

Bakhtin and native language teaching in Brazil:

some perspectives

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Resumo: Este artigo tem como objetivo examinar a influência da teoria bakhtiniana, em particular, o conceito do gênero de discurso, nos documentos oficiais do Ministério da Educação no Brasil dirigidos aos professores da rede pública e privada. A fim de compreender essa presença tão importante de Bakhtin e o Círculo, serão recuperados alguns aspectos da recepção das obras que marcaram as orientações governamentais. O resultado será complementado com a análise de um capítulo de livro didático de língua materna para alunos do ensino médio que aborda o conceito do gênero no ensino da produção de textos argumentativos.

Palavras-chave: Gêneros do discurso; plurilinguismo; dialogismo; livro didático.

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to examine the influence of Bakhtinian theory, in particular the concept of speech genre, in official documents of the Ministry of Education in Brazil intended for teachers in the public and private networks. In order to understand this very important impact of Bakhtin and the Circle, several aspects of how the works that were the hallmark of government guidance were received will be revisited. The outcome will be supplemented by analyzing a chapter of a textbook in the native language for high school students that deals with the concept of genre in teaching the production of argumentative texts.

Keywords: Speech Genres; Heteroglossia; Dialogism; Textbooks.

Initial considerations²

The philosopher of language, Mikhail Bakhtin, became well-known, read and quoted among native language teachers in Brazilian elementary schools and in teaching materials, primarily his posthumous essay “Speech genres” (1979), written between 1951-53³. This success arose in the 1990s, with the appearance of the concepts of “language”, “text”

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2 This research is part of the project *Letramentos, ensino, memória: a análise dialógica do discurso (Literacy, education, memory: the dialogic analysis of speech)* and consists of Post-doctorate and Doctorate candidates and Masters candidates on scholarships and those on Research Initiation in “Linguística Aplicada do Português” (*Applied Linguistics of Portuguese*) line of research.

3 In Portuguese, the essay was published in the compilation *Estética da criação verbal*, by M. M. Bakhtin (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1992), translated from the French edition *Esthétique de la création verbale*. Traduit du russe par Alfreda Aucouturier, préface de Tzvetan Todorov. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

and “speech genres” in official instructions that laid the ground rules for teaching the Portuguese language at elementary and high school levels in Brazil. According to Rodrigues (2006)⁴, the ideas of Bakhtin’s Circle

[...] have driven theoretical discussion and pedagogical developments in the field of language teaching since the mid-1980s. [...] Even though the main thrust of the attention of the Circle was not the teaching/learning of languages, its texts contain ideas on this theme that are surprising because of their contemporaneity.⁵

The focus of this article will be brought to bear on texts by Bakhtin and Voloshinov that are the explicit or implicit threads running through the documents produced by the Ministry of Education (MEC) in order to implement the reform of native language teaching at different political periods in Brazil. In the first part we will contextualize several aspects of the arrival of translations of Bakhtin, in order to identify how they came to be here. Thereafter we will analyze the path of the concept of speech genre in the three documents entitled *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais de Língua Portuguesa para o ensino fundamental (1º e 2º Ciclos; 3º e 4º Ciclos)* (*National Syllabus Parameters for the Portuguese Language*)(*1st and 2nd Cycles*⁶; *3rd and 4th Cycles*⁷), hereinafter referred to as PCNs, respectively published in 1997 and 1998 and, *Orientações curriculares para o ensino médio: Linguagens, códigos e suas tecnologias*⁸, (*Syllabus guidelines for high schools: languages, codes and their technologies*) published in 2006, a revised version of *Parâmetros Curriculares para o Ensino Médio*⁹(*Syllabus Parameters for High Schools*).

The influence of Bakhtinian theory stands out in these documents intended for teachers at different levels¹⁰; nevertheless, one can find dilution, omissions or lack of clarity regarding the concepts used in the different texts. Procedures like these in the end only confuse terms such as “text genres” of Jean-Paul Bronckart or Bernard Schneuwly (1998)¹¹, as if they were the same notion espoused by M. Bakhtin and the Circle, or mix-

4 R. Hammes Rodrigues, researcher in Applied Linguistics, wrote the article ‘Os gêneros do discurso na perspectiva dialógica da linguagem: a abordagem de Bakhtin’, (*Speech Genres from the Dialogic Perspective of Language: Bakhtin’s Approach*) in J. L. Meurer et al. (eds.), *Gêneros: teorias, métodos, debates* (*Genres: Theories, Methods, Debates*) (São Paulo: Parábola, 2005), pp.184-207.

