

**Style, Expressivity and Axiology in the Teaching/Learning Process of Language in Use / *Estilo, expressividade e axiologia no ensino-aprendizagem da língua em uso***

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**ABSTRACT**

Supported by Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle's thinking, this article aims to present the theoretical-methodological features that interweave in the construction of high school teaching practices, focusing on the teaching and learning process of language in use. It further aims to briefly describe how these teaching practices may contribute to the teaching of reading and text production. The motivation for this article stems from the findings of my PhD Dissertation defended in 2015, which show that teaching practices aimed at the teaching and learning of language in use promote the dialogical construction of knowledge mobilized by linguistic, stylistic and discursive elements, hence relating Bakhtin's concept of "living word" inherent in replies and active understanding to expressive issues that unveil ideological marks, values, and positioning. **KEYWORDS:** Language in use; Dialogical perspective; High school

**RESUMO**

*Este artigo visa apresentar os aspectos teórico-metodológicos articulados na construção de uma prática didática destinada ao ensino médio, com foco no ensino-aprendizagem da língua em uso, embasada pela teoria dialógica de Bakhtin e o Círculo, e descrever, de modo breve, como essa prática didática pode contribuir para o ensino-aprendizagem de leitura e produção de textos. Parte-se dos resultados obtidos em tese de doutorado defendida em 2015, que demonstrou como práticas didáticas para o ensino-aprendizagem da língua em uso colocam em diálogo elementos linguísticos, estilísticos, discursivos na construção dialógica do conhecimento, considerando a "palavra viva" no sentido bakhtiniano do termo, e relacionando-se, assim, aos movimentos de réplica e compreensão ativa, às questões expressivas que revelam marcas ideológicas, valores, posições.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Língua em uso; Perspectiva dialógica; Ensino Médio

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After all, language has a powerful effect on the thought processes of the person who generates it. Creative, original, exploratory thought that is in contact with the richness and complexity of life cannot develop on a substrate consisting of the forms of depersonalized, clichéd, abstract, bookish language. The further fate of a student's creative potential, to a great extent, depends on the language he takes with him out of high school.  
*Mikhail Bakhtin*<sup>1</sup>

## Initial Considerations

The initial motivation for this article is to present some of the findings of my 2015 PhD Dissertation<sup>2</sup> which show the construction of teaching practices aimed at the teaching and learning of language in use, thus not relying on linguistic structures only. The research went further to foster reflection about the construction of sense in the context of the utterance, aiming to develop competent text readers and producers in high school.

My research shows that approaches to teaching Portuguese in Brazil, especially in what concerns grammar, stem from tradition,<sup>3</sup> from an abstract language, and the learning process takes in account “ideal” and thus abstract subjects. Since language units (words, sentences) are ruled by combination laws that are inherent to the language system, when such units are taught in isolation they lack authorship and addressivity.

This approach has been named *indifferent language teaching* (ROCHA, 2015), for it is a process that does not develop response from the interlocutors and is decontextualized from real life and social practices of language in use. Such traditional practices take the linguistic unit as the initial point of study and focus on the sentence, on the abstract, the possible, the non-negotiated meaning, the stable, the universal, the repeatable, the system, and thus, are indifferent to life and real language use.

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<sup>1</sup> BAKHTIN, M. Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar. Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 6, Nov/Dec, 2004, p.24.

<sup>2</sup> The PhD Dissertation entitled '*Um olhar dialógico para o ensino-aprendizagem da língua em uso*' [*A Dialogical View of the Teaching and Learning of Language in Use*], funded by CNPq and supervised by Elisabeth Brait, was presented to PUC/SP in 2015 as a requirement of the Graduate Program in Applied Linguistics and Language Studies.

<sup>3</sup> The term “tradition” refers to time-endorsed practices. In Rocha (2015), an investigation of available grammar studies, instructional materials and official documents was conducted, aiming to understand how traditional practices came to determine the curriculum of Portuguese Language and rewrite the memory of the object of study of the research.

