

LOCAL TEXTBOOK PRODUCTION AS DECOLONIAL PRACTICE: COLLABORATIVE DESIGN, WORKFLOW, AND EPISTEMIC INTERVENTION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF *ZEITGEIST*

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Abstract

This article examines *Zeitgeist*, a collaboratively authored German language textbook produced in Brazilian public universities, as a decolonial pedagogical intervention and model of locally grounded materials design. Based on critical document analysis and a reconstruction of the collaborative workflow, the study shows how decolonial principles shaped planning, writing, piloting, revision, and multimodal production. It highlights thematic organization, pluricentric phonetics, authentic texts, participatory authorship, and diverse voices and accents as resistance to Eurocentric textbook models. By presenting this workflow as adaptable, the article offers guidance for Global South contexts working with limited funding and uneven infrastructure. *Zeitgeist* thus emerges as an epistemic praxis that redefines whose knowledge shapes language education.

Keywords: decoloniality; textbook development; collaborative authorship; German as an Additional Language; Global South.

1.0 Introduction

Global foreign-language textbook publishing has become increasingly consolidated over the past three decades, dominated by a small number of European houses whose products circulate as pedagogical standards across diverse educational contexts. While these materials position themselves as globally adaptable, research has shown that they systematically reproduce Eurocentric cultural narratives, monolithic representations of language, controlled text types, and a structural sequencing designed for scalability rather than contextual

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responsiveness (Tomlinson, 2011; Melliti, 2013). In the Global South, these tensions are particularly visible: imported textbooks often fail to resonate with learners' sociocultural realities, offer limited representational diversity, and marginalize local histories, multilingual practices and epistemologies (Arantes, 2018; Savedra & Meireles, 2020; Uphoff & Arantes, 2023; Aquino, 2023). From a decolonial perspective, these limitations are not merely pedagogical shortcomings but manifestations of coloniality within the production and circulation of educational knowledge (Mignolo, 2021; Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

In Brazil, dissatisfaction with international textbooks used in German language teaching has been repeatedly documented. Teachers and students report demotivation linked to the rapid structural progression of global series, their high cost, idealized depictions of German-speaking societies, and the persistent absence of Brazilian voices, racial diversity, and thematically relevant content (Uphoff, 2009; Marques-Schäfer *et al.*, 2016; Pupp Spinassé, 2024). Within this landscape, the *Zeitgeist* project emerged as a collective response: a locally authored, thematically organized German textbook developed by professors from multiple Brazilian public universities. Conceived explicitly as a counter-hegemonic pedagogical initiative, *Zeitgeist* foregrounds Brazilian sociocultural realities, integrates authentic and multimodal materials, adopts pluricentric conceptions of German, and incorporates contributions by students, teachers, researchers and members of German-speaking communities in Brazil.

Previous analyses of the project have emphasised its epistemic and pedagogical dimensions, interpreting *Zeitgeist* as a form of resistance to dominant global textbook models. However, these discussions left less visible an equally central dimension: how the book was actually produced. The collaborative work process, organisational structures, negotiation processes, workflow challenges and emotional intensities that shaped the material are not merely background details, they are part of the project's decolonial praxis. As argued by decolonial and Critical Applied Linguistics (CAP), epistemic interventions are inseparable from the material conditions and relational practices through which knowledge is produced (Moita Lopes, 2006; Walsh, 2018). Understanding the *process* of local authorship is therefore essential for recognising *Zeitgeist* not only as a textbook, but as a methodological and social experiment with implications for other Global South contexts.

This article brings together two complementary dimensions: an analytical examination of the textbook's decolonial and critical principles, linked to our previous analysis, and a descriptive reconstruction of the internal collaborative process through which the material was designed, drafted, piloted, revised, and finalised. By integrating these perspectives, the article offers a detailed account of how epistemic intentions are translated into concrete decisions: the organisation of thematic units, the structuring of production and reception strands, the embodied effort of audio recordings, the negotiation of layout and visual identity, and the everyday challenges of unpaid academic collaboration. It also systematises the workflow into a framework that may be adapted by other teams

seeking to produce locally situated, decolonially oriented teaching materials¹ under conditions of limited funding and uneven institutional infrastructure.

