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Memes in Teaching Material: Considerations on the Teaching and Learning of Speech Genres / *O meme em material didático: considerações sobre ensino/aprendizagem de gêneros do discurso*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss the presence of the genre meme in teaching materials, either as a *teaching object* or as language practice. To do so, starting from official documents, which guide the Brazilian practices of teaching and learning, the article presents a reflection on discourse studies related to the work with speech genres in a school context. Finally, it presents an analysis of the presence of such genre in text production activities from a 9th-grade coursebook used in private schools. The Bakhtinian studies on discourse provides the theoretical-methodological perspective of the article, from which we highlight the concepts of concrete utterance, speech genres and activity field.

KEYWORDS: Meme; Speech genres; Bakhtinian studies

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir a presença do gênero meme em materiais didáticos, seja como objeto de ensino, seja como prática de linguagem. Para tanto, partindo dos documentos oficiais, que norteiam as práticas de ensino/aprendizagem brasileiras, o artigo apresenta reflexão sobre estudos discursivos acerca do trabalho com gêneros do discurso no campo escolar. Por fim, apresenta uma análise da presença do referido gênero em um livro que circula na rede particular de ensino, destinado ao 9º ano, em atividades de produção de textos. A perspectiva teórico-metodológica é a dos estudos bakhtinianos do discurso, da qual destacamos os conceitos de enunciado concreto, gêneros do discurso e campo de atividade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Meme; Gêneros do discurso; Estudos bakhtinianos

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Introduction

This paper draws from and expands Lara's (2018) Master's thesis entitled *A presença de memes em práticas de ensino/aprendizagem de língua portuguesa: relações entre humor e ensino de língua materna em cursinhos pré-vestibulares* [The presence of memes in Portuguese language teaching/learning practices: relationships between humour and mother tongue teaching in university admission exam courses]. In it, the author analyses the presence of memes in Portuguese language teaching practices on *Desconversa*,¹ an online university preparatory course blog, evidencing the effects of meaning produced by this speech genre and its relevance to teaching/learning.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, the analysis of the selected corpus shows that, in the aforementioned course, there seem to be mainly two situations prompting the use of memes in teaching contents (which do not refer to the speech genre meme itself, but to other content related to the Grammar and Writing modules), namely: 1) Memes as interactive resources, thematically related to the post content on the blog, serving as an example of such content; and 2) Memes as interactive features not serving as an example of the content. It should be emphasised that, in this scenario, the meme is not approached as an *object of teaching*, but as a resource that can be motivating, depending on one's reading, for learning, for promoting relaxation, or as an example of other contents, in which it becomes a pretext (LAJOLO, 1986) for teaching grammar rules, for example. Memes thus meet not only the aforementioned goals, but also what has been called the "spectacularization of the classroom" (LARA, 2018),² a movement related to the spectacle by teachers' appropriation - voluntary or otherwise - of

¹ *Descomplica*, a startup to which *Desconversa* belongs, is an online university preparatory course that focuses on the ENEM – *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (National Secondary Education Exam). Its founder is physics teacher and engineer Marcos Fisbhen. Starting in 2012, with funds from investors, initially Brazilian, but later Americans, the *Descomplica* website was launched and made available to subscribers at a low cost, and is currently considered one of the largest education start-ups in the world. It also received the title of the largest online classroom in the world, having more than 8 million hits monthly. Parallel to the website, the *Desconversa* blog was developed and fed with free content. According to its founder, the aim of *Descomplica* is to provide learning in a short time (with regular videos of five minutes at most) in a way that differs from traditional teaching and always with the presence of humour. The blog has posts with educational content, downloadable materials, exercises, study plans, writing proposals, tips and summaries of all subjects. The contents are not posted sequentially (as in a coursebook, for example), but all posts and materials are available for students to access as they wish.

² In the original: "espetacularização da sala de aula."

elements, such as music, dance, humour and theatre in order to get students attention.³ Such movement is found in Brazilian classrooms today, especially in secondary school and university preparatory courses. In the virtual scenario, video classes aside, memes function as one of the manifestations of the voice of the teacher who tells jokes in face-to-face classrooms (LARA, 2018).

The hypothesis in Lara (2019) was that the meme - assuming the centrality of the studies, as a speech genre over which one reflects, a genre that is read and created, not only a pretext - would not be present in printed coursebooks in regular schools. This is because, in such materials, if the meme referred to issues set punctually in recent history lived by a society, “distant” from its student-reader by its specific time and space, the recovery of other links for meaning production should be made in the discursive memory of the chain of utterances. The event, in the Bakhtinian sense, is new, but always in relation to the memory. The point is that thematic content is not always easily retrieved in memory, and in the case in question the interpretation of the meme would be strongly related to the possibility of retrieval of the specific space-time that engenders it.

Another hypothesis that led us to think that, in Lara (2018), memes could be omitted in coursebooks aimed at regular basic education is the little space assigned to the teaching of humor-producing genres in the documents in effect at the time. As evidence of this fact, in a section dedicated to the official documents, we have some data about the space given to the genres that produce humour in these guidelines related to the teaching of Portuguese Language for the second cycle of Elementary Education and for Secondary Education until the year 2018, when the final version of the Common National Curricular Base, the BNCC - *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BRASIL, n.d.) was published. In comparison, we made considerations about the treatment of these genres in the National Curricular Common Base (n.d.), the document currently in force.

³ Evidently, we do not disregard the fact that this movement complies with market forces and serves as advertisement for university preparatory courses, whose aims are university acceptances and profit. We also emphasise that this “phenomenon” is important in teaching relationships when we think of the history of authoritarianism and oppression that marks the image of Brazilian education, since it is a step - although insufficient - towards a possible change in the relationships that permeate these environments. The analysis of the presence of humour through memes in educational institutions also involves the ideologies of such institutions and the construction of a new image for the school environment and for those who constitute it.