In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin claims that “[a]ny kind of *practical* orientation of my life within the theoretical world is impossible: it is impossible to live in it, impossible to perform answerable deeds. In that world I am unnecessary; I am essentially and fundamentally non-existent in it” (1993, p.9; emphasis in original).<sup>4</sup> Many traditions of Portuguese language teaching envision a subject with no definite presence in place or time, using an abstract, stable, universal, and reproducible language. Therefore, *indifferent teaching* presupposes the construction of monologic forms that give no voice to the subjects that use language. For Bakhtin

Man-in-general does not exist; *I* exist and a particular concrete *other* exists-my intimate, my contemporary (social mankind), the past and future of actual human beings (of actual historical mankind). All these are valuative moments of Being which are valid individually and do not universalize or generalize once-occurrent Being, and they are revealed [?] to me from my unique place in Being as the foundations of my non-alibi in Being (1993, p.47; em phasis in original).<sup>5</sup>

The dialogic perspective presupposes a real subject, someone who views the world from a unique position – one that has never been nor will ever be occupied by anyone else – being the notion of otherness its very condition for constituency. In teaching, this means promoting a teaching/learning process that entails learners’ asking and answering questions rather than repeating ready-made formulas or abstract models that only pertain to the “theoretical world.”

Dialogic theory emphasizes the construction of a teaching/learning process driven by the dialogue between teachers and students, students and texts as well as between texts, showing that any utterance may yield distinct meanings and viewpoints, hence evidencing the following constituents of dialogic theory: a singular concrete utterance, the subject-language relationship and the text-interaction-authorship articulation, which can only be meaningful within stylistic analysis.

This article, therefore, aims to show the interplay between stylistics, expressivity and axiology as the theoretical-methodological underpinning for the construction of teaching practices that leave behind indifferent language teaching and place the text as the departure and destination point in the dialogic construction of knowledge.

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<sup>4</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Ed. Michael Holquist & Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

After a brief methodological description of the teaching practice entitled “Entre o popular e o literário” [‘Between the Popular and the Literary’], I will present a teaching proposition in which the proverbial genre (graffiti, street art, social network posts, text messages) is placed in dialogue by parodical discourse and challenging discourse with other types of utterances, such as a chronicle, two song lyrics and a verbal-visual poem.

With reference to the resources of language in use, the aim was to explore the following contents: nouns, literal and figurative sense, synonymy and paraphrase as articulated by parodical or challenging discourse. Additional, but not focal contents are mentioned as they add up to the specific constitution of the proverbial genre.

## **1 Style, Expressivity and Axiology in the Dialogic Construction of Knowledge**

In order to clarify the theoretical-methodological underpinnings of the *dialogic construction of knowledge in the teaching/learning of language in use* (ROCHA, 2015), we must review some specificities of Bakhtin’s thinking about style by interconnecting the concepts of interaction, text, and genre. Six principles are summarized as critical for understanding the articulation between style, expressivity, and axiology.

The *first principle* concerns the function of expressivity in discourse not being a phenomenon of language as a system; that is, a concrete utterance embodies expressivity while the other language resources considered in isolation do not. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984),<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin argues that linguistics studies the compositional form of dialogic discourse, its syntactic and lexico-semantic particulars, although he considers such aspects phenomena within the “language plane” – of a purely linguistic nature. He remarks that “Dialogic relationships, therefore, are extralinguistic” (p.183), and, thus, stylistic issues should go beyond merely linguistic analysis.

Stylistics must be based not only, and even not as much, on linguistics as on metalinguistics, which studies the word not in a system of language and not in a "text" excised from dialogic interaction, but precisely within the sphere of dialogic interaction itself, that is, in that sphere where discourse lives an authentic life. For the word is not a

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<sup>6</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.202).<sup>7</sup>

This discussion allows us to move to the *second principle* of the concept of style, since expressivity is considered to be constituted by historically situated uses of language by an individual in various social contexts of interaction. In *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry*, Voloshinov quotes French writer George Louis Buffon (1707-1788) “*style is the man*” to propose a new definition of style: “style is, at least two people or rather, it is the individual and his social group in the person of its authoritative, representative, the listener ...” (1983, p.27).<sup>8</sup>

According to Voloshinov (1983),<sup>9</sup> existing social values determine the speaker’s choice of the word and of the whole utterance; hence, its style. Intonation wedds the word to the extraverbal context, since it expresses unicity and the relative linguistic and discourse stability within a given historical moment. An utterance’s stylistic tone is determined by the relationship between the *I* with the *other* (contemplator and contemplated) and the object of the discourse, and by the valuative context.

Bakhtin's (1986)<sup>10</sup> essay *The problem of Speech Genres* recaps on these definitions, which lead us into the *third principle* of the concept of style: the emotional-evaluative relationship between the enunciator and the object content and the meaning of the utterance. The author remarks that “the speaker’s evaluative attitude toward the subject of his speech [...] also determines the choice of lexical, grammatical, and compositional means of the utterance” (p.84).

