Identity representations in three textbooks for German as an additional language: reflections on family images

[Representações identitárias em três livros didáticos de alemão como língua adicional: reflexões sobre as imagens de família]

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Abstract: In this article, we discuss the identity representations that guide German language teaching in a sample of three textbooks (*DaF kompakt neu A1*, *Akademie Deutsch A+*, *Zeitgeist*). Using image analysis (JOLY 2007), decolonial perspective (MIGNOLO 2003, 2011; MALDONADO-TORRES 2007), assumptions of critical linguistic education (CANDAU 2011, 2020), and reflections on ethnic-racial, social, and gender representativeness (ONIESKO, FERREIRA 2021), as theoretical and methodological references, we investigated the semiotic and discursive potential based on the theme of family. The qualitative-interpretative analysis of the images and didactic proposals that make up the materials indicate that textbooks from international publishers present a limited range of family models, which can reinforce stereotypes and promote a distancing from the reality experienced by the local public. Based on these results and the analysis of the *Zeitgeist* textbook, this study seeks to highlight the importance of local projects for German teaching, especially in academic contexts. This study argues for the relevance of didactic-pedagogical approaches that involve a critical and political perspective, highlighting that the expansion of representations in teaching materials, both through images and in their discursive aspects, can contribute to students' better participation and engagement in different language practices in the target language.

Keywords: textbook analysis; ethnic-racial representations; decoloniality; German as an additional language; construction of meanings

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Resumo: Neste artigo, discutimos as representações identitárias que orientam o ensino de língua alemã em uma amostra de três livros didáticos *(DaF kompakt neu A1*, *Akademie Deutsch A+*, *Zeitgeist*). Tendo como referencial teórico e metodológico a análise de imagens (JOLY 2007), a perspectiva decolonial (MIGNOLO 2003, 2011; MALDONADO-TORRES 2007), os pressupostos da educação linguística crítica (CANDAU 2011, 2020) e as reflexões sobre representatividade étnico-racial, social e de gênero (ONIESKO, FERREIRA 2022), investigamos o potencial semiótico e discursivo dos materiais a partir do tema família. A análise qualitativo-interpretativa das imagens e propostas didáticas que compõem os materiais indica que os livros de editoras internacionais apresentam uma gama limitada de modelos familiares, o que pode reforçar estereótipos e promover um afastamento da realidade vivenciada pelo público local. Com os resultados e a análise do livro *Zeitgeist*, busca-se evidenciar a importância de projetos locais para o ensino de alemão, sobretudo no contexto acadêmico. Este estudo defende a relevância de abordagens didático-pedagógicas que envolvam uma perspectiva crítica e política, destacando que a ampliação das representações no material didático, tanto através de imagens como em seus aspectos discursivos, pode contribuir para uma maior participação e engajamento das estudantes nas diferentes práticas linguísticas na língua alvo.

Palavras-chave: análise de livro didático; representações étnico-raciais; decolonialidade; alemão como língua adicional; construção de significados

1 Introduction

More than at any other time in history, we are experiencing the so-called "digital turn" (Neta; Danta 2021: 2), greatly intensified by the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought about the need for emergency adaptations of different educational contexts to the digital format. Despite this, according to various studies (Schmidt 2017; Arantes 2018; Aquino; Ferreira 2023, among others)[3], the textbook (including its digital format) remains one of the most widely used resources by teachers for teaching the German language. Thus, analyzing how these materials are presented to their target audience - in this research, students and teachers of German in academic contexts[4] - remains increasingly relevant. We view the textbook not only as a tool for presenting linguistic content and input organized according to a given progression and proficiency level, but also as having the potential to create and reproduce meanings, ideologies, and values. Accordingly, the main purpose of this article is to critically discuss

[3] Including an ilustrated children's book, published by German publishing house Klett.

[4] However, we believe it is pertinent to highlight that potential changes in this scenario may have occured, from the result of increased use of digital resources during and after the pandemic, a fact that new studies on the theme may or may not point out.

aspects related to ethnic-racial, social, and gender representation, based on the analysis of images and texts on the theme of "family" in three contemporary textbooks: *DaF Kompakt neu* (Braun et al. 2016), *Akademie Deutsch* (Schmoll et al. 2022), and *Zeitgeist* (forthcoming).

The proposed analysis is grounded in studies that focus on the power relations involved in the use of international textbooks, which have traditionally been widely adopted in the Brazilian context. This discussion is, in many aspects, intertwined with issues related to the colonialities of power, knowledge, and being (Maldonado-Torres 2011), which will be briefly revisited and discussed in the text. We also highlight that the theoretical-methodological basis of the analysis presented in this article is applied linguistics from an interdisciplinary perspective (Moita Lopes 2006), based on the understanding of language as a social practice that goes beyond merely linguistic issues and which involves different areas of knowledge. In this sense, according to Moita Lopes (ibid.: 14), it also aims to "[...] create intelligibility around social problems in which language plays a central role." We further emphasize the qualitative-interpretive approach of this research (Silva; Menezes 2000; Moita Lopes 2006; Denzin; Lincoln 2006), as we understand, following Silva and Menezes (2000: 20), the "[...] indissociable link between the objective world and subjectivity [...] which cannot be translated into numbers." According to the same authors, researchers are the key instruments in the process of making sense of phenomena and attributing meaning to the data analyzed (ibid.: 20). For the analyses, we also draw on Joly's (2007) work on image analysis and Oniesko and Ferreira (2021), who focus their study on the relationship between images and ethnic-racial representation in textbooks.