Ultimately, we argue that *Zeitgeist* constitutes both a pedagogical innovation and a social methodology. Its development reveals how collectively authorship can redistribute authority in language education, broaden the range of legitimate voices and varieties of German, and generate design practices aligned with epistemic justice. More broadly, the article contributes to ongoing discussions about how Global South institutions can reclaim curricular authorship, challenging the monocentric structures of global textbook publishing and imagining new forms of pedagogical production grounded in local realities.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), decolonial theory, critical pedagogy and materials development studies together illuminate how language education operates within broader systems of knowledge, power and representation, providing the conceptual foundations for understanding locally authored textbooks as epistemic and political interventions. Within CAL (Pennycook, 2021; Moita Lopes, 2006), language teaching materials are never neutral: they construct worlds, legitimise particular identities and regulate forms of linguistic behaviour. Global textbooks have long been critiqued for their systematic reproduction of Eurocentric cultural narratives, monolingual ideologies and commercial sanitisation of discourse (Melliti, 2013; Lendo *et al.*, 2023). Such materials often present a sanitized vision of linguistic and social life, remove conflict, depoliticise cultural content and create worlds populated by idealised, middle-class, white European subjects (Arantes, 2018; Bohunovsky & Bolognini, 2005).

This framing aligns with Uphoff's (2009) argument that international textbooks circulate as "disciplinary devices" that invisibly regulate teacher autonomy and standardise pedagogical practice. These critiques resonate with broader sociolinguistic research demonstrating how globally marketed textbooks often marginalise diasporic histories, pluricentric linguistic variation and local sociocultural realities (Savedra & Meireles, 2020; Lendo *et al.*, 2023), reinforcing what Maldonado-Torres (2007) describes as the "coloniality of being" in its educational form: the systematic marginalization of certain subjects, histories and ways of knowing.

Decolonial theory deepens this critique by showing that the issue is not merely the presence or absence of certain types of images or topics, but the persistence of epistemic hierarchies that centre Europe as the locus of linguistic legitimacy, cultural normality and pedagogical authority. For Mignolo (2021), the modern/colonial order operates by naturalising its own epistemologies as universal, rendering local or subaltern knowledge as derivative or supplementary. In language education, this coloniality becomes visible in the privileging of standardized metropolitan varieties, the exportation of methodological norms

from the Global North and the assumption that curricular models designed for European learners can be seamlessly applied everywhere. Scholars such as Walsh (2018) argue that decoloniality is not only an analytic framework but also a praxis that demands the creation of alternative structures of knowledge production, authorship and representation. Within this perspective, textbook development becomes a crucial site for epistemic delinking: by centering local histories, sociolinguistic repertoires, accents and multimodal practices, locally authored materials challenge the dominance of global publishing models and propose new ways of constructing curricular meaning.

Critical pedagogy offers another important lens for understanding the need to disrupt global textbook norms. Freire (1996) emphasises that education either reproduces existing structures of domination or contributes to Critical awareness (*Conscientização*), an expanded awareness capable of reading the world critically. Global textbooks, motivated by marketability and the PARSNIP (Politics, Alcohol, Religion, Sex, Narcotics, Isms, Pork) logic that avoids “controversial” content (Çoban, 2025), routinely remove sociopolitical themes, promoting a depoliticised understanding of culture and communication. For Crookes (2013), this omission reinforces a vision of language learning rooted in consumption and personal self-improvement rather than collective reflection or social transformation. In contrast, critical pedagogy argues for materials that help learners analyse the structures of inequality that shape their lives, including those embedded in language norms, cultural representations and educational ideologies. When textbooks foreground local issues, authentic voices and the complexities of lived experience, they align themselves with Freirean commitments to dialogue, interpretive autonomy and social meaning-making.

Materials development studies provide a complementary dimension to these theoretical frameworks, highlighting how epistemic and pedagogical commitments become operationalised in concrete design choices. Tomlinson (2011) argues that effective materials should offer authentic input, create affective connections and allow learners to draw on their own knowledge and experiences. Research on locally developed materials in the Global South has demonstrated that thematic organisation, multimodal texts, and culturally situated tasks can increase motivation and support deeper forms of engagement (Prabhu, 1987; Aquino, 2026). Yet this research also shows that local authors often operate under limiting conditions: minimal funding, precarious production work, difficulty accessing authentic materials and a lack of professional editorial support. These structural conditions shape what kinds of innovations are possible and underscore the need for models that integrate critical aims with feasible collaborative practices.

Viewed together, these perspectives suggest that textbook production is not simply a matter of selecting topics or sequencing grammar; it is a deeply political act in which authors decide whose voices will be heard, which histories will be legitimised, and how learners are positioned in relation to the language they study. Designing a decolonial textbook thus requires rethinking not only the content of materials, but also their processes of authorship, revision, organisation and

circulation. In this sense, the development of *Zeitgeist* aligns with calls to reimagine materials as sites of epistemic justice, where language education becomes a space for validating local knowledge, diversifying representational frameworks and challenging the epistemic hierarchies sustained by global publishing markets. Its collaborative practices, pluricentric orientation and integration of authentic Brazilian sociocultural contexts exemplify how theoretical commitments from CAL, decolonial theory and critical pedagogy can be translated into material form, while simultaneously offering a methodological model for other contexts in the Global South seeking to reclaim curricular authorship.