The axiological standard is central to Bakhtinian thinking, since through his/her evaluative stance the subject engages in a given axiological standard and takes a stance towards certain values. Every word is imbued with the multiple axiological relationships

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<sup>7</sup> For reference, see footnote 6.

<sup>8</sup> VOLOSHINOV, V. *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry*. Trans. John Richmond. In: SHUKMAN, A. *Bakhtin School Papers*. Oxford: RRT Publications, 1983, pp.5-30.

<sup>9</sup> For reference, see footnote 8.

<sup>10</sup> BAKHTIN, M. M. *The Problem of Speech Genres*. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.60-102.

set by the subject towards the content of the utterance (BAKHTIN, 1990).<sup>11</sup> In this respect, the enunciator's evaluative tone sets an individual style and guides the construction of the whole utterance:

[...] emotion, evaluation, and expression are foreign to the word of language and are born only in the process of its live usage in a concrete utterance. The meaning of a word in itself (unrelated to actual reality) is, as we have already said, out of the range of emotion. There are words that specifically designate emotions and evaluations: "joy", "sorrow", "wonderful", "cheerful", "sad", and so forth. But these meanings are just as neutral as are all the others. They acquire their expressive coloring only in the utterance, and this coloring is independent of their meaning taken individually and abstractly (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.87).<sup>12</sup>

The choice of words, thus, is also connected to specificities of genre, the *fourth principle* of the concept of style. When choosing a word, the speaker does not withdraw it from the abstract system of language:

We usually take them from *other utterances*, and mainly from utterances that are kindred to ours in genre, that is, in theme, composition, or style. Consequently, we choose words according to their generic specifications. A speech genre is not a form of language, but a typical form of utterance; as such the genre also includes a certain typical kind of expression that inheres in it. In the genre the word acquires a particular typical expression. Genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes, and, consequently, also to particular contacts between the *meanings* of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.87; emphasis in original).<sup>13</sup>

Such choice path is directly bonded to the concept of the utterance as a link in the communicative chain. Therefore, an utterance's expressivity is also marked by the bonds it sets with other utterances, hence the importance of the *fifth principle* to conceptualize style within this perspective. For Bakhtin (1986, p.92),<sup>14</sup> the expressivity of an utterance abides to its relationship with other utterances, since "the utterance is

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<sup>11</sup> BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art. Trans. K. Brostrom. In: \_\_\_\_\_ . *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Trans. V. Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990, pp.257-325.

<sup>12</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

<sup>13</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

<sup>14</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

filled with *dialogic overtones*, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance (emphasis in original).”

The *sixth and last principle* stems from an articulation of the five preceding ones. The expressivity of an utterance is set by the relationship established between the enunciator and the interlocutor, a determining factor in the choice of genre and, thus, in the selection of linguistic resources. Style is at the same time individual and collective – individual because it sets one’s choices upon intended meanings, and collective because such choices are linked to a broader social and historical context, directed towards the other, who might be present or absent in the communication event, bonding to other discourses.

The words of a language belong to nobody, but still we hear those words only in particular individual utterances, we read them in particular individual works, and in such cases the words already have not only a typical, but also (depending on the genre) a more or less clearly reflected individual context of the utterance (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.88).<sup>15</sup>

[...]

Our speech, that is, all our utterances [...], is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of “our-own-ness”, varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of the others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.89).<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, dialogism, the underpinning concept of dialogic theory, engenders the concept of style by considering otherness both in connecting to the other – the interlocutor of produced discourses – and to the concrete utterance as a response to other utterances.

The choice of *all* language means is made by the speaker under varying degrees of influence from the addressee and his anticipated response.

When one analyzes an individual sentence apart from its context, the traces of addressivity and the influence of the anticipated response, dialogical echoes from others’ preceding utterances, faint traces of changes of speech subjects that have furrowed the utterance from within – all these are lost, erased, because they are all foreign to the sentence as a unit of language. All these phenomena are connected with the whole of the utterance, and when this whole escapes the

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<sup>15</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

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field of vision of the analyst they cease to exist for him [...]. A stylistic analysis that embraces all aspects of style is possible only as an analysis of the *whole* utterance, and only in that chain of speech communion of which the utterance is an inseparable *link* (BAKHTIN, 1986, pp.99-100; emphasis in original).<sup>17</sup>

Integrating the teaching/learning of language in use to the process of understanding the other's words becomes, thus, fundamental for the perspective argued for in this work. In his essay *Discourse in the Novel*, Bakhtin (1981)<sup>18</sup> explains that the philosophy of language and linguistics are only aware of "a passive understanding of discourse, and moreover this takes place by large on the level of common language, that is, it is an understanding of an utterance's *neutral signification* and not its *actual meaning*" (p.281; emphasis in original).

