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Tensions concerning the teaching of Portuguese: interfaces between genre and linguistic analysis¹

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Abstract

In this article, based on an analysis of the practice of two teachers, we aim to discuss the teaching of the Portuguese language, focusing on the interface between the work with genres and linguistic analysis. Our objective was to identify the knowledge related to linguistic analysis taught in two classes in the final year of primary education. We observed 22 lessons given by two teachers (11 lessons each) when they were developing a pedagogical sequence with the genre readers' letters. Four types of teaching situations that involved knowledge and reflections about this genre were identified: 1) definition of the genre and identification of different text samples of this genre; 2) reflections on socio-discursive features of the genre (text purpose, audience and location of occurrence) in general and/or in specific activities related to reading and text production; 3) reflections on the compositional form of the genre in general and/or in activities related to reading and text production; and 4) reflections on linguistic features and language conventions. The frequency of reflections on linguistic resources of the text genre being taught was low. This result revealed teachers' difficulties in promoting situations, along the pedagogical sequence, that help their students to think about the use of such resources in reading and writing activities involving readers' letters. The construction of a didactic model that includes grammatical features common to this genre was also a difficult task for teachers.

Keywords

Teaching – Discursive genres – Linguistic analysis.

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Tensões sobre o ensino da língua portuguesa: interfaces entre gênero e análise linguística^I

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Resumo

Neste artigo, com base na análise da prática de duas docentes, buscamos problematizar o ensino da Língua Portuguesa, com foco nas interfaces entre o trabalho com gêneros discursivos e o eixo de análise linguística. Buscou-se identificar conhecimentos de análise linguística abordados em duas turmas do 2º ciclo do Ensino Fundamental. Foram analisadas 22 aulas de duas professoras (11 aulas de cada) que estavam desenvolvendo uma sequência didática envolvendo cartas de leitores. Quatro tipos de situações didáticas foram identificados quanto às atividades de reflexão sobre o gênero: 1) conceituação do gênero / identificação de exemplares do gênero; 2) reflexões sobre aspectos sociodiscursivos relativos ao gênero (finalidade, destinatários, espaço de circulação), de maneira geral e/ou em atividades de leitura / produção de textos do gênero em foco; 3) reflexões sobre a forma composicional do gênero carta do leitor, de maneira geral e/ou em atividades de leitura / produção de textos do gênero em foco; e 4) reflexões sobre o uso de recursos linguísticos e aspectos normativos da língua. Houve baixa frequência de reflexões sobre os recursos linguísticos comuns ao gênero trabalhado. A menor frequência de tais reflexões ao longo da sequência encaminhada sinalizou dificuldades das docentes em promover situações didáticas que ajudassem os alunos a pensar a respeito do uso desses recursos nas cartas do leitor que liam e escreviam com seus alunos. As docentes tinham dificuldades de construir um modelo didático do gênero que contemplasse aspectos gramaticais comuns às cartas de leitores.

Palavras-chave

Ensino – Gêneros discursivos – Análise linguística.

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Significant changes have been witnessed in the teaching of Portuguese in the Brazilian curriculum, from the end of last century to the beginning of this century. Since the 1990's, curricula have been clearly focusing on the text as a space of interaction (MARINHO, 1998). What these documents state is that the focus of Portuguese teaching in the early years of primary education is no longer the transmission of grammatical terminology and taxonomy. There has been a shift in emphasis, although, as Marinho has pointed out, what is expressly said in the documents of the 1990's regarding general premises is often in contradiction to content-related guidelines or methodological recommendations.

Leal, Brandão, Santana, and Ferreira (2014), for example, analyzed 26 curricular documents issued by education departments of states and state capitals in effect in the first decade of the 21st century, and found that all of them advocated the need for teaching to be in a perspective of discursive genres. However, in 92.3 percent of the documents, the authors found guidelines regarding the need to help students meet grammatical prescriptions when reviewing texts, and only 31.1 percent indicated that teachers need to have students reflect on the diversification of linguistic resources as a means for the construction of meaning, considering genres' relative stability. According to the authors, this evidences the marks of the grammatical tradition found in last century's official documents. Therefore, one can see that this dimension of language teaching is still a field of tensions.

In curricular documents, the innovations that were introduced implied even changes in terminology. As Mendonça (2007) highlights, instead of 'grammar teaching', the term 'linguistic analysis' has been more and more used, thus widening the range of reflections on language and articulating more effectively the domains of reading, writing, and reflection on language. In addition, it is worth highlighting

the use of the word 'analysis' as stressing the idea of a teaching that problematizes its subject.