This article is thus divided into five sections, in addition to this first one, which serves as the introduction. The second section presents studies that address the use of German textbooks in the Brazilian context, highlighting the reflections of various authors on international materials and the power issues involved in their use. The third section revisits studies on coloniality and decoloniality, pointing to the growing interest in this theme among teachers and researchers in the field of German as an additional language (GAL), and advocating for prioritizing the local context in German language teaching and learning processes, with particular attention to the adoption and/or production of teaching

materials. The fourth section discusses issues related to language and meaning-making, particularly in relation to the composition of texts and images, while the following section is dedicated to the actual analysis of the three textbooks selected for this study. Finally, the concluding section compiles the main points highlighted in the analysis, drawing from the discussions that have underpinned this article.

2 Recent Studies on German as an Additional Language (GAL) Textbooks in the Brazilian Context

Over the past few decades, much has been discussed regarding the advantages and disadvantages of using textbooks in German as an Additional Language (GAL) classes in Brazil (Bohunovsky 2009; Uphoff, Arantes 2023; Savedra, Meireles 2020). A significant part of this discussion revolves around a certain mismatch between textbooks produced by the German publishing market for a general international audience and the reality of Brazilian students at all levels—from basic to higher education, including private language courses. On the other hand, it is acknowledged that completely rejecting the use of these materials would be quite difficult, as not using them often means a significant increase in time and workload for teachers, who would then have to plan and develop their own didactic materials for their courses and students.

With these premises in mind, we present a brief review of the discussions by researchers such as Bohunovsky and Bolognini (2005), Uphoff and Arantes (2023), and Bohunovsky (2009), with the aim of outlining an overview not only of the use of German textbooks but also of the reflections surrounding this usage, focusing more specifically on the academic context.

One of the first studies to address the use of international German textbooks in the Brazilian context and to discuss the problems related to their use was the work by Bohunovsky and Bolognini (2005). In this study, the authors already draw attention to the strong tendency of such materials to contribute to a stereotypical and idealized image of German-speaking countries—especially Germany - and the minimal (or absent) space given to critical and questioning reflections on the aspects presented in the books (Bohunovsky, Bolognini 2005: 2–3). The researchers thus challenge the supposed

"neutrality" of international textbooks, arguing that the representations they contain actually reflect the viewpoints and interpretations of their authors.

Highlighting the similarity in the profiles of potential learners/users assumed by international textbooks, Bohunovsky, in a 2009 article, asks: "Where is the 'specific target group orientation' (Zielgruppenorientierung) that is so often demanded in theoretical discussions in the field?" (Bohunovsky 2009a: 25). A highly relevant point in this discussion is the fact that many of these textbooks are designed for contexts where German is taught as a second language, that is, for learners who, for professional or academic reasons, are living in German-speaking countries. Thus, in another study (Bohunovsky 2009b), the author emphasizes the inadequacy of these materials for our students' context, stressing that this is not a criticism of the international textbooks themselves, as they never claim to address the specific interests of a given local context (ibid.: 335).

Bohunovsky also points to the hierarchical relationship between Brazil and Germany, identifying two "places of interlocution" that resonate strongly with the present article: one occupied by German-speaking countries, associated with imageries of superiority, efficiency, and development; and the other occupied by Brazil, associated with opposing imageries. These interlocution positions have been historically constructed and reinforced, and are directly tied to colonialism and its legacies, which manifest in different ways through the phenomenon of coloniality. This means that, even after the political emancipation of colonized countries, a colonial logic has structurally persisted, one that helps explain the hierarchy and interlocution roles described by the author.

In analyzing the power exerted by international textbooks in the teaching of GAL in Brazil, Uphoff (2009: 55) draws attention to the controlling nature of this device, which, in her words, functions as "[...] an instrument that allows various institutions [...] to direct the teaching work in the field of DaF" (Uphoff 2009: 55). Among the power structures mentioned by the author are the Goethe-Institut, the ZfA (Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen – the German Central Agency for Schools Abroad), and the major German publishing houses. Another key issue in Uphoff's research (ibid.) is the hierarchical relationship between teachers and international textbooks. Through an analysis of various discourses found in texts such as teacher manuals or academic articles

in the field of GAL in Brazil, the author exposes a strong tendency to question the quality of local teacher training in contrast to the perceived expertise and legitimacy of materials produced internationally by "qualified specialists" in the field.

In this sense, we see that in the GAL field, there exists a certain distrust of teachers' professional qualifications, often accompanied by a disbelief in the possibility of teaching the language without the support of a conventional textbook. On the other hand, textbook authors are perceived as specialists capable of competently designing a language course's core curriculum. This distinction between the knowledge of "specialists" and that of teachers reflects a hierarchy in which the latter are placed in a subordinate position.