For Bakhtin (1981),<sup>19</sup> the perceptive realm of comprehension is not linguistic - it is "concrete-expressive," since passive understanding of linguistic meaning does not entail comprehension - it is only an abstraction: "an understanding never goes beyond the boundaries of the word's context and in no way enriches the word" (p.281). Passive understanding does not add to an individual's discourse, as "there can be no new aspects in his discourse relating to concrete objects and emotional expressions" (p.281). Active interpretation, on the other hand:

[...] establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on. Therefore his orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener, it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social "languages" come to interact with one another (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.282).<sup>20</sup>

Wedding active understanding to the concepts of text, genre and style, expressivity and axiology, the teaching/learning of the language in use can be conceived

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<sup>17</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

<sup>18</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Discourse in the Novel*. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.259-422.

<sup>19</sup> For reference, see footnote 18.

<sup>20</sup> For reference, see footnote 18.



ins a process of dialogic construction of knowledge that considers the “living word” in its Bakhtinian sense.

In *Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar. Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School*<sup>21</sup> Bakhtin (2004),<sup>22</sup> speaking as a teacher, argues for a bond between methodological procedures and the dialogic perspective specifically oriented to the teaching/learning of grammar by presenting a methodological essay to support teachers and learners to relate stylistic issues with the teaching/learning of language.

Amongst the main grammar lessons taught by ‘Professor Bakhtin,’<sup>23</sup> regarding the so called dialogic construction of knowledge, lies the need to analyze every grammar form also from the perspective of its inherent representational and expressive potential, that is, to have its stylistics elucidated and evaluated. Learners, for example, are taught that the condition expressed in adjective clauses may be replaced with an adjective phrase, and when that cannot be done, they are also taught a certain procedure aiming at the replacement. However, neither teachers nor textbooks explain under what circumstances and why such replacement should be done, and learners remain puzzled about the aim of such replacement and the reason for learning how to do it (BAKHTIN, 2004, p.13).<sup>24</sup>

The Russian philosopher (2004, p.15)<sup>25</sup> argues that teaching syntax by only identifying units of language produced by others, without supplying learners with stylistic clarification and encouraging them to enrich their discourse, lacks any creative significance and does not enhance the creativity of their own discursive productions.

For Bakhtin (2004, p.23), stylistic analysis will be very appealing once “the class members are encouraged to be active participants” as “these analyses, if they are presented properly, give grammar meaning for the students: when they are illuminated by their stylistic meaning, dry grammatical forms take on new life and become more understandable and interesting to them.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The article was written when Bakhtin worked as a teacher at the no. 39 railroad school in Savelova and, at the same time, at the no. 14 secondary school in Kimra, between 1942 and 1945. It was first published in the magazine *Russkaia slovesnost*, 1994, n.2, pp.47-55 (published and reviewed by L.S. Melikhov). The article, in fact, comprises two manuscripts by Bakhtin (2004).

<sup>22</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>23</sup> Expression used by Brait (2013). NT: free translation of “Professor Bakhtin.”

<sup>24</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>25</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>26</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

It should be noted that Bakhtin's (2004)<sup>27</sup> teaching proposition is situated within a specific time-space frame: 1940s Russian secondary school. Although 'Professor Bakhtin' discusses very similar challenges to those faced by teachers, authors and researchers today in what refers to the teaching of mother tongue, Bakhtin's students' aims and needs at that time were very different from today's Brazilian secondary school students'.

Canonic literary texts, as valued by school, are a major object of the teaching/learning process. Nevertheless, using such texts as the starting point of this process does not take into account the multicultural nature of young learners and such nature is often remote from reading and text production classroom practices.

Additionally, contemporary society cannot be conceived of without taking into account the use of technologies, mastered by young learners who, as digital natives, use them in various language practices. Failing to consider this context means overlooking the time-space frame in which young generations are fleshed out.