5 R.H. Rodrigues, p. 153.

6 Brazil /Department of Elementary Education. *Parâmetros curriculares nacionais de Língua Portuguesa: primeiro e segundo ciclos do ensino fundamental: língua portuguesa* (*National Syllabus Parameters for the Portuguese Language: first and second cycles of elementary school: Portuguese Language*), (Brasília: MEC/SEF, 1997). Available at: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/seb/arquivos/pdf/portugues.pdf>. Acesso 29/10/2014.

7 Brazil /Department of Elementary Education. *Parâmetros curriculares nacionais de Língua Portuguesa: primeiro e segundo ciclos do ensino fundamental: língua portuguesa* (*National Syllabus Parameters for the Portuguese Language: third and fourth cycles of elementary school: Portuguese Language*). (Brasília: MEC/SEF, 1998). Available at: <http://portal.mec.gov.br/seb/arquivos/pdf/portugues.pdf>. Acesso 29/10/2014.

8 Brazil /Department of Basic Education. *Orientações Curriculares para o ensino médio: linguagens, códigos e suas tecnologias. Língua Portuguesa* (*Syllabus Guidelines for High Schools: Languages, Codes and their Technologies. Portuguese Language*). (Brasília: MEC/SEF, 2006).

9 It makes more sense to analyse the second revised document because the concepts were more in-depth when compared to the first document (2000). The bibliographical references remain unchanged.

10 For a good discussion of this subject matter see articles by R. Rojo, ‘Gêneros do discurso e gêneros textuais: questões teóricas e aplicadas’ (*Speech Genres and Text Genres: Theoretical and Applied Issues*), in J. L. Meurer et al. (eds.), *Gêneros: teorias, métodos, debates* (São Paulo: Parábola, 2005), pp.184-207; R. Rojo, ‘Gêneros de discurso/texto como objeto de ensino de línguas: um retorno ao *trivium*?’ (*Speech/Text Genres as The Subject of Language Teaching: Back to the Trivium?*), in I. Signorini, [*Re*]discutir texto, gênero e discurso ([*Re*]discussing Text, Genre and Speech) (São Paulo: Parábola, 2008), pp.73-108.

11 J. Dolz; B. Schneuwly, *Pour un enseignement de l’oral*. Initiation aux genres formels à l’école (Paris: Esf, 1998).

ing them with “text type”, of Jean-Michel Adam (1999)¹². Also, at certain times they lead to confusion, such as understanding text as synonymous with speech genre.

As an example of this analysis of the documents we will present the analysis of a chapter of a textbook for high school students¹³, where the focus is on producing writings with an argumentative approach. The aim is to discuss the deployment of speech genre concepts on which so much emphasis is put in teaching and positions in *Syllabus Guidelines for High Schools* based on the relations between individuals of different cultures and in relationships of power. The theory, however, when disseminated in teaching appears quite often to fall back on mechanical methods of language teaching, while the didactical activities suggested by reading texts, comprehension and written production remain fragmented, distancing themselves from the theoretical-methodological proposal defended by Bakhtin and the Circle. Before exploring the treatment allotted to the concept of genres, let us take a look at the time-space of the publications referred to in the documents analyzed, so as to understand how they were read specifically within this context.

1. Some aspects of the Brazilian reception of Bakhtin

Government documents at the end of the 1990s mention two books under Bakhtin’s name: *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*¹⁴ (MFL) and *Esthetics of Verbal Art*¹⁵. Thus the first step for discussing how these bibliographic sources came to the attention of teachers of Portuguese and authors of textbooks is to retrace the chronology of the translations in Brazil and specifically the social, historical and political context in which they arose. MFL was published at the end of the 1970s, when the country was under military rule and was embarking on a slow process of re-democratization. “The political situation in education was unsatisfactory because there were not enough vacancies for candidates, and schools were responsible for preparing for the labor market part of the demand. [...] The concern of the military government and technocratic society with technical enhancement lay in manufacturing efficiency, which required the training of a technical and specialized work force”.¹⁶

This social and political scenario helps in understanding the welcome given by researchers to the ideas of Bakhtin/Voloshinov, which were “disembarking” in Brazil at that time. It was against this background that the translation of *Marxism and Philosophy of language* appeared in 1979 and was immediately embraced within academia, as Carlos Alberto Faraco, a researcher at the Federal University of Paraná explains:

The discovery of Voloshinov at the end of the 1970s – among other intellectual waves – was a valuable contribution and benefitted the idolization of his text, an idolization that exists to this day.¹⁷

12 J. M. Adam, *Linguistique textuelle: Des genres de discours aux textes* (Paris: Nathan, 1999).

13 The compilation chosen for analysis was approved by the National Textbook Program (PNLD/EM) -2015. Available in the guide to Portuguese textbooks.