More recently, researchers in the Brazilian context have increasingly questioned these dynamics, advocating for the centralization of actors who were previously marginalized in the German language teaching and learning process—teachers, learners, and the local context. As such, there is growing emphasis on how teachers and students are perceived—typically the former as "implementers" of teaching methods (with uncritical textbook use) and the latter as "tourists" or "consumers" in German-speaking countries. Some findings from Arantes' (2018) research on how textbooks construct images of learners worldwide illustrate this point:

> i) The situations for interaction presented are based on everyday experiences imagined to occur in Germany, such as those of exchange students, temporary workers, tourists, or consumers;
> ii) Learners are therefore predominantly portrayed as tourist-consumer types, assumed to be interested in shopping, traditional festivals, television celebrities [...], single, and temporarily residing in Germany (ARANTES 2018: 22).

Considering the assumptions reviewed here, we observe a growing demand by teachers and researchers (as well as by students themselves in the classroom) to question these asymmetrical power relations, aiming to develop alternative didactic proposals that bring the margins to the center and focus on the local context through a critical and decolonial lens. In other words, this means emphasizing the importance of considering the specific interests and objectives linked to our teaching context—the linguistic and

professional training in German at Brazilian universities—while also taking into account the regional, social, and ethnic specificities present within this context.

To further expand this debate, we will now revisit some studies that have discussed decoloniality, its developments, and its potential contributions to language teaching, specifically the teaching of German as an Additional Language.

3 The Decolonial Perspective and the Teaching of German as an Additional Language in Brazil

The colonial logic is perceived in different ways and different spheres. Accordingly, there are works focused on linguistic coloniality (Grilli, 2020), colonialism, and cultural coloniality (Botelho, 2013). These works are supported by a substantial theoretical framework that investigates and discusses the three primary domains of coloniality: the coloniality of power, the coloniality of being, and the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano, 2005; Mignolo, 2017). Naturally, these fields exhibit a high degree of interconnectedness. In this sense, although the exercise of power is strongly implicated in all aspects of coloniality, the concept of coloniality of power is more directly linked to socioeconomic and political issues.

For Mignolo (2003, 2017), the coloniality of power is the main tool for the subjugation of peoples, as well as a mechanism for legitimizing the subalternization of knowledge. He references Quijano (2007) in associating its reach with capitalism. Thus, the author identifies the effects of coloniality of power in the classification processes of ways of living and knowing around the world, always from a Eurocentric standpoint. This perspective reveals the intertwinement between coloniality of power and coloniality of knowledge, the latter referring more explicitly to the sphere of knowledge production. Tonial (2018) highlights Europe's colonial attitude toward diverse knowledge systems produced in different parts of the globe—knowledge that is interpreted according to European criteria and analytical frameworks, with Europe considering its own history to be "[...] the most complete version of human history" (Tonial 2018: 37).

The coloniality of being, also interconnected with other forms of coloniality, perhaps resonates most closely with the scope of this article. It refers to processes of denial, delegitimization, and dehumanization of other ways of being and existing in the world—those that differ from the forms accepted and considered "normative" by modernity. This idea is supported by the words of Maldonado-Torres (2007: 244):

> New identities were created in the context of European colonization: European, white, Indian, Black, and mestizo. A characteristic of this type of social classification is that the relationships between subjects are not horizontal, but vertical. That is, some identities are assumed to be superior to others. And this superiority is based on the degree of humanity attributed to the identities in question. The lighter a person's skin, the closer they are to full humanity, and vice versa (MALDONADO-TORRES 2007: 244).

This negation of humanity or subaltern positioning assigned to the "Other" manifests in various ways—for example, in the realm of authority (who has the legitimacy to speak on a given topic?) or in how different subjects are (or are not) represented in texts and images. This is precisely one of the key focuses of the analysis conducted in this article, based on the following guiding question: *How are identity representations constructed in the analyzed textbooks, considering the local context in which they are used?* One of the core assumptions of our research is that the analysis of images within the theme of "family" in the three selected textbooks (*DaF-Kompakt neu*, *Akademie Deutsch*, and *Zeitgeist*), along with the activities and tasks related to them, can provide important insights into discussions around identity, representation, and ethno-racial relations—issues that are, to a large extent, associated with aspects of the coloniality of being.

Regarding issues such as representation, coloniality, and textbooks, particularly concerning teaching-learning processes and the broader educational sphere, Candau (2011; 2020) draws attention to how colonial logic continues to operate in this domain. She emphasizes the need to denaturalize processes of coloniality in order to foster a more critical language education (Candau 2020: 68). Specifically in the field of German as an Additional Language in Brazil, the critical and decolonial discussion has been gaining prominence in various projects and academic studies, many of which are linked to the

training of German language teachers and the development of locally produced teaching materials.

In presenting and discussing the *Zeitgeist* project in previous works (Aquino; Ferreira 2023; Ferreira; Aquino, forthcoming), the authors emphasize the importance of considering the specific goals and interests of the actors involved in the teaching-learning process in the Brazilian context—teachers and students—when developing and selecting teaching materials. This includes, among other aspects,

> [...] the deconstruction of patterns traditionally conveyed in imported textbooks, so that German teachers and students may become increasingly involved in the teaching process and thus protagonists of their own educational and learning journey(AQUINO; FERREIRA 2023: 3).