3.0 Global Textbook Markets and Their Structural Constraints

The global foreign-language textbook market is shaped by commercial logics that prize scalability, standardisation and cross-regional marketability, often at the expense of sociocultural relevance, authenticity and contextual responsiveness. Large European publishing houses dominate the production and international circulation of German, English and Spanish language textbooks, creating a relatively homogenous pedagogical landscape in which a small number of series become institutional defaults worldwide (Rösler & Schart, 2016; Maijala, 2007). These publishers operate within industrial production chains in which linguistic content, visual design, marketing strategies and digital extensions are tightly coordinated to ensure compatibility with international proficiency frameworks and global distribution channels. As a result, textbooks are designed to avoid culturally specific contexts, politically sensitive issues and complex sociolinguistic variation, privileging “neutral” topics and controlled text types that can be sold in diverse markets without substantial local adaptation (Tomlinson, 2011).

A significant body of research has analysed how these industrial constraints shape representations of language, culture and identity. Studies of German as a Foreign Language (DaF) textbooks have documented the predominance of idealised urban environments, middle-class lifestyles, white European characters and sanitized depictions of daily life, with diversity appearing only superficially or in depoliticised forms (Bohunovsky & Bolognini, 2005; Marques-Schäfer *et al.*, 2016; Lendo *et al.*, 2023). Melliti’s (2013) analysis of English textbooks similarly shows how global coursebooks simplify sociopolitical issues, depersonalise conflict and remove historical references that might contextualise inequality. These patterns reflect what Çoban (2025) terms “surface diversity,” in which visual inclusion of minoritised bodies coexists with the preservation of Eurocentric norms of behaviour and sociocultural aspiration. Such representational regimes naturalise a narrow worldview and reinforce hierarchies of legitimacy that position European epistemologies as universal and other contexts as peripheral.

The limitations of global textbooks also extend to linguistic dimensions. Major series tend to standardise grammatical progression and provide highly controlled input, suppressing variation in accent, register, dialect and discourse

type. In the case of German, this results in the erasure of pluricentric forms, diasporic varieties and contact-induced linguistic repertoires that exist in places such as Brazil, Namibia or Turkey (Savedra & Meireles, 2020). Standardised pronunciation in audio recordings reproduces the ideological centrality of specific metropolitan norms and reinforces native-speakerism, even as pluricentric linguistics advances alternative understandings of German as a linguistically diverse language. Global textbooks thus participate in what Rösler & Schart (2016) identify as the epistemic whitening of language pedagogy: they present linguistic complexity as a distraction from pedagogical efficiency and homogenise learners' expectations regarding what legitimate German should look and sound like.

The rise of digital platforms has not fundamentally altered these dynamics. Although publishers increasingly promote apps, online workbooks and interactive platforms as innovative, research suggests that such tools often reproduce the same structural limitations as print materials while adding barriers related to cost, connectivity and device access (Galante *et al.*, 2024). In the Global South, where internet access is uneven, digital textbook extensions can exacerbate inequalities rather than expand opportunities. Moreover, digital interactivity often remains superficial, limited to clickable exercises, automated feedback, and gamified drills, while deeper forms of engagement, critical interpretation, and multimodality remain constrained by the underlying commercial model.

These structural characteristics have direct pedagogical effects. Teachers report that global textbooks often progress too quickly through grammatical structures, insufficiently support reading comprehension, offer limited opportunities for critical or thematic engagement, and impose a sequencing that restricts curricular flexibility (Uphoff, 2009; Aquino, 2023). Students in the Global South frequently report a lack of identification with textbook characters, the irrelevance of topics to their experiences and the absence of local or regional sociolinguistic realities (Arantes, 2018; Uphoff & Arantes, 2023; Pupp Spinassé, 2024). These factors contribute to demotivation, a sense of distance from the target language and the perception that language learning is the acquisition of an abstract structure disconnected from learners' lived worlds.