Assenting to these issues, Bakhtin's (2004)<sup>28</sup> proposition stands as an example of how classroom knowledge may be constructed dialogically: a 'non-indifferent' teaching/learning process of language and its grammar, not as a model to be abided to but rather as an object of reflection that may build into other teaching/learning contexts.

## **2 'Between the Popular and the Literary': Methodological Description of Teaching Practices**

This section aims to provide an overview of the teaching practices proposed by Rocha (2015) for the dialogic teaching/learning of language in use; thus, it is not aimed to be an ideal and perfect working model or to brush away all the possible avenues that such practices may tread.

This proposition tackles how to conduct the reading of verbal, visual, verbal-visual texts aiming to develop learners' responsive understanding, hence a reaction and not a mere 'answer-the-questions' attitude. Reading should be integrated to text production activities and have as the starting point the dialogue endeavored with other texts. Within this proposition, reflecting on language relies upon reading and text production practices. According to Faraco (2006), linguistic activities must be

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<sup>27</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

<sup>28</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.

implemented within a contextualized and functional environment, focusing on the structural flexibility and the expressive wealth of the language.

Thus, within a life-dynamic language teaching/learning process, reading and text production means using language to engage in different language practices, once the dialogue undertaken between a subject and the various discourse voices allows for a responsive and appreciative attitude towards the stances taken by a speaker.

Besides fostering the analysis of linguistic-stylistic genre-specific elements, encouraging reflection is connected to the differences between discursive genres within different spheres. Faraco (2006) argues that the “intuitive perception” of the uses of certain linguistic resources, facilitated by “progressive systematization” and a “basic grammatical lexicon” may lead students to analyze, compare, evaluate and reflect upon said resources in their own produced text and thus, realize what is more suitable to every communicative situation both in school and outside school.

The construction of teaching practices, as argued by Liberali (2012), often enacts ways to challenge, present, describe and counterargue specific contextualized utterances as a scaffold to reproductive or creative situations in knowledge production. This construction aims to encourage the setting of creative situations that present learners with various views of the world and to enable them to argue and to engage responsively, hence making them speakers of their own discourses and interlocutors of dialogue with the various texts that constitute varied spheres of human activity.

Such practices allow linguistic-discursive resources to become objects of reflection aiming to promote learners’ comprehension of intrinsic evaluative features and the values they portray – in other words, understanding that stylistic and expressive elements are inherent to concrete utterances. Achieving this aim is only possible if teaching practices support the development of language awareness as per Faraco’s (2006) proposed reflective action.

To this end, the point of departure to organize the proposed teaching practices was the choice of specific concrete utterances found in various discursive genres, sequenced under methodological principles for the study of language, as argued by Vološinov (1973, pp.95-96):<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. Landislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973.

(1) the forms and types of verbal interaction in connection with their concrete conditions; (2) forms of particular utterances, of particular speech performances, as elements of a closely linked interaction-i.e.) the genres of speech performance in human behavior and ideological creativity as determined by verbal interaction; (3) a reexamination, on this new basis, of language forms in their usual linguistic presentation.

Considering the abiding architecture of the discursive genre (compositional frame, thematic and stylistic content), this theoretical-methodological sequence implied in organizing every teaching practice as follows: (1) analyzing the most immediate context of interactions and the social-historical context that build into the text-utterances selected as objects of study; (2) analyzing specific features of said utterances; and (3) assessing linguistic phenomena that participate in the material, verbal, visual or verbal-visual construction of said text-utterances.

Choosing specific concrete utterances upon which to build the teaching practice took into account approaching a given central grammatical topic – the noun, nevertheless not restricting the practice to said content as the construction of concrete utterances as knowledge object of the proposed activities entails adding other types of language knowledge.

Each teaching practice has as its organizational baseline *two dialogic connections*, the first of which is the *dialogue between utterances* that come from different discursive genres. The mindset is not to constrict the analysis to the linguistic-discursive resources of a given genre, but also to assess how each utterance participates in the construction of, relates or dialogues with another utterance as it complies with various linguistic-discursive aims. The second connection aims to establish a *relationship between three components*: the *linguistic* – the grammar focus; the *stylistic* – the expressive resource employed; and the *discursive component* as the connecting point between the linguistic and the stylistic components.

In the proposed practices, the initial object of study is proverbs (graffiti, street art, social networks posts, text messages), embedded in the parodical and challenging discourse dialogue of other types of utterances – a chronicle, two song lyrics, and a verbal-visual poem.