Contrary to what we thought about the meme speech genre, Rede Pitágoras' Book 4 of Portuguese Language and Text Production for the 9th grade of Elementary Education (VÁRIOS AUTORES, 2018), used in approximately 600 private Brazilian schools, presents, in Unit 2, the chapter Post e Meme. The chapter covers the genres Facebook post, Instagram post, Twitter post and meme. Thus, unlike what we found in our Master's research (LARA, 2018), the genre is incorporated into this coursebook (CB) as an *object of teaching*, following the proposal of the National Curricular Parameters [Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais] the PCN (BRASIL, 1998) for working with texts.

In this context, from the features of the meme's architectonics that are put in dialogue with the education field, one question we now put forward is whether, when the meme is inserted into a teaching/learning material, its eventuality and the direct link of its thematic content with the immediate daily life are lost. This is because of the ephemeral quality of the meme's thematic content, which mostly deals with subjects of short and punctual temporality, and such quality could clash with the content presented in coursebooks, made to "last" years.

Therefore, we propose an analysis of the presence of the meme in selected teaching material in the light of Bakhtinian postulates and its commentators – the CB analysed in this article is the one for the teacher. The objective is to reflect on the school work with this genre (LARA, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; MENDONÇA; LARA, 2017), based mainly on studies by Geraldi (2010), Brait (2000), Rojo (2012; 2013) and Mendonça (2018), who discuss the approaches towards speech genres in school after the PCN, which propose the centrality of speech genres in language teaching / learning activities. For this, our proposal of discussion is organised as follows: first, we present considerations about the genre meme and its architectonics; we then move on to the concept of speech genres for Bakhtin and the Circle; we then turn to the guidelines of official documents related to Portuguese language teaching and learning; and, at the end, we present an analysis of the proposed material.

1 The Genre Meme and its Architectonics

The meme speech genre has become known due to its dissemination on the internet in contemporary times. As observed by Ferreira and Vasconcelos (2019), currently in Brazil there is intense production and diffusion of this genre for diverse purposes. It circulates in virtual environments (social networks, blogs, Whatsapp and similars) and in different fields of human activity, even in those whose perception is of absolute formality. They are also utterances that can be composed of verbal, visual or verbal-visual materialities, which convey humour and re-signify images, events, stereotypes and phrases so that this purpose can be achieved.

The meme is a speech genre that produces humour attached to its eventicity.⁴ We mean that its architecture is always related to a life event, mostly contemporaneous, for the production of meaning. In this sense, the life event the meme addresses is mostly punctual, therefore ephemeral; for this reason, we hypothesised in Lara's thesis (2018) that memes, unlike novels, for example, are not everlasting, thinking of the Bakhtinian studies on chronotope – see *Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel* (BAKHTIN, 1996)⁵ –, being restricted to the small time. Corroborating Possenti (2014), we can think of the meme as circumstance humour, which embraces the temporary theme of the genre – in the sense of a theme of the day. Bakhtin writes about the instability and ephemerality of everyday language and states, in *Discourse in the novel*:

Even languages of the day exist: one could say that today's and yesterday's socio-ideological and political "day" do not, in certain sense, share the same language; every day represents another socio-ideological semantic "state of affairs", another vocabulary, another

⁴ Motivated by the high demand for production and the ephemerality of the genre, which often means that a meme is no longer found on the web within a few hours of circulation, undergraduate students in Media Studies/UFF, graduate students in Communication and similar areas at the Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) have created the #MUSEUdeMEMES (<http://www.museudememes.com.br>), a website linked to the coLAB research group (Laboratório de Comunicação, Culturas Políticas e Economia da Colaboração) and the Polo de Produção e Pesquisa Aplicada em Jogos Eletrônicos e Redes Colaborativas, registered at CNPq, which has a collection of memes and temporary exhibitions. The website also offers bibliographical references about memes, the history of each meme is recovered, and interviews are carried out with characters (mainly celebrities or character creators) that went viral on the internet through memes.

⁵ BAKHTIN, M. *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*. In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1996. pp.84-258.

accentual system, with its own slogans, its own ways of assigning blame and praise (BAKHTIN, 1996, p.291).⁶

Brait, in the presentation of the Brazilian Portuguese translation of Medvedev's *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, presents the relation between utterance and its externality proposed by Bakhtin/Medviédev (1991),⁷ which defines its architectonics, discussing the two orientations for the genre in reality:

[...] it is necessary to consider the temporal, spacial, ideological circumstances that guide and constitute the discourse, as well as the linguistic, enunciative, formal elements that make its existence possible. The first orientation is based on the externality implied in the genre, that is, related to life, with respect to time, space and the ideological sphere to which the genre is affiliated. It is therefore understood that the utterance as totality takes place in real space and time, whether oral or written, implying the existence of an audience of recipients, addressees, listeners and/or readers, and, in a way, the reaction of this reception. An inter-relation, an interaction between the addressee and author is thus established. The second orientation, also related to life, is based on the genre's interiority, regarding the forms, structures and thematic content of the utterance in its totality, a factor that allows it to occupy a place in everyday life, joining or approaching an ideological sphere. The reiteration of the dimension marked by linguistic aspects, form, thematic content, cannot be separated from another aspect essential to the conception of genre present in Bakhtinian thought: the notion of ideological sphere that involves and constitutes the production, circulation and reception of a genre, punctuating its relation with life, in the cultural, social, etc. sense (BRAIT, 2012, p.15).⁸

⁶ BAKHTIN, M. M. Discourse in the novel. In: BAKHTIN, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1996. pp.259-422.

⁷ BAKHTIN, M.; MEDVEDEV, P. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, London, 1991.

