

## French Language Contributions to Military Education in Brazil (1811–1880)

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to present the peculiarities of French language teaching and its political-military repercussions. Brazilian military education, since the colonial era, has received considerable influence from France in cultural and technical aspects, integrating the books and manuals of the curriculum. The selected methodology is exploratory research, through which the influence of military education in the formation of the elite will be observed and analyzed, with the use of the French language as a transdisciplinary axis. For this, we will make a historical-educational review, where the main characters and institutions need the knowledge obtained from academic-encyclopedic teaching. As a result, its results date back to a strong progressive movement that will shake Brazil's own imperial structure.

**Key words:** military education, French language, historical-cultural influence

### 1. Introduction

The French language presented its contributions in the world and in Brazil through different means in our history: through interactions between privateers<sup>1</sup> and indigenous people through trade and through attempts to form a colonial headquarters south of the Equator; as well as through the cultural influence played by Enlightenment thinkers, whose role served as inspiration for the illustrated ideas of the literate people trained in Coimbra, such as, for example, the Marquis of Pombal<sup>2</sup> and Gomes Freire de Andrada (Count of Bobadela)<sup>3</sup>.

The attempt to compile the main knowledge by Diderot and D'Alembert served as inspiration for the consultation of scientific-philosophical knowledge through the Encyclopedia. This model of information sharing was the north of educators for the following centuries. Thus, historically it has been identified that the institutionalization of the French language since the end of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century, from

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<sup>1</sup> The highlights of historic nature are the foundation of the Colony France Antarctica in Rio de Janeiro (16th century); The invasion of Maranhão and the foundation of *Equinocial France* (16th and 17th centuries); and the 1710 and 1711 invasions of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>2</sup> The Marquis of Pombal (Sebastião José Carvalho e Melo (1699–1782)) was responsible for introducing measures of Illustrated Reformism (a kind of enlightened despotism inspired by the Enlightenment ideals) in the Colony. This resulted in the partial overthrow of the royal patronage and administrative centralization through direct representatives of the king, without the intermediary of the Catholic Church.

<sup>3</sup> Gomes Freire (1685–1763) was one of those responsible for transferring the capital from the Colony of Salvador to Rio de Janeiro in 1763 — the year of his death. One of the reasons for the transfer was the proximity to the gold and diamond route in Minas Gerais and the security of those ports. In its explanatory statement, the highlight fell in the French invasion of 1711, where a French privateer, taking advantage of the characteristic fog of the entrance of Guanabara Bay, arrived without being disturbed and plundered Rio de Janeiro for weeks, taking over all the gold gathered in that city.

the arrival of the royal family to Brazil, germinated preliminary knowledge of the Romance language that contributed to communication in the four linguistic skills — oral expression, reading ability, written expression and listening comprehension.

The institutionalization of the French language as a teaching subject has its origins with the arrival of the royal family in 1808, from the creation of the medical school of Salvador (one of the first administrative acts of the Prince Regent on Brazilian soil) until the foundation of the College of Pedro II, the first secondary education institution in the country, in 1837. Given the fact, it includes, chronologically, the Joanine government and its son and successor, D. Pedro I, as well as the regency period, extending to the year when the Pedro II College was created and Secondary Education was instituted in the country.

The French language, in the 19th century, has an eminently instrumental purpose, since its study is justified as an instrument of access to knowledge then seen as “scientifico”, and which was professed, sometimes by Lenses (professors recognized by their notorious foreign) and almost always by encyclopedic Compendiums written in French, in military schools, in medical-surgical courses, from trade and agriculture classes until later in courses in the legal area, training centers of civil society, being a relative indicator of exclusion of academic and social elites for those who were not adept in the language that meant an indicator of civilization at the time.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Use of the French Language in Brazilian Military Schools

Some years before the proposal for the Fortification Class in Brazil in 1699, but which had not yet started in 1710, two teachers had applied for a License for the opening of Public Classes of French language, with their requirements approved based on Provisions valid by the one year. The first of these was granted “for the benefit of the public good” to Francisco José Luz, on July 23th 1788. The second Provision, granted in the same terms as the first, was passed to João José Tascio a year later, on March 18th 1789 (Oliveira, 2006).

