

Ukrainians Professors in a Luso-Hispanophone Brazilian Border Region: a Case-Study on the Management of Multilingualism in Higher Education

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Abstract : In view of recent war conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, the government of Paraná State, in Brazil, started a program to host Ukrainian scientists in state universities in 2022. The initiative aimed at integrating these scientists into the Brazilian academic community, strengthening the role of universities in producing science and innovation even in times of war, as well as fostering Higher Education internationalization. Paraná state was a pioneer in this initiative due to the fact it has been home to the largest contingent of immigrants and descendants of Ukrainians in Brazil because of migratory processes that began at the end of the 19th century. One of the universities receiving Ukrainian scientists is in Foz do Iguaçu, a city that borders Argentina and Paraguay. It is a multilingual environment, whose majority languages are Portuguese (the official language of Brazil), Spanish (the official language of both Argentina and Paraguay), as well as Guarani (the co-official indigenous language of Paraguay). It is in such a sociolinguistic environment that two Ukrainian professors began their activities within the scope of an Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Program (master's and doctorate degree). This case study, whose theme is the management of multilingualism, was developed within the scope of Language Policy. It aimed at identifying the attitudes of both Ukrainian professors and postgraduate students towards multilingualism in this context, given the plural linguistic repertoire of the academic community, as well as identifying the language management strategies for the construction of knowledge implemented by the program and in the classroom by these participants. Therefore, the study was conducted under a qualitative approach, for which surveys and interviews were adopted as part of its methodological procedures. Data revealed the presence of different languages in the classroom (Portuguese, Spanish, English and Ukrainian), which made pedagogical practices challenging for both professors and students, whose levels of knowledge in the different languages varied significantly. The results indicate that multilingualism was the norm as the means of instruction adopted in this context, in which bilingual Portuguese-English-Ukrainian instruction was used by the professors in their lectures. Although English has been privileged for the internationalization of Higher Education in various contexts, it was not used as an exclusive means of instruction in this case, mostly because it is a predominantly Portuguese-Spanish-speaking environment. In addition, the professors counted on the mediation of an interpreter hired by the program since not every student had sufficient knowledge of English as part of their repertoires. The findings also suggest Portuguese is the language that most of the participants of this study prefer, both because it is the mother tongue of majority, and because it is the official language of the host country to the professors, who have sought to integrate to the local culture and community. This research is inserted in the Axis: Multilingualism and Education, of the UNESCO Chair on Language Policies for Multilingualism to which this study is related.

Keywords : attitudes, border region, multilingualism management, Ukrainian professors

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