With reference to the resources of the language in use, the aim is to deal with nouns, literal and figurative sense, paraphrase, synonymy and irony, integrated by

parodical discourse. Additional elements that also integrate the specific proverbial genre also come into play, although they do not stand as the principal aim of the activity and as such, are only referred to and explained in a gist-oriented manner. Table 1 below depicts these relationships.

Between the mundane and the literary			
Dialogic genres	Components of reflection upon the language in use		
	Linguistic	Stylistic	Discursive
Proverbs (graffiti, street art, social networks posts, text messages) Chronicles Song lyrics Verbal-visual poems	<i>Focus components</i>		
	Nouns	Literal and figurative sense Paraphrase Synonymy Irony	Parodic discourse Challenging discourse
	<i>Additional elements</i>		
	Simple clauses, compound clauses, adverbial phrases, verbs	Alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, puns, parallelism, ellipsis, anacoluthon, metaphor, personification, antonymy	Integration of verbal and visual resources

Table 1: Dialogic construction of “Between the mundane and the literary” teaching practices

The initial activity phase has been *Proverbs in everyday texts* and promotes reflection on said genre and concrete utterances selected as the focus of study as presented above and on the left-hand column of the above table. Regarding the text message, an overview of the most immediate context of production, reception and circulation of the proverb under focus is provided together with utterance and discourse-related characteristics of proverbs. The lyrics of the 2011 song *Ditados populares*,<sup>30</sup> by the reggae band *Homem de pedra*, which is composed almost exclusively of proverbs and popular sayings, adds further reflection to the focus proverb concerning the communication environment and other utterance and discourse-related characteristics.

The next phase, *Stylistic resources of the proverbial genre*, aims to lead students to reflect on the function of nouns used in figurative language as a stylistic resource. A brief analysis of clause structure, centering on the construction of the noun phrase, is presented, followed by an activity that may be called a ‘linguistic challenge’ to identify stylistic resources - alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, puns, parallelism, ellipsis, anacoluthon,

<sup>30</sup> Lyrics and song available at: <<https://www.letas.mus.br/homem-de-pedra/ditados-populares/>>. Accessed on Feb 1, 2018.

metaphor, personification, antonym. The aim is not an in-depth analysis, but rather presenting and promoting learners' awareness of baseline concepts of such proverb-related linguistic phenomena.

The third phase, *Parodic discourse - dialogue between texts*, explores synonymy and paraphrase in the nouns in the proverbs studied in the previous phase. This activity is followed by the analysis of the chronicle *Provérbios modernizados*, by Millôr Fernandes (1963), published in the collection *Lições de um ignorante*. Designed to explore proverb-paraphrase as stylistic-discursive resources, it invites students to investigate the source texts of the chronicle and point out nouns and verbs that are paraphrased. Grammatical and syntactic properties of verbs are not the focus, which is rather exploring the meaning-laden potential of these words within the context of the utterance under analysis.

This chronicle introduces the concept of irony and the dialogical relationship between utterances and traditional proverbs aiming at producing humor – in the case of parodic discourse – or the elicitation of social and/or political issues of a given point in time, hence encouraging questioning and a challenging stance and discourse. The following activity aims to analyze Chico Buarque's (1972) song *Bom conselho*,<sup>31</sup> which refers to certain proverbs and turns them into anti-proverbs.

The final phase – *Active comprehension: producing anti-proverbs* – recaps on the concept of anti-proverbs having as source a verbal-visual poem by Marcelino Freire in *eraOdito* (FREIRE, 2002). By briefly exploring some visual resources used in the construction of this utterance, it leads students to choose a proverb, set a dialogue between it and the selected text and then produce a response by creating an anti-proverb as a critique instrument to a social problem.

Students' productions are oriented towards setting up of *installation artworks* at school - a contemporary artistic manifestation in which art objects only come to 'exist' when the exhibit goes on and produces remembrances of photo records, publications, and individual memories. Students will be encouraged to construct a multimedia exhibition that elicits tactile, thermal, odoriferous, auditive, and visual responses. They may produce billboards, signs, mobile art, sculptures, collages, etc. to be displayed at

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<sup>31</sup> Lyrics and song available at: [<https://www.letas.mus.br/chico-buarque/85939/>]. Accessed on: Feb 1st, 2018.

the school patio. Each student-author will be free to use the languages he/she finds most fit to express his/her meanings integrated to verbal language.