To better understand these curricular changes, it is necessary to reflect on the tensions that primary teachers experience in language teaching and, more specifically, to reflect on how the perspective of genres has influenced teaching with regard to activities involving linguistic analysis. Although this seems to be a recurring theme, there are few study results published in which didactic situations are explored through this perspective. Bibliographic studies presented at ANPEAD meetings, as well as in journals of the field such as *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, *Educação e Pesquisa*, *Educação - PUC RS*, and *Educação em Questão*, evidence the scarcity of data about this subject matter. Therefore, we corroborate Chartier's conclusion that "What is invoked but absent is what is done in school, what is done today or what is always done – in sum, the school practice". (CHARTIER, 2000, p. 158). The author argues that much of what is said about pedagogical practice derives from crystalized conclusions, yet seldom originated from investigations on teaching practices with a view to understanding them rather than just seeking flaws and absences. It is by starting with the necessity to understand the teaching practices experienced on a daily basis and understanding these practices' possible tensions that the present study acquires relevance for the area of education.

Therefore, based on the practice of two teachers, we will try to reflect about the classes in which these teachers approached different dimensions of the 'letter to the editor' genre with two primary 5th grade classes. Understanding teachers' practices is important to allow a deepening of discussions about the actually relevant conflicts experienced by teachers. However, before we present our data, we will discuss a few general conceptions on the teaching of Portuguese in the perspective of discursive genres.

Portuguese teaching in the perspective of genres

It has become commonplace to advocate the adoption of the perspective of discursive genres in the teaching our mother tongue [Portuguese]. However, it is essential to know clearly what concepts are being mobilized and what theoretical principles underlie teachers' pedagogical practice. In Brazil, authors from the Geneva School, which is represented by researchers such as Schneuwly, Dolz, Jean-Michel Adam, Jean-Paul Bronckart, among others, have had a significant influence on the local production. By means of a rereading of Bakhtin, these authors approach discursive genres as cultural instruments that are built in social practices of interaction. In this perspective, genres are historically built, malleable instruments which nevertheless show certain regularities whether concerning social-discursive aspects (interaction purposes, types of addressee, social spheres of circulation, textual supports) or the forms of composition or style. These authors argue that it is the role of the school to teach to read/write/listen/speak so as to introduce students into situated social practices. In other words, language teaching should include reading and text production activities in the pursuit of constructing meaning, but it also presupposes situations of reflection about the characteristics of genres.

In his approach to the stylistic aspects of genres, Bakhtin builds from the premise that "Even the speaker's choice for a certain grammatical form is already a stylistic act" (BAKHTIN, 2000, p. 286). Therefore, to Bakhtin, each genre imposes the mobilization of certain linguistic resources, which entails an articulation between discursive genre and linguistic analysis. However, each text is unique and certain choices are also made because of demands of a specific interaction context or even the author's individual style.

Discursive genre and linguistic analysis

Mendonça (2007, p. 74) argues that linguistic analysis "helps with creating and understanding oral and written texts of all genres". According to her, by means of actions of linguistic analysis, readers can widen their range of possibilities of assigning meaning to texts by mobilizing knowledge that helps interpreting grammatical cues. Similarly, in contexts of text production, familiarity with the genre adopted for the written or oral production of the text enables the use of linguistic resources potentially propitious to the intended effects.

About this question, Simioni and Húbes (2010) argue that both in reading and text production activities, it is important to reflect on the contexts in which texts are generated (goals, interlocutors, social spheres of interaction), since linguistic choices would result from these production conditions; moreover, these aspects that form the conditions of production acquire specificities that delimit a certain discursive genre in the interaction.

Such reflections follow from Bakhtin's (2000) postulates that,

The speaker receives, in addition to the common language's prescriptive forms (grammatical components and structures), the no less prescriptive forms of enunciation, i.e., the discursive genres, which are as indispensable as the language's forms to a mutual understanding between speakers (p. 304).

The choice for certain linguistic resources and the discursive genre is mainly determined by the execution problems that the object of meaning implies to the speaker (the author). This is the initial phase of enunciation, the phase that determines its particularities of style and composition (p. 308).

In this perspective, genres should assume a central role in the teaching of reading and text production, since knowledge about genres would give the teacher a greater ability to intervene constructively, thus helping students conduct linguistic analysis in articulation with the pursuit of context-relevant effects of meaning. However, this proposition does not seem to be so easily transferred into the didactics of teaching. The work based on genres requires, as argued by Dolz and Schneuwly (2004), the construction of didactic models of genres, i.e., defining the aspects of the genre that are teachable, considering school curriculum, age group, education level, and knowledge relevance, among other aspects. In this respect, Machado and Cristóvão (2006, p. 11-12) indicate a few elements to be considered in the construction of such didactic model, namely: the characteristics of the production context; the genre's typical contents; the different forms of mobilizing those contents; the genre's typical compositional construction; its particular style (the specific configurations of language units that characterize the enunciative position of the enunciator, the textual sequences and types of predominant and subordinate discourses that characterize the genre, the characteristics of nominal and verbal cohesion mechanisms, the characteristics of periods, lexical characteristics). Therefore, when selecting a given genre as the subject matter, the teacher should know the regularities that form that genre.