14 In the bibliography, *Marxism and Philosophy of Language* is attributed to Bakhtin, but the Brazilian edition, like the French, gives the names of M.M. Bakhtin and V.Volochinov on the cover.

15 This compilation was published in Spanish: M.M. Bajtin, *Estética de la creación verbal*. (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2002); and in French: M. Bakhtine, *Esthétique de la création verbale*. Trad. Alfreda Aucouturier. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

16 A. C. C. Visioli, *Política de ensino de língua portuguesa e prática docente (Policy on Portuguese Language Teaching and Teaching Practice)*. Masters Dissertation. (Maringá-Paraná: UEM, 2004), p. 32.

17 C. A. Faraco, “Voloshinov: um coração humboldtiano?” (*Voloshinov: a Humboldtian heart*) in C. A. Faraco

In the documents of the Ministry of Education, however, quoting from this book faced the same difficulties as the dissemination of Bakhtin's texts, at least in the West. Let's look at three of them. The first difficulty lies in the authorship of *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*, attributed to Bakhtin alone, although both name (Bakhtin/ Voloshinov) appeared on the cover of the Brazilian edition. The second refers to the incomplete mention of the title, since the important subtitle "Fundamental Problems of the Sociological Method in the Science of Language" is missing. This approach shows how the sociological method of language proposed by Russian theoreticians was erased. Generally speaking, allusions to issues like ideology, social individual and verbal interaction found in official texts are quite often confused with concepts originating in Textual Linguistics or Cognitive Psychology. Lastly, the greatest challenge of the Bakhtinian writings involves inaccuracies in translation and "lack of terminological uniformity. [...] Each Brazilian edition has a different translator, in addition to working from the original Russian one moment, from the French translation the next moment and sometimes reverting to the English translation [...]".¹⁸ In this respect Faraco asserted:

[in Brazil] besides the many translation problems, the thinking of the Circle has quite often and for many years been identified almost exclusively with the book **Marxism and Philosophy of Language**, the first to be published in Portuguese.¹⁹

In 1992, the compilation *Esthetics of Verbal Art*²⁰ was published in Brazil. The society was experiencing a period of change in domestic policies, including greater access by the population to elementary school, high school and university education. Within this transformation of teaching, the Bakhtinian concept of speech genres became a way forward for the requirements for thinking about new ways of reading and writing.

The book translated from the French edition was an immediate success and was mentioned in pedagogical documents beginning in 1995, because of the unfinished essay "Speech Genres".²¹ A second translation from the original Russian only came out in 2003 and brought with it four texts that were not in the previous edition, representing a significant contribution to understanding the works of Bakhtin taken as a whole. These included the texts "Arte e responsabilidade" ["Art and Answerability"]²², "A respeito de Problemas da obra de Dostoiévski" ["Towards a Reworking of the Book on Dostoevsky"]²³, "Reformulação do livro sobre Dostoiévski" [Three Fragments from the 1929 Edition *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*]²⁴ and "Conferências sobre história literatura russa" ["From Lectures

et al. (eds.), *Vinte ensaios sobre Mikhail Bakhtin (Twenty Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin)* (Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 2006), pp.125-126.

18 G. T. Souza, *Introdução à teoria do enunciado concreto do círculo Bakhtin/Volochinov/Medvedev (Introduction to the Theory of the Concrete Utterance of Bakhtin/Voloshinov/Medvedev)* (São Paulo: Humanitas, 1999), p. 42.

19 C. A. Faraco, *Linguagem & diálogo: as ideias linguísticas do círculo de Bakhtin (Language & Dialog: the Linguistic Ideas of Bakhtin's Circle)* (São Paulo: Parábola, 2009), p.15.

20 Title in Russian *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (1979, archive material published in Moscow by Iskusstvo).

21 English translation, M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Trans. Bern W. Mc Gee, eds. C. Emerson; M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 159-72.

22 English translation, M.M. Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*. Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp.1-3.

23 English translation: second section as appendix to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Emerson. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006), pp. 283-302.