⁸ Original text in Portuguese: “[...] é necessário considerar as circunstâncias temporais, espaciais, ideológicas que orientam o discurso e o constituem, assim como os elementos linguísticos, enunciativos, formais que possibilitam sua existência. A primeira orientação é considerada a partir da exterioridade implicada no gênero, ou seja, relacionada à vida, no que diz respeito a tempo, espaço e esfera ideológica a que o gênero se filia. Compreende-se, assim, que o enunciado como totalidade se produz em um espaço e em um tempo reais, podendo ser oral ou escrito, implicando a existência de um auditório de receptores, destinatários, ouvintes e/ou leitores, e, de certo modo, a reação dessa recepção. Estabelece-se, portanto, entre o receptor e o autor uma inter-relação, uma interação. A segunda orientação, também voltada para a vida, se dá a partir da interioridade do gênero, relaciona a formas, estruturas e conteúdo temático do enunciado em sua totalidade, fator que lhe permite ocupar um lugar na vida cotidiana, unindo-se ou aproximando-se de uma esfera ideológica. A reiteração da dimensão marcada por aspectos linguísticos, forma, conteúdo temático, não pode ser desvinculada de outro aspecto essencial à concepção de gênero presente no pensamento bakhtiniano: a noção de esfera ideológica que envolve e constitui a produção, circulação e recepção de um gênero, pontuando sua relação com a vida, no sentido cultural, social, etc.”

Thus, we understand that the utterance's exteriority and reception also define its project of saying, considering that the genre is built on this relation. This relation of the meme with its exteriority is directly related to the *small time*.

While reflecting on the concrete utterance and its addressee, Bakhtin (1986),⁹ in *The problem of speech genres*, in consonance with a dialogical perspective of language, points out that every utterance is directed at an addressee (a "second" in the enunciation process), from whom one expects a responsive understanding – this addressee is situated in the small time. Moreover, every utterance, according to the author, is directed at an addressee situated in a more distant historical space (which he calls "third," a superaddressee). Vološinov (1986),¹⁰ also in support of this extension of the utterance's architectonics and understanding, considers that it is constituted in view of the immediate social context (including the immediate interlocutors) and the wider context of its social group. Bearing in mind these considerations by Bakhtin and the Circle, it is pertinent to reflect on the different speech genres, taking into account their different forms of presumption of the interlocutors' responsive understanding in the small and/or great time. The meme, in our perspective, seems more connected to this small time, constituted by punctual events of the present that are re-signified by the appreciation of a certain social group.

Thematically, we can also say that memes often parody, satirise or criticise social subjects, historical and political events, etc., bringing in new voices and re-emphasising others.

As for authorship in this genre, it is important to highlight that it is intrinsically related to the ways of producing utterances on the web. In a largely collaborative production scenario, discussing authorship in these digital genres becomes, we dare say, irrelevant. Instantaneousness and immediate sharing and production of meanings are increasingly valued in a digital environment, such issues being "detached" from the concept of authorship (considering a subject who produces an utterance and is recognised/held accountable for it).

⁹ BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. Mc Gee. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp.60-102.

¹⁰ VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Memes' stable compositional form consists of a square or rectangle-shaped image (which can be sectioned) with overlapping verbal text (in Portuguese or another language), organised in a binary way in the upper and lower part of the image (the lower one usually being the utterance of rupture, which produces humour). It is also possible that the verbal text might be present only at the top or bottom of the image. The meme's style is also often constituted by citation and parody, that is, in dialogue with other texts and other images, quoting them directly or indirectly, re-signifying them in a new event.

Regarding the verbal utterance that constitutes the meme, its style is normally closer to orality, which imbues the utterance with informality. As for the meme's visual materiality, it consists of images that are usually taken from another place of circulation and therefore re-signified and associated with the verbal text. However, this is not a rule: there are also memes created with specific characters that have already been "born" on the web, idealised for memes, or even the possibility of producing a meme with a photo or image elaborated for this very purpose. Moreover, the same image (or same text) usually generates several memes and, just by modifying the verbal text (or the image), the new one is built on the previous one.

There are also memes composed only of visual materialities, exploring features, gestures, positions, expressions, etc. The visual material of such memes can also be a citation from another image or an image elaborated with the specific purpose of producing humour.

Next, we discuss how this speech genre is incorporated in official documents and coursebooks.

2 The Speech Genres in the Bakhtinian Perspective, the Official Documents and Teaching/Learning Practices at School

According to the National Curricular Parameters (PCN) for the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th grades, Portuguese language teaching should be based on "Practices for listening to oral texts and reading written texts and producing oral and written texts" (BRASIL, 1997, p.53).¹¹ Due to the large number of speech genres that constitute the various fields of activity, some genres "whose domain is fundamental to effective social participation,

¹¹ Original text in Portuguese: "Práticas de escuta de textos orais e de leitura de textos escritos e produção de textos orais e escritos."

being grouped, in terms of their social circulation, in literary, press, advertising and scientific genres, commonly present in the school universe” (BRASIL, 1998, p.53)¹² are selected in the document – with the caveat that the selection is not exhaustive. Among the 32 oral and written speech genres privileged by the document, only two – cartoon and comic strip – are traditionally linked to humour – or, as Possenti (2018) puts it, are part of the field of humour. Among the literary genres, there is also the genre chronicle, which occasionally conveys humour (note that the chronicle is also one of the “small-time” genres, which thematise everyday life and may be centred around punctual events – it has, however, already reached the field of great-time, especially when placed in relation to an author’s oeuvre, constructing, along with other genres, its “coherence”).

In the National Curricular Parameters for Secondary Education (Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais para o Ensino Médio – PCN+EM), there is the consideration that “the study of the mother tongue at school points to a reflection on the use of language in life and in society” (BRASIL, 2000, p.16),¹³ giving continuity to the orientation of studying the language within the social context. In this document, the centrality of the study of language through texts is maintained, but there is no mention of specific genres, nor any mention of genres in the field of humour. Only in the PCN+EM (BRASIL, n.d.), a document of educational guidelines complementary to the National Curricular Parameters, there is an example that considers a teaching-learning situation of the cartoon speech genre.

From 2018 onwards, the National Curricular Common Base (Base Nacional Comum Curricular – BNCC), including Secondary Education, becomes effective in the whole national territory. Its objective is to align, at the federal, state and municipal levels, teacher education, evaluation, educational content elaboration and criteria for the provision of adequate infrastructure for the development of education (BRASIL, n.d.) so that in all stages of Basic Education, regardless of where the school is located, the same competences are developed, providing equity to Brazilian education.