In view of this conclusion, and due to the need to deepen the analysis of the two teachers' practices, below we will treat the 'letter to the editor' genre, which they focused on in the didactic sequence they conducted.

Letter to the editor: characteristics and potentials for classroom work

The letter to the editor (hereinafter LTE) belongs to the domain of argumentation, according to Dolz and Schneuwly (2004). In

other words, it is one of the genres that aims to discuss controversial themes/subjects. About this question, Mello (1999, p.19) argues that:

in a letter to the editor, common readers can participate in a public debate, they can make themselves heard, give opinions about what is happening in the various social spheres, they can take part in political, economic and social discussions that are the focus of attention. The letter therefore becomes a space of discussion, of clash of opinions. In these letters, readers can defend ideas, doctrines, beliefs, i.e., they can publicly take a stand as subjects. The letter to the editor is therefore a privileged dialogue space among various discourses.

It is, therefore, a genre that targets a plural audience and has a journalistic circulation. So LTEs can be found in newspapers and magazines both in print and online, in specific sections dedicated to publishing them.

Besides giving opinions on several themes, a reader can use this type of letter to thank, complain, request, praise, ask for advice, etc. With the purpose of summarizing these different writing goals, Santiago (2005) grouped LTEs in three categories:

1) **Right of reply letter** – letters by persons or companies cited in articles or news stories in previous issues;

2) **Opinion letter** – LTEs that are expressly directed to the magazine or newspaper to praise or criticize it, or to make suggestions or requests;

3) **Manifestation letter** – LTEs manifesting about themes approached by the magazine in previous issues.

It is also necessary to highlight that, depending on the publication, the LTE can have other purposes, such as establishing contact with other readers through the dissemination of clubs.

With regard to compositional characteristics, we find in this genre a few elements that are common to any type of letter,

such as date and place, the initial greeting, the vocative, all of which install the interlocutor into the text. However, other elements can appear, such as a title. Sometimes, authors include a title related with the subject they are approaching or one reproducing the title of the news report they are commenting on. It is worth noting that, although the title is not part of the textual arrangement of letters in general, it is a specificity of the LTE genre, since through this resource readers can quickly visualize the subject matter and decide whether or not to read it.

Another important aspect of this genre is that texts can undergo an editing process, as highlighted by Mello (1999). To her, as the editor/journalist makes suppressions and modifications to the body of the text, the editor/journalist is ultimately a co-author of the published LTE.

With regard to the textual and discursive aspects of the genre in question, LTE allows an intensive use of markers of interlocution. According to Cunha (2005), this genre's interlocution marks are present in its compositional configuration, through the display of authorship in the letter, the writing style (e.g., the type of expression used in the vocative) and the thematic content planned according to what the author wants to communicate.

Intertextuality is also a fundamental aspect to understand this genre. As said earlier, many letters emerge from the reader's need to express his/her opinion about a news report, article or story he/she has read. In other words, a LTE is a text motivated by another text. Therefore, the use of resources to mark this intertextual nature seems intrinsic to this type of letter. About this question, Pastana (2007, p.25) comments:

This responsive trait in these letters is determined by the understanding of the base-text so that a stand can be taken for or against the idea presented in that text. Based on this necessity to reply, the interlocutor will make use of resources

characteristic of intertextuality to anchor his speech, such as: paraphrases, citations, presuppositions.

Another relevant point that characterizes the LTE is precisely the presence of argumentation. As emphasized earlier, this genre aims to express opinions and, therefore, to advocate a viewpoint. In this perspective, Pastana (2007, p. 25) also notes: "In these letters, persuasion is elaborated considering not only the immediate interlocutor, but the audience of readers of the medium that publishes the text".

As the writer builds his/her argument chain, he/she has to make use of various connectives to articulate his/her arguments, and do it properly, i.e., through the right choices in order to establish the intended meaning for his/her text. The student, in his/her process of appropriating the genre and developing his/her skills as a writer will have to learn to use this resource.

Still with regard to the genre's characteristics, we can see that, sometimes, the author of the letter tries to give it an informal character, which is marked by an attempt at closeness by the reader/author towards the magazine/newspaper and the other readers. One of the linguistic marks that ensure informality is the use of the vocative, both in editors' replies and LTEs, as noticed by Cecilio and Ritter (2009, p. 2065) in their analysis of letters by children to *Ciência Hoje* magazine:

In replies, the vocative ensures proximity with the reader, since the latter can feel valued by seeing his/her letter published with his/her name on the magazine by the editors. As for children's letters, the use of the vocative ensures an informal, affective tone, in addition to being part of the textual arrangement of letters in general.