24 English translation: Appendix I to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. C. Emerson. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006), pp. 275-82.

on the History of Russian Literature: Viacheslav Ivanov”]²⁵, 1920. Although this Brazilian edition was circulating at the time the document on high school teaching was drawn up, the organizers retained the quotation from the 1992 edition, revealing that the French intellectual conception of structuralist sources in the first translation had prevailed in the mind of the researchers who had organized the official project as well as the teachers involved in it.

Among the best-known texts of the compilation is the essay “Speech genres”. A brief summary follows to focus on where teaching of native languages is concerned. Divided into two parts, from the outset Bakhtin introduces the definition of speech genre. The second part entitled “Utterance as a Unit of Speech Communication. The difference between this Unit and Units of Language (words and phrases)”²⁶ distinguishes phrases and utterances within a theoretical and methodological order in order to understand speech genres within the different spheres of human activity. The phrase, a unit of the abstract grammar systems, is contrasted with the utterance, the unit of event, unique and unreproducible, a product of social intercourse, since speech only exists in the form of concrete utterances. Bakhtin defends the constitution of the two individuals interconnected, but methodologically separated, for the study of language:

These two viewpoints of one and the same specific linguistic phenomenon should not be impervious to one another and should not simply replace one another mechanically. They should be organically combined (with, however, the most clear-cut methodological distinction between them) on the basis of the real unity of the language phenomenon. Only a profound understanding of the nature of the utterance and the particular features of speech genres can provide a correct solution to this complex methodological problem.²⁷

The analysis of phrases is guided by the search for what in language is systematic, organized into structures, functioning with pre-defined categories, precisely what has traditionally underpinned the teaching of native languages. The concrete utterance is supported by other bases. It involves what has already been said, anticipations and the relations between, at least to social individuals. The study of language based on the concrete utterance introduces a notion of text as an event, a response to other texts dealing with the same subject matter of the speech and with which it relates at the same time, which is a response directed at its interlocutor. Every text presupposes a conventional system, that is, a language, but precisely because it is unique and irreproducible, a place of meanings, its reproduction by an individual is always a new event, “it is a link in the chain of speech communication”²⁸ of the huge and unfinished dialog.

Based on these theoretical presuppositions Bakhtin proposes a study of language as a communication activity, not merely understood as a form or classification, but as an interactive field consisting of genres of different spheres of human activity. By approaching verbal signs, whether in the oral or in the written dimension, the orientation towards others and the dialog between consciences establish as essential elements for language studies.

The theory of the genres is not in this text alone, but pervades several works of Bakhtin and the Circle, enabling us to work methodologically and didactically with the use of language in human activity. As Brait asserts,

25 In M.M. Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, pp. 394-403.

26 M. M. Bakhtin. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Trans. Bern W. Mc Gee, eds. C. Emerson; M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986)), p. 67.

27 Bakhtin, pp. 66-67.

28 Bakhtin, p. 84.

[...] every concept based on Bakhtinian proposals, one must bear in mind that, along with the others, it creates a network from which it will find it difficult to distance itself. In the case of speech genre, we also see interference from concepts like heteroglossia, dialogism, polyphony, responsibility, tone, etc.²⁹

The outcome of this theoretical approach to speech genres is that in order to incorporate it into native language teaching, one must understand it differently from the traditional theories of literary genres involving the Aristotelian conception, nor should one engage with pre-established categories or models defined outside social intercourse.

2. The concept of genres in Ministry of Education (MEC) documents

In the *National Syllabus Parameters for the Portuguese Language* (PCNs) for the two cycles (1st/2nd and 3rd/4th), the concept of genres dominates like a syllabus organizer, structuring the manner in which oral and written language, as well as literature, function in the different spheres of circulation. In the words of Gomes-Santos, “the concept of genre, in this document in particular, is chosen as the key concept for how one goes about teaching Portuguese”³⁰, in the search to render traditional teaching practices problematical.

This didactical approach can be taken by surprise when we examine two government texts. However, the organizers base their approach on competing theories: text genres and speech genres, and use few bibliographical quotations, with the result that the concepts are identified using paraphrases. In the introduction to the text for the 1st – 2nd Cycles, the approach to the concept is noticeable through a mention appended in a footnote: “The term genre is used here as proposed by Bakhtin and developed by Bronckart and Schneuwly”.³¹ Nevertheless, the theory of speech genres has its core in social and historical aspects, while the theory of text genres focuses on the composition of the linguistic materiality of the text involving a socio-discursive interface. The sources of the concept found in the governmental instructions involve the didactical approach of the researchers at the University of Geneva (Schneuwly; Dolz, 1996; 1998) in preliminary versions mentioned in the Brazilian document but never published.