The BNCC dialogues with the national documents produced in the last decades and updates them, incorporating, as far as Portuguese Language is concerned, new

¹² Original text in Portuguese: “cujo domínio é fundamental à efetiva participação social, encontrando-se agrupados, em função de sua circulação social, em gêneros literários, de imprensa, publicitários, de divulgação científica, comumente presentes no universo escolar.”

¹³ Original text in Portuguese: “o estudo da língua materna na escola aponta para uma reflexão sobre o uso da língua na vida e na sociedade.”

forms of interaction and communication, mainly related to Digital Information and Communication Technologies (Tecnologias Digitais de Informação e Comunicação - TDICs). Many new genres, which have emerged in recent years after the publication of the PCN, are now incorporated into national guidelines. Thus, in turn, the text remains the centre of the national proposal of Portuguese Language Teaching.

The concept of activity field becomes the guiding principle of teaching/learning proposals as of the BNCC. There is no longer, as in PCN, the delimitation of genres to be approached in each period of basic education. Some are mentioned, with emphasis on the genres connected to digital literacy and composed of multiple languages, but the document is organised into fields of activity. Each of them encapsulates language-related objectives, contents and skills to be addressed. According to the document, this organisation “points to the importance of the contextualisation of school knowledge, to the idea that these practices derive from social life situations and, at the same time, need to be placed in significant contexts for students” (BRASIL, n.d., p.84).¹⁴ For each period of school education, some fields of activity are delimited to be approached, also considering these fields’ intersection. For the final years of Elementary School, the following fields were selected: artistic-literary, study and research practices, journalistic-mediatic and acting in public life.

Regarding the space granted to humour in the new document, only in the guidelines for Elementary School are there indications for it to be addressed, as far as questions related to reading and production of meaning are concerned. However, throughout the document, genres that can produce humour, such as memes, cartoons, digital cartoons, comic strips, gifs, podcasts, etc., are mentioned, even though the work with humour is not put in the foreground in relation to them (with emphasis on digital genres). Once the genres for texts production are not limited, and only the fields of activity are, we cannot say that genres that produce humour will be of lesser or greater importance in school settings, since the choice of genres will lie in the hands of teachers, institutions and CB, and because we are in a phase of guidelines transition. A caveat that can be made, in this regard, is that there are indications/suggestions in the document for the production of memes, for example, in various sections, both in

¹⁴ Original text in Portuguese: “aponta para a importância da contextualização do conhecimento escolar, para a ideia de que essas práticas derivam de situações da vida social e, ao mesmo tempo, precisam ser situadas em contextos significativos para os estudantes.”

Elementary and Secondary School. However, this indication is made in discussions on the use of different materialities, digital literacy, journalistic area and opinion texts. There is also indication, in several sections, that no genres are superior to others. Regarding the meme, for example, we find: “understanding a lecture is important, as well as being able to assign different meanings to a gif or meme. In the same way, making proper oral communication and knowing how to produce meaningful gifs and memes can also be [important]” (BRASIL, n.d., p.69).¹⁵

The notion of speech genres from the Bakhtinian studies has been present in discourses about teaching/learning in Brazilian education for some decades, and it remains, as seen, in the BNCC (BRASIL, n.d.). Therefore, in order to think about teaching/learning practices at school, here, specifically, from the analysis of a coursebook chapter – always in dialogue with the official documents that guide teaching practices – broader understanding of this concept is required.

When we discuss speech genres based on Bakhtinian studies, we refer to specific ways of sign manifestation in the interaction process in the fields of human communication (BAKHTIN, 1986).¹⁶ According to the author, in *The Problem of Speech Genres*:

All the diverse areas of human activity involve the use of language. Quite understandably, the nature and forms of this use are just as diverse as are the areas of human activity. This, of course, in no way disaffirms the national unity of language.' Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. All three of these aspects—thematic content, style, and compositional structure—are inseparably linked to the *whole* of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres* (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.60; emphasis in original).¹⁷

¹⁵ Original text in Portuguese: “compreender uma palestra é importante, assim como ser capaz de atribuir diferentes sentidos a um gif ou meme. Da mesma forma que fazer uma comunicação oral adequada e saber produzir gifs e memes significativos também podem sê-lo.”

¹⁶ For reference, see footnote 9.

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 9.

It is noteworthy that in this section of the essay the author highlights the social nature of the utterance, which is always produced by a socio-historically situated *self* who enunciates in a singular way from the place they occupy, the dialogical threads that constitute them and the communicative situation of which they are part, always bearing in mind *another* to whom one utters. Such notion of speech genres, which is constituted from real communication situations, is incorporated by the official documents that guide teaching/learning relations in Brazil, documents which propose that speech genres should be taken as *teaching objects*, considering their compositional, stylistic and thematic diversity:

Texts are always organized within certain thematic, compositional and stylistic restrictions, which characterise them as belonging to this or that genre. In this way, the notion of genre, constitutive of the text, must be taken as an *object of teaching*. In this perspective, it is necessary to contemplate, in teaching activities, the diversity of texts and genres, not only because of their social relevance, but also because texts belonging to different genres are organised in different ways (BRASIL, 1998, p.23; *emphasis added*).¹⁸

As already stated, in the BNCC (BRASIL, n.d.), speech genres are always analysed within their area of production, circulation and reception, and considering their formal, compositional, stylistic characteristics and the dialogue with other texts.