Against this backdrop, locally authored textbooks emerge as responses to both the pedagogical limitations and the epistemic hierarchies embedded in global publishing. Rather than adapting imported materials, locally produced resources can centre learners' realities, incorporate authentic texts grounded in community histories, diversify linguistic representation and offer thematically meaningful experiences. Yet producing such materials under the conditions typical of the Global South poses significant challenges, including limited funding, fragmented academic networks, precarious work conditions and the absence of robust editorial infrastructures. These constraints shape every stage of the production process (from text selection and copyright negotiations to audio recording, layout design and piloting) and contribute to the need for models of collaborative authorship that are both critical and materially feasible. It is within this complex landscape of constraint and possibility that the *Zeitgeist* project

was conceived, offering not only an alternative pedagogical resource but also a methodological pathway for reimagining curricular authorship from a decolonial perspective.

4.0 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology that integrates critical document analysis with a detailed reconstruction of the collective processes through which *Zeitgeist* was developed. While previous analyses of the textbook have focused primarily on its theoretical foundations and its epistemic resistance to global textbook models, the present article expands the methodological scope by examining how these principles materialized through the development process, organisation, workflow and collective negotiation involved in producing the first volume. The methodological approach is therefore both analytic and descriptive: analytic in its engagement with the textbook as a pedagogical and epistemic artefact, and descriptive in its reconstruction of the collaborative practices, decision-making processes and material constraints that shaped its emergence. This dual orientation aligns with decolonial calls to illuminate not only the outcomes of knowledge production but also the relational, situated and material conditions under which knowledge is created (Mignolo, 2021; Walsh, 2018).

The primary corpus for analysis consists of internal project documents, multiple iterations of textbook drafts, piloting notes, collaborative meeting records, and the published preliminary version of the textbook itself. These materials were triangulated with reflective accounts produced by the authors during and after the development process, drawing on autoethnographic (Chang *et al.*, 2013) principles that foreground the embodied, affective and organisational dimensions of collective authorship. This reflexive component was essential for capturing forms of material production often invisible in traditional accounts of materials development, such as the emotional work of sustaining collaboration, the negotiation of disagreements, and the time-consuming tasks of coordinating dispersed teams under conditions of limited institutional support.

The methodological orientation also draws on participatory design research, which conceptualises educational design as an iterative, dialogic and socially embedded process (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). Throughout the development of *Zeitgeist*, authors worked in dynamic configurations (sometimes in large meetings, often in smaller groups or pairs) in order to refine texts, activities, phonetic content, multimodal resources and visual design. These iterative cycles of drafting, peer revision, piloting and redesign provided ongoing empirical material for analysis. The division of the team into three principal working groups (Production, Reception and Phonetics), supplemented by auxiliary groups dedicated to layout, digital materials, permissions and revision, created a multilayered structure that generated traceable documentation of decision-making processes and collective dynamics. These documents allow the methodological

reconstruction presented here, making visible the internal tensions, adaptations and conceptual negotiations that shaped the final material.

Piloting in university classrooms played a key role in evaluating the thematic resonance, difficulty level and conceptual clarity of the emerging materials. Although piloting was limited by institutional constraints and the uneven availability of instructors not directly involved in the project, it generated feedback that informed substantive revisions to task design, scaffolding, visual layout and multimodal integration. Piloting data included written teaching notes, oral feedback from instructors, student comments and classroom observations, all of which contributed to triangulating the analysis of the textbook's pedagogical affordances with insights from actual classroom use. The methodological stance here treats piloting not merely as a validation stage but as part of a cyclical, praxis-oriented approach to materials development, aligned with critical and decolonial understandings of educational design as fundamentally iterative and relational.

Because the study analyses a complete pedagogical artefact and its associated internal documents rather than human participants, no institutional ethics approval was required. Nonetheless, the methodological process adhered to principles of ethical reflexivity consistent with collaborative research: contributors to written and audio materials used in the textbook provided consent, and all descriptions of team interactions respect confidentiality and emphasise collective authorship rather than individual attribution. This ethical stance is consistent with the project's broader decolonial commitments, which seek to destabilise hierarchical models of expertise and privilege horizontal collaboration.

Overall, the methodology aims to make visible the epistemic and material effort involved in creating a locally authored textbook in the Global South. By combining critical analysis of the textbook's design with a reconstruction of its cooperative workflow, the study offers both an interpretive lens for understanding *Zeitgeist* as a decolonial intervention and a reflexive model that other teams may adapt when developing situated, multimodal and critically oriented educational materials under similarly constrained conditions.