In the first part of the PCNs of the 3rd/4th Cycles, the section on “Conditions for Dealing with the Subject of Teaching: Text as a Unit and the Diversity of Genres” revisits Bakhtinian concepts – text and genre – without mentioning the primary sources, which in the end decontextualizes them from the combined theory of Bakhtin and the Circle and placing them within the scope of Portuguese language teaching. What one reads is:

Every text is organized within a given genre on account of what it is intended to communicate, as part of the conditions for producing speeches that lead to social uses that determine

29 B. Brait. ‘PCNs, gêneros e ensino de língua: faces discursivas da textualidade’ (*PCNs, Genres and Language Teaching: the Discursive Faces of Textuality*), in R. Rojo (ed.), *A prática de linguagem em sala de aula (Language Practice in the Classroom)* (São Paulo: EDUC, Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 2000), p. 20.

30 S. Gomes-Santos, *A questão do gênero no Brasil: Teorização acadêmico-científica e normatização oficial (The Issue of Genre in Brazil: Academic and Scientific Theorization and Official Rules and Regulations)*. Doctorate thesis. (Campinas, Language Studies Institute, State University of Campinas/Unicamp, 2004), p. 152.

31 Brazil /Department of Elementary Education. *Parâmetros curriculares nacionais de Língua Portuguesa: primeiro e segundo ciclos do ensino fundamental: língua portuguesa (National Syllabus Parameters for the Portuguese Language: first and second cycles of elementary school: Portuguese Language)*. (Brasília: MEC/SEF, 1997), p.26.

them. Genres, therefore, are historically determined, representing relatively stable forms of utterances available in culture. They feature three elements: thematic content: which is or may be said through the genre; compositional construction: the particular structure of the texts belonging to the genre; style: specific configurations of language derived, above all, from what the speaker is trying to say; specific sets of sequences comprising the text, etc.³²

When we compare this fragment with the Bakhtinian essay one can see that the excerpt is directly founded in it, as is obvious from the following excerpt, although the organizers have omitted its origin in the document, making it appear that authorship rests with the undersigned institution (“Brazil. Department of Elementary Education”):

All three of these aspects – thematic content, style, and compositional structure – are inseparably linked to the whole of utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. These we may call speech genres.³³

In the first part of the PCNs “What Writing should Schools teach”, two central themes appear: genre assumes the statute of the subject being taught, while text serves as the unit of teaching, so that the text becomes a source of reference that expands the pupil’s repertoire.

All text belongs to a given genre, with its own form, and which can be learnt. When admitted to the school, texts that circulate socially exercise a modeling role, serving as a reference source, a textual repertoire and support for **intertextual activity**³⁴. Textual diversity outside the school can and should be at the service of expanding the pupil’s educational knowledge.³⁵

The organizers establish teaching of Portuguese based on the diversity of the texts, while focusing on working with intertextuality. Once again one can see further dilution of the Bakhtinian conception of text as utterance. By introducing the term “intertextuality”, a word coined by Bulgarian semiotician Julia Kristeva, in 1967, in the French journal *Critique* as a way of referring to a text that absorbs another text, the meaning of the concrete utterance changes. In Bakhtin’s writings the question that arises is that of dialogism in speeches looked at from a quite different perspective: it involves the organization of heteroglossia, the quoted speech and the interspersed genres. On re-reading the essay “Discourse in the novel”, we will find the concept of “hybrid construction” distancing itself from the linguistic approach in which text is treated as a purely linguistic product. Bakhtin explains:

32 Brazil /Department of Elementary Education. *Parâmetros curriculares nacionais de Língua Portuguesa: terceiro e quarto ciclos do ensino fundamental: língua portuguesa (National Syllabus Parameters for the Portuguese Language: third and fourth cycles of elementary school: Portuguese Language.)* (Brasília: MEC/SEF, 1998), pp. 21-22.

33 M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Trans. Bern W. Mc Gee, eds. C. Emerson; M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 60.

34 Highlighted by the author of the article in order to emphasize additional confusion surrounding speech genres, text and intertextuality, as can be seen from the suggestions in the document, distancing itself from the positions of the Bakhtinian theoreticians.