One can therefore see that the official documents postulate addressing the genre not only in its formal, stylistic and thematic aspects, but also in aspects related to the interaction situation and to the historical event (that is, related to its architectonics form), considering the duality of the utterance which, while unique and subjective, is also social. The centrality of speech genres in Portuguese language teaching is acknowledged by the official documents, is part of an educational project whose goal is students' civic shaping and, therefore, strives for school and its practices not to be detached from social reality. Based on these documents, the diversity of the language in

¹⁸ Original text in Portuguese: “Os textos organizam-se sempre dentro de certas restrições de natureza temática, composicional e estilística, que os caracteriza como pertencentes a este ou aquele gênero. Desse modo, a noção de gênero, constitutiva do texto, precisa ser tomada como *objeto de ensino*. Nessa perspectiva, é necessário contemplar, nas atividades de ensino, a diversidade de textos e gêneros, e não apenas em função de sua relevância social, mas também pelo fato de que textos pertencentes a diferentes gêneros são organizados de diferentes formas.”

its different forms of language events is assumed. This conception of language is also evidenced in the objectives of the PCN dedicated to the second cycle of Elementary School and in the BNCC (BRASIL, n.d.); according to them, people should not take language as an immutable system of rules in teaching/learning relationships anymore, but instead:

use different languages, be them verbal, musical, mathematical, graphic, plastic and corporal, as a means to produce, express and communicate their ideas, interpret and enjoy cultural productions, in public and private contexts, serving different intentions and communication situations (BRASIL, 1998, p.7).¹⁹

This new view on what Portuguese language teaching in Brazil should be, fruitful since the 1980s, aimed to favour students' interests and the distancing from excessive schooling of reading and text production activities, from utilitarian use of texts as a pretext, from excessive valorisation of normative grammar, which leads to prejudice against different varieties, and mechanisation of metalanguage, addressed in a decontextualised way (BRASIL, 1998).

Thus, assuming this “new vision” and taking speech genres as the centre of Portuguese language teaching, the official documents assume perspectives of reading, interpretation and linguistic analysis that guide teaching/learning practices. In this respect, several researchers make considerations; we highlight the work of Geraldi (2010), Brait (2000) and Rojo (2012; 2013), as well as the work of one of the authors of this article (MENDONÇA, 2018).

Brait (2000) proposes a discussion, from the Bakhtinian perspective, that relates the PCN, speech genres and Portuguese language teaching. In this text, there is questioning about PCN in order to think how this document, which starts from the studies of Bakhtin and the Circle, is consistent with this theory. For the author, little is emphasised regarding the speech genre to its field of production, circulation and reception. According to the scholar:

¹⁹ Original text in Portuguese: “utilizar as diferentes linguagens, verbal, musical, matemática, gráfica, plástica e corporal como meio para produzir, expressar e comunicar suas ideias, interpretar e usufruir das produções culturais, em contextos públicos e privados, atendendo a diferentes intenções e situações de comunicação”.

one cannot speak of genres without considering the sphere of activities in which they are constituted and act, and the conditions of production, circulation and reception implied. This is much more important and constitutive of the speech genre [...] than the sequences of a text, which several textual typologies encompass, though not addressing the sphere of activities or modes of circulation, which belies socio-historical perspective of the speech genre (BRAIT, 2000, p.20).²⁰

Brait (2000) believes that the PCN' lack of focus on the production, circulation and reception of texts can also be justified because in the PCN there is confusion between the notions of speech genres and textual type, which results from the incorporation of other theories by the document. For the author, the guidelines are based on the idea of genre, however the issue of textual typology predominates and directs the proposals, assigning a closed perspective to the orientation to work with genres in teaching units and approaching to the notion of text as a pre-established model that is not part of the world of life. In addition, Brait (2000) emphasises the closing of meaning in reading and writing activities, that is, the restriction of dialogue in the Bakhtinian sense, which corroborates the detachment of a notion of socio-historical enunciation and preaches genre stability.

Geraldi (2010), assuming language as an event – which is in turn, linked to socio-historical ideologies and to the state of being unfinished – also proposes a reflection on Portuguese language teaching and discusses the presence, in teaching/learning relations, of speech genres as an *object of teaching*. For the author, when genres become *objects* in teaching relations, they lose eventness, the ever-unfinished nature of activity, which is inherent in a dialogue, and move towards defined and stabilised values kept at school, a space that still esteems established, finished truths and, therefore, tends to shut itself to plurality. Thus, according to the author, when genres become an *object of teaching*, they lose the function performed by them in their field, in their situations of real circulation. In addition, the transformation of speech genres into *teaching objects* diverts school practices from reading, writing and linguistic

²⁰ Original text in Portuguese: “não se pode falar de gêneros sem pensar na esfera de atividades em que eles se constituem e atuam, aí implicadas as condições de produção, de circulação e de recepção. Isso é muito mais importante e constitutivo do gênero discursivo [...] que as sequências de um texto, das quais várias tipologias textuais dão conta, não tocando, entretanto, em esfera de atividades ou modos de circulação, o que descaracteriza a perspectiva sócio-histórica de gênero discursivo.”

analysis activities (i.e., language learning), directing them to specific content teaching activities.

Rojo (2012; 2013) also draws considerations on the speech genres addressed at school and how they are approached. In these works, the author analyses teaching/learning practices, the contents and the context established in the teaching/learning process. For the author, in a reality seized by *multiliteracies*²¹ - which are understood not only in the perspective of multimodality, but also in the multicultural perspective – thematic, structural or formal work, especially those belonging to genres with verbal materialities – linked to traditional pedagogy – is prioritised in reading and writing activities, with discursive approaches regarded as a sideshow (ROJO, 2013).

Rojo highlights the importance of developing students' current competences, connected to the fields of activity in which they live, which corroborates the discourses of the official documents, which, in turn, incorporate the Bakhtinian studies. For the author, the school must attend to a variety of language and utterances, interaction between tongues and languages, interpretation and translation, styles, fulfilling the Bakhtinian heteroglossia (ROJO, 2013).