5.0 The *Zeitgeist* Project: Principles and Collaborative Workflow

The *Zeitgeist* project emerged from the specific sociopolitical and pedagogical conditions of German teaching in Brazilian public universities, where longstanding dissatisfaction with imported textbooks intersected with an expanding research tradition in CAL, critical pedagogy and decolonial thought. Conceived in 2019 by professors from six universities, the project articulated an explicitly counter-hegemonic vision: to develop a German textbook grounded in Brazilian realities, centred on thematic organisation rather than structural Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) sequencing, and informed by critical, pluricentric and decolonial commitments. While the theoretical foundations of the project have been analysed elsewhere, understanding *Zeitgeist*

as a decolonial pedagogical intervention requires examining the collaborative processes, organisational structures and material constraints through which it was produced. The book's epistemic aims, foregrounding local histories, authentic voices and linguistic plurality, were inseparable from the forms of work process, negotiation and collective authorship that shaped the project from its inception.

From the outset, four guiding principles oriented the textbook's development: content orientation, learner and teacher autonomy, critical-reflective engagement and a decolonial reconfiguration of knowledge authority. These principles were not abstract ideals but operationalised through concrete decisions about themes, genres, phonetic work, multimodal resources and the organisation of work. Content orientation meant that units were structured around sociocultural themes relevant to Brazilian learners (place, identity, time, values and knowledge) rather than around functional situations or grammatical categories. Autonomy involved creating materials flexible enough for teachers to reorder units and tasks according to their contexts, while critical-reflective engagement required integrating texts and activities that encouraged learners to interpret social issues, examine representations and connect German learning to their lived realities. The decolonial principle shaped decisions about text selection, audio production, linguistic variation and authorship, emphasising voices rooted in Brazilian contexts and challenging the centrality of European epistemologies in conventional DaF materials.

To translate these principles into practice, the team established a collaborative structure organised around three main working groups (Production, Reception and Phonetics)² alongside auxiliary groups dedicated to layout, digital materials, permissions, revision and piloting. This structure allowed for a distributed work load but required constant negotiation to maintain coherence across units and strands. The Production group focused on developing oral and written tasks, gradually building communicative abilities within thematic contexts; the Reception group curated and adapted authentic and semi-authentic texts, designing activities that prioritised reading strategies and critical comprehension; and the Phonetics group integrated pronunciation work into both strands, drawing on contrastive analysis with Portuguese and adopting a pluricentric understanding of German. These groups operated semi-autonomously while remaining interdependent, exchanging drafts, aligning thematic progressions and adjusting linguistic scaffolding through iterative cycles of peer revision.

Collaborative work unfolded through a combination of large-group meetings and small-group interactions. Early meetings, often long and exhaustive, revealed both the potential and the challenges of horizontal authorship: while they fostered collective reflection, they also made decision-making slow and emotionally demanding. In response, the team adopted smaller constellations (pairs or trios) that developed specific sections of units before circulating drafts to other groups for critique and harmonisation. This shift created a more agile workflow and made visible the dialogic nature of the process, in which disagreements about linguistic complexity, thematic balance, visual representation or audio

choices were negotiated through sustained conversation rather than imposed unilaterally. The extensive correspondence generated during these exchanges (emails, shared documents, annotated drafts) constitutes an important part of the project's methodological record, highlighting the relational, embodied and affective dimensions of authorship.

One of the most distinctive features of the workflow was the integration of authentic texts and multimodal materials. Seeking to avoid the artificiality and idealisation characteristic of global textbooks, the team curated texts from diverse genres, including migrant letters, academic abstracts, blog posts, institutional documents, student narratives, journalistic pieces, and literary fragments, while also inviting external collaborators to produce original materials. This approach decentralised the notion of the "experts," distributing epistemic authority across a heterogeneous network of teachers, students, researchers and community members. However, it also required navigating complex issues of copyright, permissions and adaptation. A specific working group was created to contact authors and institutions, negotiate reproduction rights, and ensure that all materials were used ethically and legally. When permissions were denied or restricted, the team adapted or replaced texts, documenting modifications to preserve transparency. These negotiations illustrate how decolonial commitments intersect with practical constraints: while the project sought to democratise authorship, it also had to operate within legal frameworks shaped by global publishing economies.

Audio production further exemplified this tension between epistemic goals and material limitations. Lacking access to professional studios, the team adopted a participatory strategy in which contributors recorded their own texts using basic equipment. Rather than compromising the quality of the material, this method produced an audio corpus marked by diversity of accents, speech rates, registers and linguistic trajectories, including voices of Brazilian German speakers, German speakers living in Brazil and collaborators from different regions. This plural soundscape challenged the normative homogeneity of commercial audio recordings and demonstrated how pluricentricity can be enacted not only conceptually but materially. It also reflected the emotional and relational effort embedded in the project: authors recorded texts multiple times, coordinated re-recordings, adjusted audio clarity and engaged deeply in decisions about what kinds of voices should appear in the textbook. These micro-level processes, rarely captured in accounts of materials development, constitute essential aspects of the project's decolonial praxis.