In addition to the vocative, other aspects can help marking that informality, such as the choice of punctuation resources for emphasis (e.g., exclamation and interrogation marks) and the use

of short periods which, nonetheless, approximate the texts to a more spontaneous language. However, in their analysis, Cecilio and Ritter (2009) noticed that when the letter aims to criticize the magazine/newspaper, the text eventually follows a more formal model. Moreover, even when a more informal tone is assumed, the author always makes sure to keep some politeness in his/her writing. In other words, there are no insults or abuse, which would be considered inappropriate in a respectful interaction. In the same perspective, the modal 'would' [T.N.: *The Portuguese tense 'futuro do pretérito do indicativo', an equivalent of this modal, is what the author refers to.*] is commonly used (e.g., *I would like...*, *Would it be possible...*).

Another relevant aspect concerns the subjectivity one can find in LTEs. In other words, we can see that the sender assumes the text as his/hers (his/her opinion, criticism, request), therefore, he/she usually writes in the first person singular. We also find writing in the first person plural, particularly in situations where the author considers him/herself as representing a category (when, for example, the aim is to complain about the government, the author speaks on behalf of all citizens: *We want...*).

Still according to Cecilio and Ritter (2009, p.2065), "the linguistic marks that characterize that effect are the personal pronouns and verb desinences, in addition to the enunciative marks in the lexical choice that denote the affective and evaluative subjectivity of the sender".

Finally, it is worth stressing that adjectives and adverbs also have a guaranteed place in these letters. Both work as intensifiers of words, highlighting them. Cecilio and Ritter (2009) explain that these resources are often used for praising and work as a kind of seduction that can lead the editor to publish your letter.

Methodology

As said earlier, we analyzed classes by two teachers of primary fifth grade who taught

in two public schools in the metropolitan region of Recife, Brazil.

The teachers participated in monthly meetings at the university with the research group, which was coordinated by the first two authors of this article. Undergraduate pedagogy students and education graduate students, such as the third author at the time of the study, also attended the meetings.

The meetings involved discussing genres of the argumentative type (among which, the LTE) and planning didactic sequences involving the teaching of those genres. In addition, the meetings also included times of socialization and evaluation of the experiment during the stage of implementation of the didactic sequences that were planned in the group.

Each surveyed teacher conducted the sequence planned for teaching LTE during 11 classes and, for each class, different types of activity were proposed.

The classes were video-recorded and transcribed based on this recorded material and on notes from field notebooks, and then detailed class reports were made. Thus, the reports included the transcriptions of the recorded material made with cameras and voice recorder devices, as well as scene descriptions based on the notes from the field notebooks, which contained time details and descriptions of the activities.

Following the content analysis proposed by Bardin (2007), the reports were explored by our research group in three main phases. In the first reading, we sought to build analysis categories. Such categories were organized in tables, which were then completed based on our second reading of the reports. Finally, data in the tables were interpreted, with reports being reread in order to select episodes for deeper examination through qualitative analysis.

It is worth mentioning that, during the planning meetings, no recommendations were made on what aspects related to linguistic characteristics could be focused on in the activities proposed to students, so each teacher

was free to choose the contents she thought best suited to her group.

Results

In the 11 classes surveyed at each teacher’s classroom, we found a higher number of LTE reading activities predominantly focused on discussing the contents of the letters than text production or linguistic analysis activities. However, we also found various moments of reflection on more general aspects of the media where the texts appeared, on the characteristics of the genre, and on language practices in which LTEs circulate. In this article, we selected episodes in which the teachers conducted reflections on the LTE genre with their group of students.

Three types of didactic situation were identified in relation with activities of reflection on the LTE genre. Table 1 shows the number of classes in which each teacher conducted activities concerning these three types of didactic situation:

Table 1- Numbers of classes in the didactic sequence by type of LTE-based reflection activity

Types of reflection proposed in the activities	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
1. Reflections on social-discursive aspects of the genre (purpose, addressees, spaces of circulation)	11 classes	8 classes
2. Reflections on the compositional form of the letter to the editor genre	11 classes	9 classes
3. Reflections on the use of linguistic resources common to letters to the editor	5 classes	4 classes

Obs.: 11 classes were surveyed. In each class, reflections were conducted concerning different dimensions of genres.

As shown in Table 1, both teachers experienced activities referring to the different types of reflection identified. However, both gave priority to reflecting on social-discursive and compositional aspects to the detriment of linguistic resources. Below we present a more

detailed analysis of the didactic situations involving these three types of reflection, including passages of the classes in which they were approached.

Reflections on social-discursive aspects of the LTE genre

This type of reflection was identified in activities involving the discussion of different types of LTE, i.e., activities that explored comics/newspapers in order to identify LTEs in those media, as well as activities that promoted discussions about the goals, addressees, media and social practices where LTEs circulate.