The installation artworks exhibit will be communicated through the school journal/bulletin (in case there is one) and social networks and other classes will be encouraged to visit the exhibit. They will also be invited to write their own anti-proverbs and stick them to an interactive board where everyone will be able to express their ideas. The installation artworks will become, hence, a collaborative production.

The central aim of this practice is to show how nouns relate, establish relationships between meanings and how meanings are constructed in the context of interaction. The concept of a noun as a word that refers to beings, objects, things has been relativized to show the need to consider the text, the context, and the genre.

In the text production phase, students will recap on this concept and will analyze their text guided by linguistic criteria, taking into account the production context that promotes the collaborative construction of installation artworks in the school and having as target audience the school community.

This proposition has a multidisciplinary perspective interweaving possibly-related disciplines, such as History, Geography and Arts, as well as active teaching methodologies for such disciplines.<sup>32</sup> The Arts teacher can aid the selection of materials (textures, colors, objects, etc.); the History teacher may set bridges to relevant historical events - just as Marcelino Freire did - and the Geography teacher may lead discussions around contemporary social-political issues.

Within this perspective, designing a *digital cloud portfolio*,<sup>33</sup> to bind all the students' works together may become a collaborative storage and sharing tool where students may (re)organize their production in various formats - verbal texts, images, photos, videos, animations, etc. - and rescue their authorship in school. This tool, then, becomes an integrative component of every student's evaluation process, also supporting self-reflection of the learning as it allows viewing along time. Additionally,

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<sup>32</sup> Active teaching methodologies, according to Morán (2015), focus on higher learner engagement, as, for instance, project or problem-solving directed, which promote engaging in relevant challenges, pedagogic games, activities and reading that integrate individual and collaborative participation and projects.

<sup>33</sup> Cloud computing uses memory and storage capabilities of internet-shared and interconnected servers. Data storage and access is provided at any time from anywhere in the world, and does not need to rely on individual computers' data storage or applications. Remote access has led to the use of the term 'cloud.'

the students' history may be constructed all along their school life and recapped on to allow assessing not only their history but also changes and evolution.

A digital portfolio can also allow the collaborative production of glossaries, a lexicon database, abstracts, class diaries, a whole lot of productions associated to the studied content. It may be shared with other classes, thus generating a 'study network' that portrays several points in the history of classroom learning.

This strategy allows the use of digital languages with a meaningful function to Portuguese language classroom knowledge production. Although we are aware that a great portion of Brazilian population still lacks access to digital resources, this reflection aims to raise the government's awareness towards the types of investment in printed and mediatic resources and in their fair distribution across the country, given the acknowledged need of preparing learners for an increasingly digital society.

## **Final Considerations**

Two years after the presentation of my Dissertation now in a new educational and political context marked by tensions and changes enacted by the release of the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC, in Brazilian Portuguese) aimed at primary school and - still subject to enactment for - high school, we must recap and elaborate on the teaching proposition presented by my Dissertation within this new discursive arena in which axiological issues seem to be detached from the national curriculum.

As argued above, indifferent teaching presupposes the construction of monologic forms that silence the subjects involved in the reading comprehension process. Recipes, formulas, close-ended procedures derive from conceiving of the subject as a 'thing' that applies to a technique of text production.

The official discourse in the BNCC (BRASIL, 2017) and in the High School Reform dialogues with the social-historical memory of Portuguese language teaching in Brazil, once both rely upon the 'indifferent teaching' of grammar perspective (ROCHA, 2015). In this predominant construction, ever since traditional grammar teaching in Brazil, teaching has been marked by 'indifferent teaching practices' which do not allow for responsiveness, do not develop learners' responsive attitude and remains decontextualized from real life and social practices of language in use.



Such indifference presupposes teaching language, as discussed above, focusing on the phrase, the abstract, the possible, the meaning, the stable, the universal, the reproducible, the system level and thus, indifferently to life and real language uses. The indifferent adjective, therefore, refers to teaching propositions that disconsider subjects and real situations where subjects make a case for their viewpoints. Irrespective of learners' responsive interpretation or authorship, this conception of teaching does not invest in developing critical reading comprehension or productive authorship skills that allow learners' empowered use of linguistic resources.

When faced with this tradition, as a teacher, I feel increasingly dragged by this coercive context which does not allow teachers to design teaching propositions and practices that challenge the officially termed 'most adequate' model. We are now surrounded by so-called neoliberal teaching practices that have turned the school into a business and knowledge into merchandise in their aim to develop skilled workers. Evaluation systems like SAEB<sup>34</sup> and ENEM<sup>35</sup> and the release of dozens of official documents laden with teaching directives are but strategies that enforce an educational model that aims to control the implementation of marketing goals.