The aforementioned works suggest thinking of new possibilities of teaching/learning, a *pedagogy for multiliteracies* (ROJO, 2013), that is, practices that incorporate the language's diversity of forms and whose focus should be the learner, so that they should be agents in the process of knowledge production and not just reproduce knowledge; new practices of reading and writing, consistent with the socio-historical context of these subjects-students, which is understood as a reality with texts produced mostly in hybrid materialities. For the author, "the challenge is posed to our

²¹ According to Rojo (2012, p.12): "multiliteracies are [...] two specific and important types of multiplicity present in our mainly urban societies in contemporaneity: the cultural multiplicity of populations and the semiotic multiplicity of text constitution through which they get informed and communicate." [Original text in Portuguese: "multiletramentos são [...] dois tipos específicos e importantes de multiplicidade presentes em nossas sociedades, principalmente urbanas, na contemporaneidade: a multiplicidade cultural das populações e a multiplicidade semiótica de constituição dos textos por meio dos quais ela se informa e se comunica."] The author also states that the composition of contemporary texts is characterised by what has been called "multimodality or multi-semantics of contemporary texts, which require multilevels. That is, texts composed of many languages (or modes, or semioses) and that require capacities and practices of understanding and production of each of them (multiliteracy) to engender meaning." [Original text in Portuguese: "[...] multimodalidade ou multissemiose dos textos contemporâneos, que exigem multiletramentos. Ou seja, textos compostos de muitas linguagens (ou modos, ou semioses) e que exigem capacidades e práticas de compreensão e produção de cada uma delas (multiletramentos) para fazer significar."]

reading/writing school practices, which were already restricted and insufficient even for the ‘print era’” (ROJO, 2012, p.22).²²

The studies mentioned point to reading and writing practices still restricted in the school environment; however, fortunately, there is a movement so that the practices in the school environment should cover, at least minimally, the use of new technologies so that digital genres are contemplated, which requires readers – in this case teachers and students – to acquire and develop new reading and writing skills – hence the importance of Rojo’s (2013) proposal regarding the *pedagogy of multiliteracies*, which values the work with contextualized meanings. According to Rojo (2012), we cannot divert the school away from new practices of human interaction. It should be noted that, in the BNCC (BRASIL, n.d.), the concern regarding digital genres is acknowledged, and there is encouragement to work with these genres in the school environment in reading and writing activities, in their actual production, circulation and reception media.

Brait (2000), Geraldi (2010) and Rojo (2012; 2013) discuss the use of speech genres in Brazilian classrooms, examining teaching guidelines and teaching/learning practices that are or could be practised after the publication of the PCN. The common question in these works is *how* and *which* speech genres are placed in the school environment and what happens to their nature.

In Mendonça (2018), we also address this “scholarly” use of the text and discuss academic studies on digital and educational speech genres, highlighting how subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and social values are constituent elements of the utterances and spaces of manifestation of their instability and discontinuity. Thus, considering that the architectonics (I-for-myself, I-for-the-other, the-other-for-me) and the field of activity are elements that define the genres’ nature, in their social operation, our proposal is the need to pay attention to these aspects in teaching-learning activities about/involving speech genres.

In the following section, we present an analysis of how the speech genre meme, of multimodal nature that circulates in digital environments, is addressed in activities of reading and text production in a Portuguese language coursebook produced under the directives of the PCN (published in 2018).

²² Original text in Portuguese: “o desafio fica colocado para nossas práticas escolares de leitura/escrita que já eram restritas e insuficientes mesmo para a ‘era do impresso.’”

3 Memes in the Coursebook

The second unit of Text Production from Rede Pitágoras de Ensino, Book 4, targeted at the 9th grade, is entitled “Sabia que no celular você também se depara com gêneros textuais?” [Did you know that you also come across textual genres on your mobile phone?]. The unit’s proposal is to work on interpretation and text production of speech genres that can be accessed by such devices. It comprises two chapters: in the first, the email is addressed; in the second, in which we are particularly interested, the post and the meme. The chapters are divided into content exposition, text interpretation exercises, production proposals of the genres covered (one obligatory for each one) and a scheme with content systematisation. In the same Book (4), there are three other units, which address, respectively, the genres Literary Memories (Unit 1), Letter (Unit 3) and Report of an Experience and Debate (Unit 4). The structure of all the chapters is similar.

In Unit 2, for the *post* genre, different indications are presented for when it circulates on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter; for the *meme*, there are none. The whole unit is illustrated, has information boxes with additional content, and examples of the genres are taken from real situations. As for the examples, it is also worth mentioning that they are taken from socially esteemed sources, such as the page of the Ministry of Education, the State Department of Health of São Paulo, the Ministry of Tourism, and the *Artes Depressão* page.

In general, we believe that the written activities proposed in the unit, both in relation to the post and in relation to the meme, do not prioritise the effective use of the language as recommended by the official documents (BRASIL, 1998) in force at the time of publication. We take two activities as examples, in which we can see how the production is artificial, bordering on a mere imaginative “exercise”:

(1) Choose a problem that your city has and write a text in your notebook or on a word processor on the computer, as if you were going to post it on Facebook, denouncing the situation. Your addressee will be the city council. If possible, select an image or a video to be posted with the text (VÁRIOS AUTORES, 2018, p.16).²³

²³ Original text in Portuguese: “Escolha um problema que sua cidade apresenta e escreva um texto no caderno ou em um editor de texto no computador, como se fosse postá-lo no *Facebook*, denunciando a situação. O seu destinatário será a prefeitura do município. Se possível, selecione uma imagem ou um vídeo para ser postado junto ao texto.”

(2) Now it is time to turn this post into a tweet: reduce the Facebook post from the previous activity to 140 characters, as if you were going to post it on Twitter (VÁRIOS AUTORES, 2018, p.16).²⁴

The student is instructed to produce the post in the notebook or on a word processor on the computer, *as if to post it* on Facebook or Twitter; however, in order to establish links with life, the activity could be proposed so that students would produce it directly on the social network (even if a profile on social networks had to be created by the teacher specifically for this activity) so that the activity were done in its real production, circulation and reception environment. This fact corroborates Brait's (2000) studies, when she criticises the lack of focus on the relationship between genre and field of activity in the school environment. It also reinforces Geraldi's (2010) notes when he criticises the school's movement towards the transformation of speech genres in "object of teaching," to the detriment of an effective use of language. In the BNCC (BRASIL, n.d.), the proposal is that the genre should be addressed in its real field of production, circulation and reception. Therefore, students are encouraged to develop skills for working with content mixing, such as video, image and audio, being faced with real situations of digital genres' production.