35 Brazil /Department of Elementary Education. *National Syllabus Parameters for the Portuguese Language: first and second cycles of elementary school: Portuguese language.* (Brasília: MEC/SEF, 1997), p.34.

What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional makers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two “languages”, two semantic and axiological belief systems.³⁶

Let us now move on to the second part of the *Syllabus Parameters for the Portuguese Language* where the focus is on the practice of Portuguese language teaching. The documents contain very similar guidelines both for teachers in the lower grades and in the higher grades. In the section on “Didactic handling of content”, the “speech genre” concept is discussed as content, and one can detect below that term is adopted as a didactic organizer.

Speech genres

Appropriate genres for working with oral language: tales (fairy tales, ghost stories, etc.), popular myths and legends; poems, songs, comic strips, nursery rhymes riddles, tongue twisters, jokes; greetings, instructions, narratives; interviews, news, announcements (on radio and television); seminars, lectures.

Appropriate genres for working with written language: recipes, instructions for use, lists; texts printed on packaging, labels, calendars; letters, notes, postcards, cards (birthday, Christmas, etc.), invites, diaries (personal, class, travel, etc.); comic strips, newspaper texts, magazines and children’s supplements: titles, discussions, news, classifieds, etc.; advertisements, slogans, posters, leaflets; nursery rhymes, songs, poems, comic strips, riddles, tongue twisters, jokes; tales (fairy tales, ghost stories, etc.), popular myths and legends, cordel literature, fables; theatrical texts; historical narratives, encyclopedia texts, dictionary entries, reports from different sources (editions, magazines, reference books, textbooks, etc.).³⁷

This fragment establishes the concept of genres outside the social and historical conditions of the texts and the spheres of circulation and reception, reducing the compositional forms, subject matter and style to exclusively linguistic aspects. This manner of using and applying the Bakhtinian concept loses its theoretical-methodological proposal. As Voloshinov argues:

[...] the task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in a particular, concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e., it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity.³⁸

Lastly, in *Syllabus guidelines for high schools: languages, codes and new technologies* (2006)³⁹, several changes occurred in the composition of the document whose theoretical

36 M.M. Bakhtin, Discourse in the Novel, in Michael Holquist (edited), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trad. Caryl Emerson (et al.), (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 110. (Translation in Portuguese M. M. Bakhtin, Discurso no romance, *Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance*. Trad. Equipe Aurora Fornoni Bernadini. (São Paulo: Unesp, 1998), p. 110.

37 Brazil /Department of Elementary Education. *National Syllabus Parameters for the Portuguese Language: first and second cycles of elementary school: Portuguese language*. (Brasília: MEC/SEF, 1997), pp.111-2.

38 V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. by L. Matejka; I.R.Titunik. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), p.68.

39 Brazil /Department of Basic Education. *Syllabus Guidelines for High Schools: Languages, Codes and their Technologies*. (Brasília: Ministry of Education; Department of Basic Education, 2006). Available at portal.mec.gov.br/seb/arquivos/pdf/book_volume_01_internet.pdf.

basis then explicitly became textual linguistics. However, the consultants of the Ministry of Education (Brazilian academicians well-known here) retain among the bibliographical references the compilation *Ethics of verbal art*, but exclude *Marxism and Philosophy of language*. This procedure indicates not only a conceptual shift in the guidelines, but also in the practical manner for proposing Portuguese language teaching at high school level.

When browsing the more than 30 pages of the chapter “Knowledge of Portuguese” one notices the use of “speech genres/genres of speech” that appear to be somewhat removed from Bakhtin’s theory. In the following excerpt from the second section “The Portuguese language within the high school context”, one implicitly finds the Bakhtinian conception (the dynamic relationship between production, circulation and reception of texts) in dialogs with other ways of approaching the process of interaction.

*Practice of teaching and learning the Portuguese language as a native language [...] will highlight the importance of dealing with situations of interaction bearing in mind the manners in which the production, reception and circulation of meanings arise.*⁴⁰

Below two fragments of the document taken from the fifth section “Syllabus Organization and Methodological Procedures for Dealing with Content” revisit text as a privileged subject matter of teaching, while the demarcation of content is organized into groupings of texts, that is, in the materiality of speech genres:

What is intended is that when demarcating content, schools should strive to organize their teaching practices by grouping texts according to different clippings, on account of local demands, based on the principle that the subject matter of privileged teaching are the processes for producing meaning for texts, **like materiality of speech genres**, in the light of the different dimensions of which they consist.⁴¹