Teacher 1, on class 1, for example, handed students various complete newspapers. Then she had them leaf through the papers and identify the main sections in each of them. Next, she and the students proceeded to systematize what could be found in each section. Finally, the teacher had the students look for a letter section and from this point she promoted an initial talk about who could write in a newspaper and the purpose of the LTE genre, as we can see in the episode below:

Episode 1 (teacher 1, class 1)

T: So, would you be able to tell me if the newspaper, it is written only by journalists?
S4: No.
T: It’s also written by whom?
S1: People.
S4: Readers.
T: By readers, this little section here, look, of letters, people send letters saying what?
S4: What they think.
T: What they think about subjects, right? When someone sends a letter to a newspaper, they’re having it say what in that letter? What do they mean with that? What’s the purpose of a letter in a newspaper?
S12: To make an annunciation?
T: To make an announcement, is it?
S12: Yeah.

T: To sell something through the letter, is it?
 Students: No.
 S6: No, Miss. They send it telling to do this, this and this, fixing the street...
 T: Talking about things that they find impor...
 Students: ...tant.

The passage above evidences the teacher's concern for reflecting on the purpose of the genre ("*What's the purpose of a letter in the newspaper?*"), the type of author of this genre ("*Would you be able to tell me if the newspaper, it is written only by journalists?*"), the type of content proper of the genre ("*People send letters saying what?*").

In the following classes, teacher 1 resumed and deepened aspects relating to the concept of LTE, with a view to consolidating students' learnings. On class 11, for example, the discussion focus was the question of authorship. In that class, students were required to write an LTE to *Diarinho* (the children's section of *Diário de Pernambuco* newspaper). The teacher used that opportunity to explore with students about who the authors of the letters published in that section usually are. Below is a passage of that class:

Episode 2 (teacher 1, class 11)

T: There's a letter section. So, who writes these letters?
 S5: We do.
 S2: Children.
 T: Children. Any child?
 Students: No.
 S7: The reader.
 T: What children?
 S7: Who are readers.
 T: The readers. Of what?
 S2: Of *Diarinho*.
 T: The readers of *Diarinho* write to *Diarinho* and the people who make the newspaper publish the letter. Who knows if they won't publish the letter of one of you?!

In this episode, we can see that the teacher sought to characterize the types of LTE authors ("*There's a letter section. So, who writes these letters?*"). In addition, she sought to relate the type of author with the medium where the texts were published, indicating that it was children who were readers of *Diarinho* ("*The readers of Diarinho write to Diarinho*").

Therefore, besides reflecting on the types of letter authors, the teacher aimed at introducing children into that type of social practice. In this perspective, she articulated general information characteristic of this genre with reflections exploring the texts that students were reading (episode 1) or situations of preparation for a text production activity (episode 2). The social-discursive aspects were therefore part of her plan, with pedagogical intentionalities linked to different domains within her teaching of LTE, which represents a conception of language teaching that is very connected with the current discussions among researchers in this field – discussions that also appear in official curricular documents.

Teacher 2 also dedicated herself to approaching LTEs' social-discursive aspects. On class 5, for example, during the analysis of a particular LTE, she discussed who the text's addressees were. As we will see in the fragment below, students were in doubt about the addressee, since the LTE opened by addressing someone in particular who had been mentioned in the news report the letter referred to. In that report, a child (Mariana) recounted a situation of bad service in a store due to her not being accompanied by her parents. In turn, Beatriz, the author of the LTE the group focused on, gave her opinion on that question:

Episode 3 (teacher 2, class 5)

T: Who wrote the letter?
 Students: Beatriz Gomes.
 T: You had no doubt on this one, did you?! And who was it written to?
 Students: Newspaper.
 S1: *Diário de Pernambuco*.

T: Well, this second one was harder, wasn't it?
Students: Newspaper.

S2: Diário de Pernambuco newspaper.

T: Who was it written to? Then some said it was to the newspaper, others thought it was where to?

S2: Diário de Pernambuco newspaper.

T: No, hold it.

Students: Newspaper, Diário de Pernambuco newspaper.

T: Hold it. Some thought it was the newspaper. A letter to the editor, where it is written to?

Students: To the newspaper.

T: To the newspaper. But that letter, who was it written to?

S3: To Mariana.

T: To the newspaper, but to whom in particular?

Students: To Mariana.

T: To Mariana, right? That's why you were in doubt now, isn't it? The letter to the editor is written to the newspaper, right? But the person that she wanted her to read it, that she was most interested in her reading that letter, more than everyone else was...

S4: Mariana.

T: It was Mariana.

As seen in the passage above, teacher 2 promoted a talk about the LTE's addressee. The passage reveals a conflict originated over the discourse strategy adopted by the author of the letter. As seen earlier, one feature of LTEs is that they address plural audiences (readers of newspapers). However, as a discourse strategy, letters' authors often address people cited in the news reports discussed in the letters. In this perspective, the teacher pointed that the letter's author wanted her primary reader to be Mariana (*The letter to the editor is written to the newspaper, right? But the person that she wanted her to read it, that she was most interested in her reading that letter, more than everyone else was...?*).