In relation to the meme speech genre, which necessarily mobilises other materialities besides the verbal materiality, production in its real environment of production, circulation and reception is also a *possibility* verbalised only for the teacher in smaller letters, in a different colour, in the upper corner of the page where the exercise is located:

(3) Teacher, instruct students to prepare the meme in the notebook or on a bond paper, for that they can use image clippings, coloured pencils, markers, among other materials. If they have access to the internet, at school or at home, they can do the activity on the computer, using text and image editors (VÁRIOS AUTORES, 2018, p.37).²⁵

²⁴ Original text in Portuguese: "Agora é a vez de essa postagem tornar-se um *tweet*: reduza o post da atividade anterior que você escreveu para o *Facebook*, a 140 caracteres, como se fosse postá-lo no *Twitter*."

²⁵ Original text in Portuguese: "Professor, oriente os alunos a elaborar o meme no caderno ou em uma folha sulfite, para isso podem usar recortes de imagens, lápis de cor, canetas hidrográficas, entre outros materiais. Se tiverem acesso à internet, na escola ou em casa, podem fazer a atividade no computador, usando editores de texto e imagens."

For the student, the orientation is that the genre should be produced in the notebook or on a separate sheet.

The Teacher's Book, which offers guidelines to approach the content, addresses this issue, when it makes the following remark as a complementary suggestion:

(4) If possible, try to conduct these classes at the school's Computer Lab so that learning is more palpable (VÁRIOS AUTORES, 2018, p.14).²⁶

In the expository part of the section regarding the meme genre, which is the focus of this research, it is stated that:

(5) On social networks, another privileged textual genre are the memes. These are compositions made with one or more images combined with short texts or humorous effect phrases. Memes can refer to everyday topics, recent news, celebrities, among other subjects, and their propagation through the network occurs quite quickly (VÁRIOS AUTORES, 2018, p.35).²⁷

Here, it is also perceived that the memes selected as examples (and, later, also those selected for the exercises) indicate a longer temporality, relating, for the most part, to historical facts and artistic works, socially valued. This makes it possible for memes to be on the coursebook for a longer time, since it is updated in a great time (every two years, every three years ...) – some utterances used in the coursebook are in Figures 1, 2, and 3.²⁸ Considering the hypothesis raised at the beginning of this article that the meme, due to its more punctual temporality (its centrality in small time), would not compose didactic materials from regular schools (printed coursebooks and printed handouts), we can say that selecting memes whose themes are more general and linked to philosophical themes characteristic of the meme in this field as it can be part of teaching or historical facts would solve the problem in question. Thus, this is perhaps a activities with no harm to its “presentness” in a period of two or three years.

²⁶ Original text in Portuguese: “Se possível, tente fazer essas aulas no Laboratório de Informática da escola, para que a aprendizagem seja mais palpável.”

²⁷ Original text in Portuguese: “Nas redes sociais, outro gênero textual que desfruta de bastante prestígio são os memes. Trata-se de composições feitas com uma ou mais imagens combinadas a textos breves ou frases de efeito que geram humor. Os memes podem se referir a temas cotidianos, notícias recentes, celebridades, entre outros assuntos, e sua propagação pela rede ocorre de maneira bastante rápida.”

²⁸ We do not present a real page from the coursebook due to copyright.



Fig. 01.

Source: https://pbs.twimg.com/media/DIT_OLLX4AAB_xM.jpg (Accessed on 31 March 2019)



Fig. 02.

Source: https://pbs.twimg.com/media/DIT_OLLX4AAB_xM.jpg (Accessed on 31 March 2019)

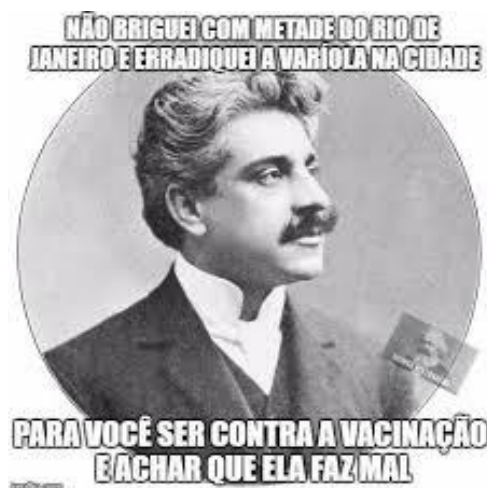


Fig. 03.

Source: https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQhOM6rf_YJ-wAiOHG5UEc0Q8ZtJPtUaXaEPyQAUyLhfLPgsLdNQ. (Accessed on 31 March 2019)

Another issue to be mentioned is that, through the section that composes the expository part of the work with the genre presented (5) in its entirety, as well as the other exercises proposed in the unit, it is also evident that the practice of reading the genre is not explored, that is; there is a limited number of activities that allow the learner-reader to provide a responsive understanding of the utterance. On the other hand, there is always a caption or a short text following the meme presenting an interpretation for the utterance or at least an explanation of the genre, using the related meme as an example. This question should be pointed out, since it may be an indication that, in this material, reading is approached separately from writing, as processes that take place separately. Another hypothesis that would justify this question is the perception that the meme would be a difficult genre to interpret, or that students would not recover implicit elements necessary for their interpretation, or that they would not have knowledge about the references/quotations made in the utterances. Thus, despite the fact that this genre appears in activities in the coursebook, it is probably the image the authors have of memes and of the students that restricts the scope and richness of working with them.

As mentioned earlier, the meme is a genre of the field of humour. The field of activity, next to the architectonics, defines the nature of the genre, as shown by Bakhtin and the Circle's studies. Contrary to this fact, the material under analysis explores the issue of humour in the genre minimally. Thus, the social function of the genre, that is, its role in the interaction in its field, is not explored in the present approach, only the

genre's compositional form and theme – see transcription (5) – so humour (which could be used for social criticism, scorn, etc.) is not addressed as a constituent aspect of the utterance in the material. This type of approach, as seen in section 2, runs counter to the official documents' postulates, which guide the work with the genres not only in their formal, stylistic and thematic aspects, but also in relation to the situation of interaction that defines them. In (5) we also see that the social function of the genre is only minimally contemplated in its definition – just a quick reference to its form of circulation is made; however, these aspects are little explored in the activities.