In discussing textbooks and the training of German teachers, Puh (2020) views the near-absolute dominance of international textbooks in the Brazilian context—especially in teacher education in academia—as a significant issue that needs to be addressed. According to the author, the primacy of these materials reinforces a position of subalternity of teachers and students in relation to such materials, as these are perceived as products of "highly complex knowledge" supposedly only attainable in European universities (Puh 2020: 120). In addition to the factors mentioned so far, other relevant issues emerge regarding the critical and decolonial perspective in German language education and the use of imported textbooks: the matter of representativity and how various common textbook themes—such as "identity," "food," "housing," and "family"—are approached.

In the following section, we will explore in more detail the issue of imagery and identity representation in teaching materials and how some researchers in the field have been linking this issue to the problem of uncritical use of international textbooks.

4 Meaning-Making, Images, and Representation

Language can be understood as an inherently social phenomenon and thus plays a fundamental role in citizenship formation and the battle for change. According to Fabrício (2006), language is inseparable from any social and discursive practice, as it sustains or transforms individuals' social and cognitive actions. Similarly, Moita Lopes (2006) argues that through language and discourse, we construct representations, identities, and meanings within society. In this sense, language is also ideological and therefore political, which means that language teaching cannot disregard social issues in a given context, such as identities, which result from sociocultural relations and interactions.

Given its sociocultural role, language can also be defined as a complex system composed of signs, through which subjects negotiate and collaborate in the construction of meaning using different signals, representations, and perceptions (Hall 2016: 37). These signs, made up of both verbal and non-verbal elements, represent concepts and images that shape individual and collective conceptual mappings, establishing relationships between the sign, the concept, and world interpretations. We are thus capable of interpreting linguistic signs in different ways depending on the communicative and sociocultural situation. Semiosis, therefore, represents a field of language studies that encompasses customs, values, and social experiences interwoven in the construction of meaning (Santaella 2002: 37).

Regarding the term *image* specifically, Joly (2007) states:

> What is most remarkable is that, despite the diversity of meanings of this word, we understand it. We understand that it designates something that, although not always referring to the visible, borrows certain traits from the visual and, in any case, depends on the production of a subject: imaginary or concrete, the image goes through someone, who either produces or recognizes it (JOLY 2007: 13).

For the author, one of the main objectives of image analysis is to decipher the implications and meanings underlying the apparent neutrality of "visual messages" (Joly 2007: 47). In terms of deciphering images, Penn (2022) also emphasizes the socially shared nature of the image interpretation process, where meaning is generated through the interaction between the viewer and the visual message. Referring to Barthes (1977),

she further points out that many images have the power to naturalize certain cultural aspects, contributing to the creation and perpetuation of "myths." This process contributes to the invisibility of dominant norms and ideologies. In this way, many images or systems of representation—despite appearing to carry an "aura of neutrality," as Joly puts it—actually serve to legitimize hegemonic values. In the words of Curran (1976):

> The mythological or ideological significance of a message belongs to systems of representation that often appear to be neutral and objective but that legitimize and sustain power structures or a particular set of cultural values (CURRAN 1976: 9 *apud* PENN 2002: 324).

Thus, for Penn, one of the main goals in image analysis is the "demystification" of this naturalization process of visual messages by identifying elements that may be implicitly referenced and, above all, by exposing their ideologically constructed nature. For the analysis developed in this study, it is also essential to consider that sociocultural, historical, and situational contexts work together in the construction of meanings embedded in each image. This point is especially important when analyzing textbooks used in additional language teaching, since the selection of images that compose these materialis, as also noted by Penn (2002), is not neutral. These choices may be tied not only to pedagogical-didactic goals but also to learner motivation and engagement with the activities.

Through the critical analysis of images and related didactic activities in three textbooks, we aim to discuss how the combination of these elements can contribute to the construction of sociocultural knowledge and meaning for German language students in the Brazilian context. Considering that language is a social phenomenon represented by signs that can be interpreted according to individual and collective conceptual mappings, the conceptual choices made in these materials may restrict identity representations, distancing them from the lived experiences of Brazilian students. According to various studies (Arantes 2018; Puh 2020; Aquino; Ferreira 2022), the textbook still remains the primary resource in GAL teaching, which makes the way images are presented in these materials even more significant, as language and culture tend to become associated with the visual messages they convey.

Oniesko and Ferreira (2022), in their study on ethnic-racial relations in Brazil - grounded in Law 10.639/2003, which mandates the inclusion of this topic in both primary and secondary education - analyze the representation of Black individuals in textbooks. The authors highlight the negative impact of their absence on the formation of adolescents and young adults, linking this absence to the hegemonic bias of dominant ideologies. Moreover, they argue that the presence of stereotypes in textbooks, especially those conveyed through images, can contribute to processes such as exclusion, self-rejection, and low self-esteem among stigmatized or minority groups (Oniesko, Ferreira 2022: 7).

When discussing meaning-making, images, and identity representations in German textbooks, it is also important to briefly reflect on the concept of *identity* as adopted in this study. In the chapter titled "A Transgressive Applied Linguistics," Pennycook (2006: 78) discusses what he calls a "turn toward identity," highlighting the growing importance and multifaceted nature of the topic, which involves diverse perspectives. These different perspectives are also present in Lüsebrink's (2016) work, where he relates the term *identity* to a sense of belonging to specific groups, either through self-attributed characteristics or those assigned by others, a dynamic that can be understood as processes of self- or other-identification (Lüsebrink 2016: 14–15). However, the author emphasizes that identities are plural and mutable constructions. In the same vein, Canagarajah (2000: 117) conceives of *identities* as "[...] multiple, conflicting, negotiated, and evolving."