Visual design played an equally significant role. In collaboration with a Brazilian illustrator, the team created a visual identity grounded in interpretive openness, critical representation and aesthetic coherence. Illustrations avoided stereotypical characters and instead utilised silhouettes, symbolic elements and watercolour motifs that encouraged interpretive dialogue rather than reinforcing fixed identities. Choosing colours, designing icons, structuring page layouts and balancing text-image relations required continuous negotiation between

aesthetic, pedagogical and accessibility considerations. A second visual group later joined the process, adapting the initial design into a consistent layout and addressing challenges such as font size, spacing and the integration of QR codes. These decisions were shaped not only by aesthetic preference but by an awareness of diverse learners' needs, including those related to readability and attentional diversity, aligning the visual dimension with the project's broader commitments to inclusivity and contextual relevance.

Piloting constituted another methodological pillar, even though it occurred under structurally constrained conditions. Instructors not directly involved in the writing groups tested units in university classrooms and provided feedback on thematic resonance, textual difficulty, activity design and multimodality. Students' responses highlighted the affective and cognitive impact of encountering Brazilian contexts, authentic texts and diverse voices within a German-learning environment. Instructors' notes also pointed to necessary revisions, such as increased scaffolding for complex texts, adjustments to sequencing, clearer instructions and improvements to visual accessibility. Although limited in scale, these pilots produced insights that fed directly into the redesign process, reinforcing the iterative nature of the workflow and underscoring the importance of contextually embedded classroom evaluation for decolonial materials development.

Underpinning all these processes were the material realities of academic production in Brazil. The team operated with minimal funding, significant teaching and administrative workloads, and limited institutional support. Most of the writing, reviewing, editing and coordinating work occurred as unpaid contribution, distributed unevenly across the group and often sustained by personal commitment rather than structural recognition. These conditions shaped the pace, organisation and emotional texture of the project: coordination fatigue, scheduling conflicts, moments of discouragement and the need for constant negotiation of responsibilities were part of the everyday reality of creating *Zeitgeist*. Yet rather than undermining the project, these constraints made visible the relational and affective infrastructures necessary for decolonial authorship, highlighting how knowledge production in the Global South is inextricably tied to collective resilience and the cultivation of supportive academic communities.

Taken together, the principles and workflow of *Zeitgeist* demonstrate how collaborative textbook development can serve as a concrete enactment of decolonial epistemologies. The project not only challenged Eurocentric models at the level of content and representation but also reconfigured the processes through which curricular knowledge is produced. By foregrounding horizontal collaboration, authentic multimodality, linguistic plurality, contextual relevance and reflexive adaptation, *Zeitgeist* offers both a pedagogical alternative and a methodological framework for locally situated, critically oriented materials design. Its development reveals the complexities, tensions and possibilities inherent in producing a textbook from the Global South, an endeavour in which epistemic

intervention is inseparable from the material, affective and organisational efforts that sustain collective authorship.

6.0 Discussion

The development of *Zeitgeist* reveals how the creation of locally authored teaching materials can function simultaneously as pedagogical innovation, epistemic intervention and social methodology. When examined through the intertwined lenses of decolonial theory, CAL and critical pedagogy, the project demonstrates that curricular materials are not simply pedagogical tools but sites where knowledge hierarchies are reproduced, contested and transformed. The collaborative workflow, the thematic architecture, the multimodal and authentic texts, the plural soundscape of audio recordings and the visual identity constructed through dialogue with a Brazilian illustrator all materialise commitments that go beyond conventional textbook design. What emerges is a process that reconfigures the relationship between authorship, representation and pedagogy, foregrounding the importance of contextual relevance and epistemic plurality in language teaching.

One of the central insights that emerges from the project concerns the relationship between epistemic intent and material practice. Throughout the design process, theoretical principles did not exist as external guidelines but were constantly negotiated in moments of practical decision-making: choosing whether to include a particular authentic text, determining how to scaffold a complex genre, deciding which accents to include in audio recordings, or balancing aesthetic choices with accessibility. These micro-decisions reveal how decolonial approaches to materials development depend not on grand conceptual gestures but on sustained, situated and often laborious efforts to ensure that the values of plurality, representation and contextualisation permeate the material at every level. The inclusion of authentic texts and original contributions from students, teachers and community members illustrates this dynamic. Rather than simply “adding diversity,” the project sought to reorganise the epistemic authority underpinning textbook authorship by treating local knowledge and lived experience as legitimate sources of curricular content, challenging the expert-driven model of global publishing.