Also in the exercises proposed for the production of the genre, humor and social function are not properly explored (notice that the proposal in 7 begins with a statement about humour in language activities, but is detached from the rest of the instructions):

(6) “Taking the image above as an example, select a period from Brazil's history and create a new meme in your notebook or on a separate sheet. Be creative” (VÁRIOS AUTORES, 2018, p.37).²⁹

(7) “Humour often helps address serious issues in a casual way. In groups, write on paper or on the computer a meme related to the post of one of your peers who has drawn your attention in the previous activity. The objective is to contribute to the discussion of the theme and the search for solutions, but this time, in a comic and creative way” (VÁRIOS AUTORES, 2018, p.37).³⁰

The student is instructed to be creative when producing their text, without even being presented with instructions that address aspects of the genre's social function, its purpose in social interaction. Besides, the exercise wording mentions creativity, but with no definition about what, in this genre, would indeed be creative³¹ – see the example (6). In (7), students are oriented to produce the text in a “comic and creative way” but, as seen in (5), the compositional and stylistic features of the meme related to production of humour are not addressed along the unit. Thus, the student does not find enough information in the coursebook to carry out the requested proposal.

²⁹ Original text in Portuguese: “Tomando a imagem acima como exemplo, selecione um período da história do Brasil e crie um novo meme em seu caderno ou em uma folha avulsa. Use a criatividade.”

³⁰ Original text in Portuguese: “Muitas vezes, o humor ajuda a abordar assuntos sérios de uma forma descontraída. Em grupos, elaborem em papel ou no computador um meme relacionado ao post de um de seus colegas que tenha chamado a sua atenção na atividade anterior. O objetivo é contribuir para a discussão do tema e a busca de soluções, mas, desta vez, uma forma cômica e criativa.”

³¹ In discourse studies, the concept of “creativity” is quite controversial and, due to the lengthy discussion it demands, we shall not address the issue in this article.

Regarding the meme's social function and its little exploration in the analysed coursebook, we would like to make an additional remark. This genre, in its most common means of production and circulation, may have a project of saying of offence and aggression to the *other*, and it is marked stylistically by foul language and hate speech.

Thus, the genre, when migrating to the school environment, finds an institution that must "educate the citizen" on the basis of ethical values and, perhaps because of this, undergoes a kind of "hygienisation." For example, the material analysed is concerned with ethical relationships, and in this case, writing on social media. Therefore, it focuses on the question of respecting others, differences, etc. It is suggested, for example, that the teacher should talk to students about cyberbullying when they finish the unit:

(8) Teacher, in order to end this unit with a reflection, it may be interesting to talk to students about cyberbullying, the bullying that takes place on the internet, through memes and chat applications. It is important to explain to the students that social networks and their tools (memes, posts, etc.) should not be used to offend or mistreat people, and that even when disagreeing with someone's point of view, one must respect this person. Also discuss the importance of respecting differences in all the environments where we live" (VÁRIOS AUTORES, 2018, p.39).³²

Evidently, ethical relationships should be a concern of the school. However, when working with genre, highlighting its style and social function, along with other elements, it is of the utmost importance that a discussion should be made with the student about the use of this genre in social interactions. The school's formatting all content that circulates in the school environment is inevitable; it is part of how the school operates. The problem may be *how* it happens (SOARES, 2011); in this case, by removing the genre's connection to life, the school refrains from discussing with students questions that affect their social life.

³² Original text in Portuguese: "Professor, para encerrar essa unidade com uma reflexão, pode ser interessante conversar com os alunos sobre o *cyberbullying*, o *bullying* que se dá através da *internet*, por meio de postagem de *memes* e de aplicativos de conversas. É importante explicar aos alunos que as redes sociais e suas ferramentas (*memes*, *posts*, etc) não devem ser usadas para ofender ou maltratar pessoas, e que mesmo discordando do ponto de vista de uma pessoa, é necessário respeitá-la. Fale ainda sobre a importância do respeito às diferenças em todos os meios em que vivemos."

Final Considerations

Finally, it is necessary to emphasise the importance of incorporating memes in coursebooks, considering the need to update the practices of the education field for the reality of multiliteracies.

A “problem” in this incorporation could be the ephemeral nature of the thematic content, which deals with subjects mostly of small and punctual temporality and which might clash with the content in coursebooks, which are produced to “last” longer. We have seen that the analysed coursebook solved this purported problem by selecting memes with broader themes (philosophical themes and/or focused on cultural objects of wide circulation and on historical facts).

Still, another “problem” could be what defines these genres in their social function and style: their character of criticism and sarcasm (mixed with humour), corrosive and unbalanced tone, direct and foul language. The material in question practically “silences” those aspects of the genre, leaving them on the fringe. We call this process “hygienisation” of the genre.

Thus, there are still challenges for those who are involved in the preparation of teaching materials in terms of the insertion, in these linguistic instruments, of memes as an object of teaching and as a practice of language use. One of them could be the confrontation of questions related to students’ daily life – in this case, the themes of the memes, centred on the small time, point to punctual events that could be recovered to understand other moments lived. Another challenge could be to bring the language of life to the school context, the language with which students are faced and use in their daily lives on social networks – in this case, bringing it to school means bringing it up for discussion and debate, which is much more helpful than silencing and censoring it.

However, the two challenges mentioned would have their place within school walls only if we understood school not only as a “house of teaching” (focusing on “content”), but also as a “house of learning,” in Geraldini’s (2010) understanding: a space where there is room for practices; in our case, practices of reading, text production and linguistic analysis of utterances that circulate in life, in social interactions, and which, fundamentally, are relevant to students.

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