The country’s first terrestrial military school was the “Casa do Trem” in 1811 (Faria, 2015). The site, which is currently the headquarters of the National Historical museum, was provisional until the move to the Military Academy, located in Largo de São Francisco (Motta, 1998). In parallel with his curriculum of up to seven years (Motta, 1998), the books and manuals were mostly written in French. Thus, the most modern bibliographic references were written in the French language, as France and its philosophes assumed for historiography the role of flagship in the dissemination and development of the ideals proclaimed by the Enlightenment. The Westernized intellectual aristocracy wanted in this way the French “delicacy, courtesy, culture, the joy of living” (Hazard, 1971).

During this period, letters of appointment of teachers of the French and English languages were promulgated. With a salary of four hundred thousand reis a year, the Letter of Appointment of the French Language Teacher provided: “the French language being the most widespread and, so to speak, universal, the creation of a chair in that language is very necessary for the development and prosperity of public education” (Almeida, 2000).

In parallel, the Military School of Application<sup>4</sup>, located in Praia Vermelha (Red Beach) was created in 1855,

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<sup>4</sup> The students were enrolled at Largo de São Francisco and then went to *Praia Vermelha* (Red Beach). Those destined for infantry and cavalry would attend the 1st year of the Military School and the 1st year of the School of Applications, while those of artillery and engineering attended both schools, during the years that were planned for their formation, in one, assimilating knowledge, theoretical and other, applying them in practical exercises.

with the purpose of beginning the training of officers, transferring military technical education (engineering and artillery courses) to the Largo do São Francisco school.

The opportunity for the two “schools” to fight shoulder to shoulder and test their efficiency soon arose, as the 1850s started with a major conflict in the platinum region. Brazilian troops, under the command of Luís Alves de Lima e Silva-Marshal and marquis of Caxias — fought in Oriental Band (Uruguay) and in the Rio da Prata United Provinces (Argentina), it was the war against Manuel Oribe and Juan Manuel de Rosas (1851-1852).

From the experiences gathered on the battlefield, two testimonies reflect the complexity of military education. A German soldier, who participated in the war against the Rio da Prata United provinces, reported that “in the Brazilian Army technical unpreparedness and the absence of professional knowledge prevailed, with the exception of the small group of officers trained in the Academy” (Motta, 1998).

As a result, the War Ministry noted the need for change: the Minister of War, in his speech, showed concern with the curriculum of the Military School, which did not offer ideal conditions for the training of weapons professionals. However, through the keen eye of a European, accustomed to large-scale conflicts, it was possible to perceive that the “academic” officers had characteristics necessary for the command of modern war, since the battle is only the end of every organization that begins with the mobilization, displacement and concentration of troops, which involves planning, administration and logistics problems, in which courage alone is not enough (Faria, 2015).

With the creation of the Polytechnic School in 1874, the military branch ended its activities in Largo do São Francisco, and artillery and engineering courses were transferred to the Military School. Despite the changes, books and teaching content continued to be predominantly of French origin.

The influence of nationalist movements in France also finds echoes within the military institution. At the Military School based in Praia Vermelha (Red Beach), the period between the years 1874 and 1889, stood out in this respect in relation to previous decades. The school, its teachers and its students were greatly influenced by social, political and cultural movements that shook the country and the world, respectively.

The environment of great effervescence, especially political, marked the Brazilian scenario of those years. Unlike generations before the conflict against Paraguay (1865-1870), teachers and students were actively involved in important movements that challenged the social and political order of the empire. As a satisfactory outcome of these movements, the political mentality (protective and salvationist) remained in the ideal, mainly of the students, with a clear prejudice for the military formation.

### 3. Results

The French language's contributions to military education date back to the colonial era, with Enlightenment influences and its thinking towards freedoms within a more autonomous state structure in relation to the Church. As foundations, the encyclopedic teaching provided the basis for the thinkers of Coimbra to base the Brazilian bases since before the arrival of the Royal Family.

The hiring of French language teachers at the main schools in Brazil at the time contributes to the view that the knowledge disseminated and shared by the military elite needed an interlocution beyond the Portuguese language. Speaking, reading and writing French was also an instrument of status and power, since encyclopedic books and technical manuals had long passages in that language and those who did not speak French would not climb the ranks throughout their careers, especially after the decade of 1850.

Along with the French language, the historical and cultural influences permeated the walls of military schools, influencing campaigns and a greater involvement of the military in politics. This fact will contribute to the fall of the monarchy nine years after the period covered by the article.

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