Equally significant is the way the collaborative structure reshaped the material and social relations and social relations involved in creating the textbook. The distribution of work across the Production, Reception, and Phonetics groups, the iterative cycles of drafting and review by members of the wider team as well as invited external academics who had not participated in producing the material, and the turn toward smaller writing constellations all indicate that the pedagogical principles of horizontality, dialogue, and critical reflection were not restricted to the content of the book but were enacted through the process of producing it. This echoes Freire’s argument that pedagogical practice must embody the

forms of social participation it seeks to cultivate (Freire, 1996). The project's reliance on trust, negotiation, emotional investment and collective problem-solving, especially under precarious material conditions, demonstrates how collaborative authorship can challenge the individualistic and hierarchical norms often associated with textbook development. In this sense, *Zeitgeist* becomes not only a tool for teaching German but a living experiment in collective knowledge-making that reflects broader struggles for academic autonomy and epistemic justice in the Global South.

The challenges encountered throughout the process further illuminate structural issues that shape the production of knowledge in linguistically peripheral contexts. Securing permissions for copyrighted materials, negotiating with authors, managing the lack of editorial infrastructure and operating without funding for authors' time all reveal how global publishing economies constrain the capacity of local teams to produce high-quality materials. Yet these challenges also generated forms of innovation: participants developed flexible workflows, created alternative networks for sourcing content, coordinated the production of multimodal resources across institutions and embraced an iterative, dialogic model of design that allowed for continual adjustment. These forms of resilience highlight how pedagogical creativity in the Global South often emerges precisely from the need to navigate structural inequalities, making visible the material realities that underlie the production of educational knowledge.

In addition, the project demonstrates how decoloniality can be enacted through linguistic design. The decision to treat pluricentricity not as a concept to be mentioned but as a principle embedded in the production strand, reception strand and especially in audio materials, challenges the dominance of metropolitan German norms and exposes learners to linguistic diversity often erased by global textbooks. Similarly, the choice to incorporate Portuguese strategically in early units, not as a sign of deficiency but as a resource for contrastive analysis and metalinguistic awareness, aligns with critical perspectives that value learners' linguistic repertoires rather than treating them as obstacles to acquisition. These decisions show how grammatical explanations, pronunciation work and thematic development can become sites for contesting monolithic language ideologies.

Moreover, the inclusion of thematically organised units rooted in Brazilian sociocultural realities signals a significant departure from the decontextualised progressions typical of global textbooks. Instead of framing German as an abstract or neutral system, *Zeitgeist* situates language learning within social, historical and affective contexts. Units on identity, knowledge, values, place and time invite learners to bring their experiences into the German classroom, to read texts critically and to see language as a means of engaging the world. This thematic orientation resonates with critical pedagogy and multiliteracies, suggesting that language education can be a space for cultivating interpretive autonomy and social imagination. At the same time, the project acknowledges the constraints of beginner-level learners by providing bilingual scaffolding, accessible tasks

and contrastive explanations, showing that critical and decolonial aims need not conflict with linguistic support.

The visual design of the textbook further exemplifies the project's epistemic commitments. By adopting silhouettes instead of detailed human figures, using a non-indexical colour palette, and favouring symbolic, open-ended illustrations, the book resists reproducing stereotypical identities and instead encourages interpretive flexibility. These visual choices operate as a counterpoint to the commercial aesthetic of global textbooks, which often rely on stock images that reinforce Western middle-class norms. The visual identity of *Zeitgeist* thus becomes another site where epistemic delinking is enacted, challenging the visual regimes that shape language-learning imaginaries.

Ultimately, the project's collaborative workflow reveals that decolonial materials development is not merely about what appears on the page but about the social practices, emotional environment and material negotiations that make the work possible. The project exposes the conditions of academic production in the Global South, overwork, lack of funding, institutional fragmentation—and shows how collective authorship can serve as a response to these conditions by building networks of support, shared responsibility and mutual accountability. In this sense, *Zeitgeist* demonstrates how collaborative textbook development can become a form of academic activism, resisting the structural marginalisation of local knowledge and affirming the possibility of producing high-quality, contextually grounded materials through collective effort.