[...] It is pertinent to confer on the notion of syllabus content a meaning directly linked to the idea that content in the field of the Portuguese language can appear as elements for organizing thematic approaches around which the school will define the didactic intervention projects which will elect as the subject matter of teaching and learning both the issues concerning the uses of language and the ways in which they are updated in interaction events (**speech genres**) and matters concerning the work of linguistic analysis (the formal elements of the language) and the analysis of the social and pragmatic function of the texts (both those produced by the pupils, and those used in reading or similar practices).⁴²

The indications in the *Syllabus Guidelines for High Schools* for the Portuguese Language bring to a close a study regarding genre, using the expression speech genre from the perspective of text genres. Although the consultants argue in favor of using language as a constituent element of the individual, reading and writing are treated as tools. From the theoretical perspective of Bakhtin and the Circle, this approach becomes incoherent since the constitutive conception of language arises in social interaction through concrete sayings and does not share the idea of language as a tool or instrument to be used or taught in school.

In the third section “Conception of Language and Teaching Practices” of this chapter the concept of text is dealt with within the perspective of interaction, while Bakhtin is associated with other theories as a number inserted in a footnote:

40 Brazil. p. 19.

41 Brazil. p. 36.

42 Brazil. p. 36.

Here one is referring both to the contribution of studies carried out in this approach within the scope of Linguistics, which involve scholars like Hymes, and in the Philosophy of Language, like **Bakhtin**, in Ethnomethodology and Sociology, like Goffman, in Psychology, like Bronckart and in education, like Schneuwly, and to those found within the scope of the Psychology of Development, as is the case of Vygotsky and his followers.⁴³

While understanding that those involved in this document are elementary school teachers, this naming system turns out to be problematic, confusing them with subject matters over which they do not always have specific command and which are of little practical assistance in their teaching habits. Access by many teachers to the concepts of Bakhtin and the Circle initially takes place through these official documents established for the country as a whole. Thus proposals for syllabus sometimes shed little light on the Bakhtinian conceptions of language, heteroglossia, dialogism and speech genres.

If it is true that the main focus of Bakhtin and the Circle was not the teaching/learning of languages, we are also surprised with several significant considerations that point to a possible methodology for teaching the native language that introduce concrete utterance and the social, historical and ideological context in which they were engendered as constituent.

We know our native language – its lexical composition and grammatical structure – not from dictionaries and grammars but from concrete utterances that we hear and that we ourselves reproduce in live speech communication with people around us. We assimilate forms of language only in the forms of the utterances and in conjunction with these forms. The forms of the language and the typical forms of the utterances, that is, speech genres, enter our experience and our consciousness together, and in close connection with one another. To learn to speak means to learn to construct utterances (because we speak in utterances and not in individual sentences, and, of course, not in individual words). Speech genres organize our speech in almost the same way as grammatical (syntactical) forms do.⁴⁴

What is central to all these methods is that students become acquainted with some word only through the presentation of a variety of contexts in which that word figures. [...] To put it briefly, under a sound and sensible method of practical instruction, a form should be assimilated not in its relation to the abstract system of the language, i.e., as a self-identical form, but in the concrete structure of utterance, i.e., as a mutable and pliable sign.⁴⁵

Comparing the three documents, that is, the *PCNs* of the 1st and 2nd cycles and the 3rd and 4th cycles with the *Syllabus Guidelines for High Schools* in the time-space in which they were produced – 1997 to 2006 – one notices that the guidelines were based on the Bakhtinian concept of speech genres, but in reality they were out into practice in pre-established reading and writing activities for Brazilian school pupils, somewhat far removed from the conception of Bakhtin and the Circle and the concrete utterance. By

⁴³ Brazil. p. 23.

⁴⁴ M. M. Bakhtin. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Trans. Bern W. Mc Gee, eds. C. Emerson; M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p.78.

⁴⁵ V.N.Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. by Ladislav Matejka and I.R.Titunik, (Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 69.

way of example we will present an activity in a textbook on the Portuguese language that asks high school students to produce something in writing.