For the purposes of this article, we understand identity representations in textbook images as constructions that may or may not foster identification processes among the teachers and students who engage with these materials in their daily teaching and learning of German. Based on the points highlighted above, we chose to focus our analysis on the theme of *family*, as it allows for multiple perspectives in relation to visual messages and representation through categories such as race, social class, and gender. The relationship between text and image under the theme of family, therefore, enables a relevant discussion on the representations of identity, society, and culture prioritized by the textbooks analyzed here. This critical analysis of teaching materials (especially within language teacher education programs) is also essential to foster a more questioning learning process, one that reflects the perspectives of students and teachers alike.

5 Textbook Analysis

Notions of identity should not be dissociated from sociocultural constructions and power relations. Therefore, we consider that ethno-social perspectives—both in images and in the discourses adopted by teaching materials—are directly influenced by ideologies and discursive practices. Given that the learning of an additional language should not be limited to structural-linguistic or cognitive goals alone, but should instead embrace a broader concept of individual formation, it becomes imperative to investigate to what extent textbooks are contextualized within the sociocultural environments in which their target audience is situated (Santos Filho et al. 2022).

With the aim of discussing how ethno-racial, social, and gender representations are constructed in German as an Additional Language (GAL) textbooks, this study analyzes the opening pages of the lessons on *family* at beginner levels (A1–A2) in three textbooks used in academic contexts: *DaF kompakt neu A1* (Braun et al. 2016); *Akademie Deutsch A+* (Schmohl et al. 2022); and *Zeitgeist* (currently in production). The first two are published by major German publishing houses (Klett, Hueber) for an international audience. *DaF kompakt neu*, in particular, is adopted in at least six major Brazilian universities (UFF, UFRJ, UERJ, UFMG, UFRGS, and USP), while *Akademie Deutsch* emerges as an alternative for teaching German internationally in academic contexts.

The theme of *family* was chosen for analysis because it represents a complex and constantly evolving sociocultural construct, making the way it is addressed a potential indicator of social, ethnic, and cultural values. In Brazilian society, the so-called "traditional" family, typically depicted as a heterosexual (married, white, upper or middle class) couple with children—is still often presented as the norm (Amazonas et al. 2008). This study questions whether such representations, shaped by ideological, political, and religious discourses and positions, particularly in connection with the *coloniality of being*—are also imposed within GAL textbooks. This discussion becomes even more relevant in academic contexts, where textbooks play a key ideological and critical role in shaping future language teachers and researchers. We therefore find it essential to problematize, through analysis of the semantic and ideological potential of images and

texts, how questions of identity and representation can be "read" in textbooks, based on the meanings they convey and construct.

We argue that teaching materials should recognize and value the diversity of identity markers, countering the reproduction of ethno-racial, social prejudices, and discrimination within a linguistic community (Candau 2011: 246). In this regard, we align with Freire's (2004) assertion that education can function as a tool of alienation and domination, but it can also offer alternatives for emancipation. Accordingly, from the standpoint of a critical and reflective language education, different family configurations must be part of the discussions and themes addressed in teaching materials.

In the following subsections, we analyze the family-themed lessons from three GAL textbooks to investigate how verbal and non-verbal elements (the relationship between image, text, and context) represent different family configurations, in light of discussions related to decolonial studies and ethno-racial, social, and gender representations. To this end, we conduct a qualitative analysis establishing interpretive connections between the images and the accompanying didactic activities.

5.1 DaF kompakt neu A1

The title of part B in the second lesson of the textbook, *"Family Stories"*, introduces the topic of *family* through narratives, likely with the expectation that students will also be able to share their own family stories. A quick glance at the page reveals an apparent preference for a traditional perspective on family (a meaning that may be inferred from the combination of the title and the accompanying images). It is interesting to note that within this perspective, there appears to be little room for narratives involving problems or complexities - something that would not be unusual in our real classroom settings. In any case, the images seem to opt for an idealized and "perfect" vision of what is understood or expected within the concept of family.

The first activity (*Unsere Familie – Our Family*) aims, through a word-ordering task, to introduce vocabulary related to family members. The words to be ordered, referring only to traditional family members (terms such as *stepfather* or *stepmother* are

not included), are to be placed in a table with descriptors divided into male and female categories, suggesting a binary and heteronormative conception of family.

Image 1: DaF kompakt neu A1

Source: Braun *et al*. (2016)

Activity "b" asks students to identify Jan's family members through images. These portrayals clearly align with traditional and colonial conceptions of family: all characters are white, smiling, and seemingly affluent (which is evident through visual cues such as their environment, clothing, and even the presence of a Golden Retriever pet). Furthermore, the families depicted are all heterosexual couples with children and healthy, involved grandparents. Thus, we can see that on this first page, the book chooses to approach the family theme from a rather limited perspective, giving space only to white and heteronormative representations, effectively erasing the diversity that should be reflected in teaching materials, especially considering the diversity present in society and, therefore, in our classrooms.