Together, these insights highlight the broader implications of the project for materials development and language education. *Zeitgeist* offers a replicable framework for other contexts seeking to produce locally grounded and critically oriented textbooks: thematic organisation anchored in local realities; multimodal authenticity; pluricentric linguistic design; iterative, collaborative authorship; flexible digital integration; and sustained reflexive dialogue. This framework does not eliminate the structural challenges of working in underfunded environments, but it provides a model for navigating them while maintaining epistemic and pedagogical commitments. In doing so, the project contributes to an emerging body of work in the Global South that seeks to reclaim curricular authorship, challenge global publishing norms and reimagine what language textbooks can be when designed from and for local contexts.

Conclusion

The development of *Zeitgeist* demonstrates that the creation of locally authored teaching materials is not merely a pedagogical alternative to global textbooks, but an epistemic and political intervention grounded in collaborative praxis. Designed within the constraints of Brazilian public universities and informed by CAL, decolonial theory and critical pedagogy, the project reveals how locally situated textbook production can challenge the epistemic hierarchies

embedded in global publishing models while offering linguistically and affectively meaningful resources for learners. By centring Brazilian sociocultural realities, incorporating authentic and multimodal materials, embracing pluricentric linguistic variation and adopting a thematic structure aligned with critical reflection, *Zeitgeist* redefines the contours of what a beginner-level German textbook can be. It exposes the limitations of commercial global materials and proposes an alternative conceptualisation grounded in local knowledge, thematic complexity and social relevance.

Equally significant is the insight that curricular innovation in the Global South depends not only on theoretical commitments but on the forms of coordination, collaboration, and collective engagement that sustain a project of this scale. The collaborative workflow, marked by distributed authorship across multiple universities, iterative cycles of drafting and revision, negotiations over representation, and the demanding production of multimodal content, makes visible the material conditions under which decolonial educational design is carried out. The challenges encountered along the way, including limited funding, uneven institutional support, copyright constraints and the emotional demands of sustained collaboration, highlight the structural barriers that shape knowledge production in linguistically peripheral contexts. Yet these challenges also catalysed methodological creativity, fostering workflows that combined horizontal decision-making, reflexive dialogue and flexible coordination. In this sense, *Zeitgeist* demonstrates that the process of producing a textbook can itself enact decolonial principles by redistributing authority, valuing local voices and making collective authorship a central epistemic strategy.

The project contributes to broader debates about the role of the Global South in language education by showing that curricular authorship does not need to replicate the models of the Global North to be effective, rigorous or visually compelling. On the contrary, *Zeitgeist* shows that when materials emerge from local epistemologies, linguistic repertoires and social experiences, they offer richer opportunities for learner engagement and more nuanced representations of language as lived practice. The methodological framework articulated through the project (combining thematic organisation, multimodal authenticity, pluricentric design, iterative piloting and collaborative production) provides a replicable model for other contexts seeking to develop decolonial materials under conditions of limited resources. It suggests that even in environments marked by precarity, collective effort, critical reflexivity and firm epistemic commitments can generate high-quality, contextually grounded pedagogical resources.

Ultimately, *Zeitgeist* is more than a textbook. It is a praxis: a material and relational reimagining of who produces curricular knowledge, whose voices are legitimised, and how language learning is positioned within broader struggles for epistemic justice. Its development shows that local authorship can intervene meaningfully in global textbook economies, not by imitating their formats but by redefining the purposes, aesthetics and epistemic foundations of language pedagogy. As language education increasingly confronts demands for plurality,

equity and contextualisation, the experiences shared here invite further comparative work across languages, regions and institutional settings. They also underscore the need for structural support that recognises textbook development as legitimate academic production central to the transformation of language education. Viewed from this perspective, *Zeitgeist* is not an isolated achievement but part of a wider movement in the Global South to reclaim curricular authorship and to imagine new futures for language pedagogy grounded in local realities, collaborative practices and decolonial horizons.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT: The examples discussed in this article are presented in the text. Additional examples from the corpus may be made available by the author upon request.

Notes

1. Although the framework discussed here emerges from the production of materials for German as an Additional Language, several of its principles may also inform the development of materials for other educational contexts, including first-language teaching and other school subjects. This is especially the case for aspects such as collaborative authorship, local thematic grounding, critical selection of texts and images, attention to representational diversity, and iterative processes of piloting and revision.
2. While no separate strand was dedicated exclusively to contrastive grammar, issues related to similarities and differences between Brazilian Portuguese and German were addressed across the three groups, particularly in the Phonetics strand and in the linguistic scaffolding of Production and Reception tasks. Contrastive insights informed the anticipation of potential areas of difficulty for Brazilian learners, including form–meaning mismatches and usage constraints. However, rather than organising the material around explicit grammar comparison, the project prioritised meaning-oriented and context-based approaches, integrating grammatical reflection into communicative practices.

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