Many teachers, who find themselves drowning in this restraining context, end up restraining others. Traditional grammar teaching is one of the most cramping forms of language teaching/learning from the dialogic knowledge construction perspective, as it prevents learners from increasing their knowledge about language in use and language in a broader sense – reading and text production are linguistic-discursive practices that cannot be realized by merely abiding to grammar rules.

Nonetheless, language-in-use teaching/learning practices can be designed to promote reflection upon the construction of meaning within the real context of the utterance that go beyond analyzing abstract linguistic structures into promoting the development of readers and text producers. Dialogic theory supports this type of process by encouraging questioning and the search of new responses.

To this end, my intention was to develop a language in use teaching/learning proposition that abandons indifferent teaching and moves towards a dialogic perspective

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<sup>34</sup> Basic Education Evaluation System.

<sup>35</sup> National High School Exam.

centered on the utterance, the concrete, the real, the sense, the dynamics, the unique, the individual within every communication event.

The teaching practice constructed as briefly proposed above is an attempt to rule out “grammaticism” and “normativism” (FARACO, 2006, p.21) in favor of “colorful expressiveness” that “can only be attained through the utterance,” considering that “this coloring is independent of their meaning taken individually and abstractly” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.87).<sup>36</sup>

The aim is no longer teaching reading, text production and grammar but rather relating these skills to responsive and active understanding dynamics, to expressivity revealing ideological and evaluative marks and stances. Language cannot be dealt with through modeling process geared towards generic linguistic standards (in the sense of a given discursive genre’s regularly occurring phenomena), but through practices that construct active understanding, interweaving text, genre and stylistics concepts. This process entails the teaching/learning of language in use to promote the dialogue between linguistic, stylistic and discursive elements, aiming at the dialogic construction of knowledge, enacted from the “living word,” in the Bakhtinian sense.

The Bakhtinian concept of language is not restrained to the teaching of discursive genres bound to their theme, text structure and stylistic features to allow learners to embody them into their production.

The current official directives for high school teaching/learning of discursive genres – PCNEN (BRASIL, 1999), PCN+EM (BRASIL, 2002), OCEM (BRASIL, 2006) – seem to refute Bakhtin’s (1986, p.89)<sup>37</sup> claim that genres correspond to typical discursive communication forms: “the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances.”

Such directives refute learners’ ability to learn genres within their real social context as they downgrade genres to formulas and disconsider that speakers/writers dialogue through discursive genres, irrespective of their schooling. Nothing is farther from Bakhtinian concepts of dialogue, otherness, the place in which subjects come to

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<sup>36</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

<sup>37</sup> For reference, see footnote 10.

being than this teaching genre as a ‘plastered’ language practice model that requires learners to produce texts in which genre is remote from its real construction.

Many discourse genres may and should be taught through living discourse rather than through models. Since the 1990s a process of discourse genre systematization has been set in motion, as if subjects were only able to learn them when formally taught, as if genres were not closely related to a number of human activities from which subjects learn to use the genres they actually need.

Thus, when teaching practices are developed based on two dialogic interactions – the dialogue between different discursive genre utterances and the relationships between linguistic, stylistic and discursive components, reflection is promoted upon how each utterance builds into another, refers to, relates and dialogues with another when aiming at varied discursive intents, and a life-dynamic language in use teaching/learning proposition can be constructed.

This proposition aims to evidence that verbal language, one amongst many languages used by humans, stands as a primary condition to develop text readers and producers. Not language as synonymous to classification and life-detached definitions, but language in use as a constituent of subjects’ social practices.

Language – like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives – is never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, and in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is a characteristic of all living language. Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems, within these various systems (identical in the abstract) are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.288).<sup>38</sup>

For the teaching/learning of Portuguese language, discursive genre is central to the construction of a teaching/learning proposition that does not revolve around an instructionist process that prescribes learning as a ‘fill-in technique,’ but rather is based on real life contexts that aim to develop citizenship by means of an ethical-aesthetic education that considers the real needs of Brazilian young learners in the contemporary

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<sup>38</sup> For reference, see footnote 18.

world, such as working life, technology, science, culture and social engagement, having the text as its point of departure and destination.

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