Reflections about the compositional form of LTEs

Reflections about the compositional characteristics of LTE were also present in almost every class by both teachers. The activities they conducted had students recognize the point of view that was expressed in the text; identify the justifications that authors gave to that point of view; find and produce titles for the LTEs; recognize the reference to a newspaper article as a component of this genre, and find it in the text; and, finally, identify the contextualizing elements of an LTE (date, place, signature).

Below is an example where teacher 1 favored a reflection about the genre's compositional characteristics.

Episode 4 (teacher 1, class 6)

T: She (referring to Clara, the author of the LTE that was read in class) wrote the letter and, on the twenty-third [day of the month] her letter appeared in the newspaper. Now look at this letter, does she bid farewell?

Students: No.

T: Is there a farewell? No. No farewell. But can a letter to the editor have a farewell?

Students: Yes, it can.

T: Look, here's Clara's farewell (reading the letter on the classroom wall): "A kiss, Clara". In our letter to the editor, can there be a farewell?

Students: No.

T: No?

Students: Yes, there can.

T: Yes, there can. Depends on the person. Sometimes the person wants to add it, sometimes she doesn't. In ours, we didn't say 'a hug', did we? In that letter that we wrote? But did Juliana say it in hers (referring to the author of another LTE that was read in classroom)?

Students: No.

T: No. She only put the subject, her opinion, and that's all. But did she say her name?

Students: Yes.

T: Did she say where she lives?

Students: She did.

T: It's important to say it, your name and where you live. And to say why you wrote the letter. In this case here, why was it that Juliana wrote the letter?

S7: About the sun.

T: But why did she write?

S4: So people wouldn't catch a disease.

Students: Because she thought it was important.

T: She thought it was interesting, that it was important, what else did she think?

S7: Uh...

T: Her opinion. And what is an opinion about something?

S6 and S7: Saying what you think.

T: It's what we think about it. For example, Juliana gave her opinion about the news report and about the ultraviolet rays A, ultraviolet B, about sunscreen, about all that, right?

As she analyzed an instance of the genre, teacher 1 took the opportunity to recall and systematize students' knowledge about the contextualizing elements of an LTE. In the beginning of the passage above, she reflected more specifically about the farewell (*"But can a letter to the editor have a farewell?"*). To answer her questions, the teacher had students check not only the instance that was being analyzed in that class, but also another letter they had analyzed a few days earlier (*Yes, there can [be a farewell]. Depends on the person. Sometimes the person wants to add it, sometimes she doesn't. In ours, we didn't say 'a hug', did we? In that letter that we wrote? But did Juliana [referring to the author of the other LTE that was read in classroom] say it in hers?*).

Teacher 1 also chose as a subject of discussion the type of information appearing in the part of the letter where the author identifies himself/herself (*But did she say her name? Did she say where she lives?*). Thus, we can see that, as she read the text, she systematized the parts that form a LTE.

Another important element explored was the presence of viewpoints in letters (*"It's important to say it, your name and where you live. And to say why you wrote the letter. In this case here, why was it that Juliana wrote the letter?"*). In this respect, Melo (1999, p. 19) highlights that "in letters, readers advocate ideas, doctrines, beliefs, in other words, they take a stand publicly, as subjects". The passage above evidences that the teacher aimed to theorize about the genre, yet keeping focus on understanding the texts they were reading. In other words, the reading of texts in this passage was filled with reflections about characteristics of the genre, but not in such a way that the pursuit of the effects of meaning was "abandoned". In fact, those reflections served as a means to better understand the texts and language practices. This kind of leading shows that the teacher had not focused her teaching only on theorizing/prescribing about the genre, something that might have been a didactic option, had the influence of prescriptive teaching been stronger on her practice.

Reflections about the use of linguistic resources common to letters to the editor

As cited earlier, Dolz and Schneuwly (2004) stress that, in the teaching of a particular genre, it is possible to build a didactic model of it by selecting a few aspects that are common in texts of the genre studied, with view to a more systematic action. In this perspective, authors who have studied LTEs of social circulation (CUNHA, 2005; PASTANA, 2007; CECILIO E RITTER, 2009) indicated different types of linguistic resources that could be the object of teaching, such as: the markers indicating the nature of the text, such as the use of vocatives; resources typical of intertextuality to anchor the author's speech, such as paraphrases, citations, presuppositions; argumentative operators to defend points of view; connectives to articulate arguments; resources related to the linguistic marks that ensure the text's informality;

punctuation resources to emphasize what is meant; resources that indicate politeness in language, such as the use of the modal 'would' [TN.: *See the previous translator's note regarding 'would' in this translation.*]; pronoun-related resources (to replace nouns) and word-intensifying resources, such as adjectives and adverbs. In this study, we aimed to investigate if such aspects that form the genre had been focused on in the same way as social-discursive and compositional dimensions were approached, as we have shown thus far.

