sociocultural elements as a fundamental component for the integration in the host country and the importance in the construction of their identity, independence, and emancipation. Based on these points of analysis, we hope that the discussions raised by this article may somehow collaborate with future studies and contribute to the reflection about the existing language policies for refugees and asylum seekers in Portugal, as well as to the consolidation of the area of Portuguese as a Host Language. From the perspective of the receiving community, providing refugees and asylum seekers with language skills means that they will be more likely to access the labour market, participate in their local communities and enrich them culturally. From the refugees' and asylum seekers' point of view, learning the Portuguese language represents the possibility of assuming control of their lives and acquiring freedom to read not only "the word", but also "the world" in the new land.

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