On the second page, Activity 3 introduces a non-authentic text (created for pedagogical purposes), accompanied by a colorful illustration of hands, about *patchwork families* (*Patchworkfamilien*). This inclusion seems intended to bring diversity into the theme of family. However, a brief analysis reveals the continued dominance of a hegemonic and normative perspective. The text mentions that only one in ten families in Germany are "not normal" (with *normal* placed in quotation marks), but it fails to provide

any statistical reference to support this claim of minority status. Moreover, the text does not address race, gender, or any political, economic, or social adversities. Diversity is presented here as an exception, a matter of individual choice (to divorce, not marry, not have children), and not as a reflection of the real and complex realities of many families—whether in German-speaking countries or in Brazil.

Furthermore, as shown in the following exercises on the same page (3b, 4), the primary function of the text is to introduce new vocabulary and grammatical structures (specifically the connectors *und*, *oder*, *aber*), rather than to genuinely explore the theme of family diversity.

Based on this analysis, *DaF kompakt neu* appears to perpetuate a view of family within a culturally and ethnically standardized framework, in which established norms suppress difference, reinforce dominant culture, and prioritize what is "common" and homogeneous (Candau 2011). Clearly, family models that deviate from the ideologically perceived norm are treated as "abnormal." The emphasized portrayal of a white, happy, wealthy, and heteronormative Germany aligns with a colonial matrix that upholds hegemonic standards and fails to embrace difference (Ferreira; Aquino, forthcoming).

Finally, there are no activities, based on the selected images and their relation to vocabulary and exercises, that encourage students to engage critically. It is often left up to the teacher to introduce more reflective questions relevant to each learning context, such as: "Does your family look like the people in these images?" or "Did you miss any vocabulary items that you would need to describe your family?" In the context of training future German language teachers and researchers in Brazil, this type of standardization does little to support or inspire students in developing critical awareness.

5.2 Akademie Deutsch A+

As in the previous textbook, Unit 5.1 of *Akademie Deutsch* introduces the topic of family through a vocabulary exercise, involving a word-ordering activity in relation to four images. Instead of the term *family*, this material chooses to use the term *kinship* (*Verwandtschaft*), which implies a relationship more closely tied to blood relations. Once again, family is represented through images of white individuals, mostly men, and photos

of families formed by heterosexual couples with children, alongside smiling, affectionate elderly people (grandparents).

The second part of the first exercise involves matching words related to the central theme of family, where students are asked to add other terms to describe kinship relationships. Although this approach is somewhat broader than the one found in the previous book, and does allow for some interaction with students, the exercise remains limited to vocabulary related to kinship and family, lacking critical discussion topics or thought-provoking content on the theme. As with the previous material, any reflective or critical engagement with the topic would fall to the teacher to introduce.

Image 2: Akademie Deutsch

5 | 1

1.2 STEFANS FAMILIE

a) Lesen Sie die Texte. Welches Foto passt zu welchem Text?

A Das sind meine Eltern, meine Geschwister und ich. Ich heiße Stefan und bin der in der gelben Jacke. Ich bin acht, meine Schwestern Marie und Luise sind sechs und elf. Unsere Eltern machen oft Wanderungen mit uns. Auf dem Foto sind wir in Österreich!

B Mein Onkel Lukas ist alleinerziehend. Seine Frau und er sind geschieden. Er kümmert sich allein um seine Tochter Lena. Manchmal ist es hart. Er arbeitet von 8 bis 16.30 Uhr und dann macht er noch den Haushalt. Lena macht ihre Hausaufgaben deshalb fast immer allein.

C Meine Großeltern Jörg und Gertrud Hansen sind noch richtig fit. Meine Oma ist 74, aber sie geht regelmäßig zum Yoga und fährt viel Fahrrad. Mein Opa ist 76. Manchmal spielt er sogar Fußball mit uns! Ihre Kinder sind mein Vater Lars Hansen, seine Schwester Martina Fuchte und sein Bruder Lukas.

D Tante Martinas Ehemann heißt David. Die beiden sind seit 25 Jahren verheiratet und haben zwei Kinder. Martina ist Kinderkrankenschwester, ihr Mann ist Ingenieur. Am Wochenende sind sie gerne im Park. Bei schönem Wetter grillen wir dort manchmal mit der ganzen Familie.

E Die Kinder von Martina und David heißen Marco und Sarah. Marco ist mein Cousin und seine Schwester ist meine Cousine. Die beiden gehen noch zur Schule, Marco macht gerade sein Abitur. Mein Papa sagt immer, Marco ist sein Lieblingsneffe, aber er hat ja auch nur einen.

F Das ist unser Familienhund. Er heißt Paulchen und wir lieben ihn alle sehr. Er beißt nicht und will immer nur spielen. Er ist auf jedem Familienfest! Er gehört den Großeltern, aber manchmal ist er auch bei uns.

A | B | C | D | E | F

b) Erstellen Sie einen Stammbaum für Stefans Familie. Ergänzen Sie die Namen und zeichnen Sie die Linien.

Stefan

82 KAPITEL 5

Source: Schmohl *et al*. (2022)

In the second exercise (2.1) on the second page, six images accompanied by texts introduce Stefan's family. Through reading, the student is expected to match each text to the corresponding image, and in exercise "b," construct Stefan's family tree (*Stammbaum*), representing an imaginary, traditional family. As in *DaF kompakt*, the main family presented in this lesson is non-authentic and based on the family constellation of a male character (comparable to the character Jan in the previous book). As in the first exercise of this book (and similarly in *DaF kompakt*), the characters are all white, smiling, and depicted in clean, pleasant environments (homes, parks), accompanied by other children and a Golden Retriever pet, identical to the dog featured in *DaF kompakt*.