As pointed earlier, reflections about the use of linguistic resources were least recurrent in the implementation of the didactic sequences. In the 11 classes we observed, teachers 1 and 2 conducted reflections in that direction in five and four classes, respectively. In addition, such reflections were commonly more isolated and without further deepening, thus evidencing some difficulty in dealing with those questions. In the observed situations, the teachers sought to discuss the following aspects: 1) linguistic resources that indicate the level of formality of LTDs; 2) linguistic resources that indicate the dialogic nature of the text; 3) textual cohesion processes; and 4) orthography.

It is worth stressing that, with regard to the fourth aspect above, few articulations could have been made with the characteristics of the genre. As to the other topics, they could have been explored in articulation with reflections about the genre's characteristics.

Below we present a few episodes that point in that direction:

Episode 5 (teacher 1, class 8)

T: It's a letter to the editor, because he begins the text... look how he begins the text: "Dear mister editor..." It's a...? It's a what?

S1: Letter to the editor.

T: It's a letter, it's a greeting in the letter, like he said here, look: "My dear friend Aldenize" or "Dear Ziraldo" (referring to the two letters pinned to classroom wall), are they people that we are close to?

Students: No.

T: So that boy who wrote this letter, is he close to the editor?

Students: No.

T: No. He wrote "dear mister", if he were close, he would say "Dear editor", right? "My dear friend so-and-so". He wrote like this: "Dear mister editor, I read, I read the news report published, the news report of July 6".

We can see that the teacher's intention with this dialogue was to help students understand that, depending on the addressee, the degree of formality of the text can vary. She focused on that theme by relating the linguistic choices to the strategies adopted in LTEs (*"He wrote 'dear mister', if he were close, he would say 'Dear editor', right?"*).

Teacher 2, on class 4, also sought to explore with students the question of formality in the LTE genre. Therefore, she compared LTE with a few news reports that were read in class, as shown in the episode below.

Episode 6 (teacher 2, class 4)

P - The news report and the letter to the editor, the form, what is the language like? Which is more formal?

Students: That one.

T: What?

Students: The news report.

T: And the more informal?

S7: That one.

Students: The letter to the editor.

T: The letter to the editor, right? She says, "I loved the news report", when the... when a reporter, he... a..., someone is writing about the news report. Now can he say: "I loved whatever..." Can he speak like that?

S7: No.

T: No, he can't, right? It's a more formal language.

An LTE is certainly a more informal text. However, as we saw in teacher 1's speech (see episode 4), in some situations, the reader

can choose to keep a certain distance from the addressee (e.g., when the reader writes to criticize the author of some news report or the medium itself).

In addition to the question of formality, we saw that processes of textual cohesion were also the object of reflection in a few situations. On class 5, during a text production activity, teacher 1, for example, had students spot repetitions in the text and took that opportunity to have them think about a way to avoid such repetition. This is shown below:

Episode 7 (teacher 1, class 5)

T: Shall we make another paragraph? What was that you said?

S1: "We know that that is wrong and there is a law against that." (The student dictates for the teacher to write on the blackboard)

T: "That" and "that" twice? There is a law against what?

S2: Against exploitation.

S3: Exploitation of children.

T: Oh, "We know that that is wrong and there is a law against the exploitation of children" (writing).

The passage above shows that teacher 1 used, in this collective production activity, a meta-language (*Shall we make another paragraph?*). She could have shown more clearly to the children that the text could be sliced for better articulation between parts. In the LTE-reading activities, she could also stimulate reflection about the genre's compositional forms and authors' paragraphing strategies, or she could also analyze the authors' strategies to paragraph their LTEs. This topic, however, is only introduced by means of a warning that there is such a linguistic unit.

Still regarding episode 7, we can see that the teacher highlighted the use of strategies to establish textual cohesion as she explored the existence of unnecessary repetition ("'*That*' and '*that*', twice?"), showing that the repeated word (that) could be replaced with a more precise

expression (*the nature of the law*). Once again, we can see a lack of deepening in the discussion about the necessity (or not) of a replacement. Nor was there any encouragement for children to make suggestions on how to avoid using the word "that" twice. By doing that, the teacher only induces students to replace the word with the information about the matter of the law. Therefore, she does not promote conditions for the children to choose the linguistic resources to form textual meanings.

According to Schneuwly (1998), choices about linguistic resources build from basic orientations (representations about the interaction situation in which the text is produced), i.e., the author adopts a certain genre with which she/he has had contact in previous experiences. And it is about this encounter that the reflections cited in the episodes above were made. In episodes 5 and 6, for example, the reflections referred more clearly to the style of the genre, while in episode 7, the teacher focused more on the text's peculiarity, without articulating the choices made with the genre's general characteristics.