We acknowledge that there is an attempt to introduce diversity in one of the texts, as one of Stefan's uncles is divorced and raises his children alone. However, any possible issues or reflections related to this character are not explored; he is presented simply as one more example among many. Thus, *Akademie Deutsch* also exhibits a silencing of differences, marked by the ideology of whitening, promoting the idea of a homogeneous

society (Ferreira; Camargo, 2013), and once again placing the responsibility on the teacher to introduce alternative perspectives.

In addition to privileging certain identities and social realities, both international textbooks address the highly relevant and sensitive topic of *family* in a way that primarily serves to mediate grammar and vocabulary instruction, offering little to no space for student or teacher perspectives, or for critical reflection and discussion. It is evident that *DaF kompakt* and *Akademie Deutsch* maintain ties to colonialist imagery and power structures, thereby delegitimizing other identities and experiences.

Considering that *Akademie Deutsch* is positioned as a potential replacement for its predecessor, *DaF kompakt*, in academic contexts, we observe a continuation of approaches focused on teaching structures and vocabulary through the use of non-authentic texts and images. These materials do not reach the semiotic and ideological potential needed to go beyond descriptive-analytical approaches.

5.3 Zeitgeist

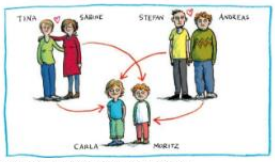
As previously mentioned, the textbook *Zeitgeist* is a local project that is still in development. Therefore, we aim to present and discuss some of the book's proposals within the theme of *family*. We also highlight that the project addresses a plurilingual demand, which can be seen in these examples through the use of Portuguese translations for the question titles.

Image 3: Zeitgeist

1 Was sehen Sie auf dem Bild? Ordnen Sie die Bilder den Vokabeln zu. Combine as imagens às palavras.

( ) Eine Mutter, eine Großmutter (Oma) und ein Kind
( ) Eine Mutter und eine Tochter oder einen Sohn
( ) Drei Mütter und ein Kind
( ) Ein Vater und ein Kind
( ) Eine Frau und ein Mann ohne Kinder
( ) Eine Person allein
( ) Ein Paar mit Hund oder Katze
( ) Ein Paar
(A) Ein Paar und ein Kind
( ) Großmutter (Oma) und Großvater (Opa) mit Enkel oder Enkelin

2 Lesen Sie den Text. Leia o texto abaixo.



Alles Familie, Alexandra Maxeiner, Anke Kuhl

Das ist die Familie von Carla und Moritz.
Andreas und Sabine sind die Eltern von Moritz, Tina und Stefan sind die Eltern von Carla. Aber jetzt hat Carla auch zwei Mütter und Moritz zwei Väter. Tina, Sabine, Stefan und Andreas haben eine Tochter und einen Sohn. Sie sind eine große Familie.

Wer ist Ihre Familie? Quem é a sua família?
Beispiele: Meine Familie ist meine Mutter, meine Schwester und mein Hund. / Meine Familie sind meine Freunde.

Teil B: Wie ist Ihre Familie? Como é sua família?

1 Janaina erzählt über ihre Familie. Lesen Sie ihren Bericht. Janaina conta sobre a sua família. Leia o relato.

Foto: arquivo pessoal

Hallo! Mein Name ist Janaina und ich bin in Sorocaba geboren. Meine Familie ist klein und lebt auch dort, aber nicht alle wohnen zusammen. Ich lebe mit meiner Mutter, Mariley und meiner kleineren Schwester, Amanda. Meine Mutter und mein Vater sind geschieden. Ich habe auch eine größere Schwester, Bruna. Sie ist verheiratet und wohnt mit ihrem Ehemann, Thiago. Er hat einen Zwillingsbruder, Danilo. Danilo ist mein Verlobter. Ein bisschen verwirrend, oder?

a. Janaina sagt, ihre Familie ist klein. Und wie ist Ihre Familie? Klein oder groß? Erzählen Sie auch ein bisschen über Ihre Familie? Die Adjektive im Kasten helfen. Janaina diz que sua família é pequena. E como é a sua família? Pequena ou grande? Conte um pouco sobre sua família. Os adjetivos na caixa ajudarão:

lustig - sympathisch - ernst - problematisch - ruhig - laut - begeistert - interessant

b. Lesen Sie jetzt den Bericht weiter und beantworten Sie die Fragen. Leia agora a continuação do relato e responda as perguntas.

Meine Mutter ist immer zu Hause, aber Amanda und ich sind nicht da. Sie arbeitet als Köchin und ich bin Deutschlehrerin und mache ein Traineeprogramm an einer deutschen Schule. Das Haus muss aber ordentlich sein und deshalb verteilen wir die Aufgaben im Haushalt. Wir haben zwei Hunde und meine Mutter muss sie jeden Tag füttern. Meine Schwester muss den Garten sauber machen. Fast immer wollen die Hunde reingehen und da spielen, aber sie dürfen nicht zu Hause bleiben. In der Woche kann ich fast nie beim Haushalt helfen, aber am Wochenende räume ich die Zimmer auf und putze die Bäder. Meine Mutter kümmert sich um die Küche und kocht das Mittagessen. Sie kann ja super kochen. Das Geschirr will aber niemand spülen und trocknen. Bruna hat diese Aufgabe. Jetzt möchten wir dringend einen Geschirrspüler kaufen. Er kann uns sicher dabei helfen!