Final considerations

The analyses that we conducted evidenced that the teachers promoted systematic reflections about the social-discursive and compositional characteristics of the LTE genre, and did not dedicate frequently to discuss linguistic aspects. This finding seems to indicate some contradiction in the teachers' practices, since, according to Bakhtin, genres consist of their contents, compositional form, and style, and therefore, linguistic resources could not be overlooked in reflections about genres. However, this apparently contradictory fact seems to reveal precisely the tensions in the process of didactization of the concepts in question. According to Chartier,

The exercise of teaching is also made over the long time that authorizes multiple,

if contradictory, practices. The forms of organization and work techniques, the learning procedures and modes of assessment, the educative interventions are inherited, imitated, and reproduced as much as they are empirically produced, technically or theoretically built or justified (in relation with a constructed corpus of knowledge) or refer to a set of values (a concept of good-for-the-child, a political mission of the school, etc.). Therefore, depending on the case, practices appear as articulators of multiple choices, whether hierarchized or not, poorly or strongly coherent, eclectic or systematic, open or closed, finished or unfinished, to a weak or strong potentiality of evolution. (CHARTIER, 2000, p. 165)

We have seen that, in general, the teachers promoted a teaching that was connected with current orientations about language teaching. One aspect worth noticing is the concern for exploring texts of social circulation, articulating reflections about the genre's characteristics to the exploration of the texts that were read, thus moving away from practices where genre theorization would be the key element. This demonstrates an effort on the part of the teachers to articulate different domains in their teaching of LTE in their classes. The practices of both teachers also indicated their option not to give priority to the learning of grammatical prescriptions to the detriment of a teaching focused on interaction by means of texts.

However, as said earlier, when we consider the linguistic dimension, we found a low frequency of reflections about the resources common to the genre that was taught. In other words, the linguistic characteristics relating to the LTE genre did not seem to be part of the genre's didactic model underlying the practices conducted. This evidence points to the idea that grammar was approached with scarce articulation to the didactic work with genres.

However, our interest is not to verify this fact only. As shown earlier, the activities

and reflections conducted by the teachers with regard to the social-discursive and compositional aspects of the LTE genre indicate that the absence of a more reflexive and frequent approach to the genre's linguistic resources cannot be interpreted only as an attachment to the old practices. On the contrary, we found that the practices conducted by the teachers show that both have been appropriating concepts and theories that are valued in the current scene. Therefore, they have gone a significant way, as Chartier once again emphasizes,

a successful transformation pays the price of numerous aborted, failed or abandoned attempts. Before each innovation that is so designated, the ordinary in class implies the incessant groping, local adaptations, and provisory modifications without which the class is not made. (CHARTIER, 2000, p. 164).

Therefore, the teachers, immersed in interactions in which different experiences and types of knowledge were mobilized, recreated their practices by innovating in some fields more rapidly than in others. We still need to know, however, which of those fields poses the greatest obstacles. Apparently, our data point that, in the case of genre didactization, the linguistic aspects were the most difficult to both teachers. A possible explanatory hypothesis is that the discourse of grammar teaching as something too attached to "traditional teaching" might have caused, in the teachers' practice, the need for a greater separation from linguistic contents. In other words, for them not to be recognized as traditional, they might have started a process of denial of contents of that nature. This aspect can be problematized by considering the idea that teachers' choices are not only made based on conscious decisions. On this respect, Chartier also points that

Indeed, the work of the teacher, whatever his/her workplace and specific constraints,

takes place in the field of the classroom, considering both explicit demands (official instructions, the school's modes of organization and assessment, the demands of the school's hierarchy, the project the teacher creates to himself/herself) and implicit pressures such as the socio-cultural environment, material conditions (staff, architecture, school budget, and students) or, the establishment's atmosphere (colleagues, supervisors, students' parents, etc.). Each teacher is, therefore, led to negotiate in a way that's partially spoken, partially understood; and for his/her way of doing things, there is a margin of play authorizing a regulated, limited diversity of possible practices. (CHARTIER, 2000, p. 165).

Therefore, this decreased investment in reflections about linguistic activities involving genres can be a result of how grammar teaching has been viewed in the current context of discussions about the curriculum of Portuguese. Another plausible hypothesis to explain the scarcity of reflections of that nature is the lack of knowledge about what linguistic aspects can

form the didactic model of the genres. This hypothesis builds from the assumption that the teachers probably did not have a clear vision of what linguistic analysis contents could be more effectively approached with their students. It certainly seems easier to plan activities to discuss about a genre's purposes and addressees than launching a proposal to have fifth-grade students reflect about linguistic aspects, which are more abstract and, perhaps, more difficult to note and understand.

Therefore, the data presented in this study reveal the need to continue investigating teaching practices with the purpose of finding whether the hypotheses above will be confirmed. If such suppositions are true, then we can get to the conclusion that it is necessary to invest more effectively in teacher continuing education with focus both on the definition of what to teach in early years of primary education and on the didactic strategies to be used. In other words, with regard to the domain of linguistic analysis, it would be vital to define what knowledge is important in the different phases of school education, and reflect of on the best teaching strategies.

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