- Wie kann Janaina im Haushalt helfen?
- Was muss ihre Schwester Bruna machen?
- Was will niemand machen?

Source: elaboração própria

The theme of *family* is introduced in the first book (*beginner level*) of the *Zeitgeist* project in Unit 4, titled *Das ist alles Familie* (*This is all family*). As with the other textbooks, the first activity in *Zeitgeist* also aims to introduce the unit's vocabulary. However, it does so in a more contextualized way, seeking a stronger connection between image and text. The images presented in the exercise are illustrations created specifically for the book and therefore avoid any immediate representation of skin color or form, leaving the construction of the characters' identities open to interpretation. The accompanying text, which students must match to the images, does not have a single correct answer and is not composed of isolated words, but of more complex structures (conjunctions, prepositions, dative, plural), even if these structures are not necessarily explored in depth in the lesson. Nonetheless, they are required for a more informed and nuanced approach to the topic.

In the second exercise, we present the family of Moritz, a character from the book *Alles Familie!* (Maxeiner; Kuhl 2010). The text introduces Moritz's family—composed of two mothers—through an illustration, without labeling it as different, alternative, or *Patchwork*. After reading and interpreting the image, students are invited to talk about their own families through a deliberately open-ended and provocative question: *"Who is your family?"*—suggesting that there are many valid ways to define family and form familial relationships. Through the images on this first page, we see that the aim is not only to introduce vocabulary, but also to enable a deeper discussion on the concept of family. The relationship between image, text, and didactic tasks presents critical potential, encouraging reflections on values, ideologies, and social contexts.

On the second page, an authentic text is presented, written by Janaina—a teacher and graduate of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro—who shares experiences about her family and daily life. In the accompanying photo, we see that her family consists of three Black women with mixed-breed dogs, set in a more modest environment (compared to the images found in the previously analyzed textbooks). In her text, Janaina describes her family experience, which students are then asked to use as a model for their own writing. In addition to Janaina's story, the online material for the book includes other student-authored narratives about their family lives, many of which are accompanied by audio recordings read aloud by the students themselves.

In this way, beginner German learners have access to a wider variety of texts created by diverse individuals, reflecting different German proficiency levels and pronunciation styles. Although the linguistic input is more complex than that found in the other textbooks analyzed here, we believe the authenticity of the texts and images may foster a sense of identification between students and the material, encouraging their own written and spoken production in German on the same theme.

In this sense, *Zeitgeist* shows a clear intention to bring students closer to the teaching material so that they feel represented. The choice of texts and images as an entry point for socially contextualized discussions has the potential to support more relevant and engaging language learning, incorporating ethnic-racial, social, and gender representations that are more aligned with the sociocultural and situational realities of these students and teachers.

6 Conclusion

Returning to the perspective put forward by Joly (2007), who highlights the importance of visual messages in the construction of meanings involving ideologies and values, we can conclude that the analysis of images alongside texts in the textbooks examined here reveals just how far from neutral such choices truly are. Through this type of investigation, it is possible to uncover the intentions or underlying assumptions of these materials regarding, for example, processes of identity representation in terms of class, ethnicity, and gender—precisely the focus of this study through the theme of *family*.

In this sense, we can say that, when considering the teaching of German in the Brazilian academic context, there is a significant discrepancy between how ethnic, social, and gender representations appear in the textbooks *DaF kompakt* and *Akademie Deutsch*, and the realities of the local teaching context. The analysis showed a predominant choice of imagery that favors white, heteronormative, and socially privileged identities—representations that, in most cases, diverge from the lived realities of a large portion of our students. Beyond the analysis of images, it is also evident that the pedagogical proposals of these materials focus primarily on structural-linguistic aspects, offering little

to no space for critical or contextually reflective approaches—such reflections, if present, are left entirely to the teacher's discretion.

In summary, we observe a lack of elements that reflect ethnic, social, and gender plurality in these textbooks. In contrast, the locally developed textbook *Zeitgeist* seeks to address these gaps, both in terms of imagery and pedagogical proposals. This material reveals an intentional effort to avoid reproducing colonial values that privilege Eurocentric ways of being and knowing (in line with the concept of coloniality of power), aiming instead to provide opportunities for linguistic, social, and political engagement and participation for both teachers and students. However, we acknowledge that much work remains to be done regarding identity representation in this textbook—such as the inclusion of more diverse images featuring elderly people, people with obesity, or people with disabilities, for example.

Finally, we emphasize the importance of further studies aimed at uncovering and critically discussing the teaching materials currently used for German language instruction. We also note that, as *Zeitgeist* is still in development—and given that it represents a relatively rare initiative within the Brazilian context—new studies and research should, in the future, pursue more in-depth investigations of this material across various aspects, such as image selection, types of learning activities, underlying assumptions, and the adopted linguistic progression.

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