3. Speech genre in Portuguese textbooks for high school

In this final section the purpose is to present the treatment afforded to the speech genre concept in *Português: Linguagens (Portuguese: Languages)* (2013)⁴⁶, a textbook coauthored by Willian Roberto Cereja and Thereza Cochar Magalhães, one of the works most selected by teachers in public and private school networks. This compilation, approved by the *National High School Textbook Program*⁴⁷ (2015), is based on the concept of speech genres according to Bakhtin in order to organize the theoretical and methodological approach to teaching reading and the practice of writing. Organized in three volumes, the contents of each book include Literature, Grammar and Writing. Firstly we will look at how the “Teacher’s Manual” provides theoretical inputs so that teachers can develop their classes with the genres. Thereafter we will present the result of the analysis of just one example of writing activity in the reader’s latter genre.

The “Teacher’s Manual” has a section on “Writing” with a theoretical reference entitled “What are speech genres?”⁴⁸, and in it the authors introduce the Russian thinker and his theory in a succinct manner. The features of the genres are discussed in two pages, beginning with the Bakhtinian idea that “every text we produce, oral or written, contains a set of relatively stable features, whether or not we are aware of them”⁴⁹. Thereafter, the subsection “text genre as a tool” makes reference to the studies of the French Native language Teaching Group at the University of Geneva (Joaquim Dolz and Bernard Schneuwly). As Cereja and Magalhães argue, the Bakhtinian concept of “speech” is synonymous with “text genres”, believing that learning how to write “must take place in a spiral, in other words, the genres must be periodically revisited and studies in greater depth and breadth”⁵⁰. It introduces a proposed syllabus based on the work of Dolz, Pasquier and Schneuwly, quoting from an unpublished translation. With these explanations the approach reverts in a similar manner to the official line (*PCNs*), failing to untangle itself from the confusion of speech genres *versus* text genres and types of text.

Let us move on to the chapter “Reader’s Letters”, intended for 3rd grade high school, in order to analyze how the authors convey ideas on how to prepare argumentative texts. Let us consider three factors of speech genre: journalism, the discursive-linguistic approach and points of view as a type valuational appreciation.

The concept of genre is revisited when organizing the two sections: “working on the genre” and “writing readers’ letters”. The box below shows the summarized structure of the chapter:

46 The work was approved by the *National High School Textbook Program – PNLD-EM 2015 (BRASIL, 2014)* and is available to Brazilian public and private schools.

47 The *National Textbook Program for High School* was created by the Ministry of Education in 2005 with the aim of establishing criteria for quality of the teaching material purchased and distributed for free by the government.

48 W.R.Cereja; T.C. Magalhães, *Português: Linguagens*, (São Paulo: Saraiva, 2013), pp. 417-420.

49 Cereja; Magalhães, p. 417.

50 Cereja; Magalhães, p. 420.

Chapter 2 Reader's letters		
SECTIONS	SUBJECT MATTERS/ PROPOSALS	
“Working on the genre ”	Reader's letter 1: Proud resident”, excerpted from the scientific discovery magazine <i>Horizonte Geográfico</i>	
	Reader's Letter 2: Cover, U.V.B, Santos, SP, <i>IstoÉ</i> (magazine)	
	Reader's letter 3: Cover, F.F. <i>IstoÉ</i> (magazine)	
	Reader's letter 4: R.C., <i>Veja</i> (magazine)	
	Reader's letter 5: S.M.R, <i>Folha de S. Paulo</i> (newspaper)	
	Reader's Letter 6: H.A. C. <i>Folha de S. Paulo</i> (newspaper)	
“Writing the Readers' Letters”	<i>Proposal</i>	1 (one) proposal to produce a group letter for publication in a newspaper or magazine
	<i>Planning the Text</i>	7 (seven) proposals on guidance on writing, reading, circulation and reception
	<i>Revision and Re-writing</i>	5 (five) topics involving the structure of the paragraphs and use of register
“Writing in a Coherent and Cohesive Manner”	Expressing words and ideas Exercises	

Source: Cereja; Magalhães, 2013, pp.181-190.

The authors introduce a variety of journalistic texts to be read, while the seven issues maintain the structural nature of identifying the subject matter with no great difficulty. It should be pointed out that there is a good introduction with a variety of texts, rather than just presenting a single model letter, which goes to show the transformations undergone by textbooks since the year 2000 onwards. However, the questions regarding the authors of the texts are completely ignored, as well as the discursive approach, leaving the connecting elements for a section that comes after the text has been written, revised and re-written.

The consequence of the theoretical ambiguity put forward in the “Teacher's Manual” regarding the concept of speech genres is the absence in the activities regarding different elements that are not explored in the activities, one of them being the style of the author and the genre. Cereja and Magalhães choose the perspective of Dolz and Schneuwly on genre as a teaching instrument, and end up distancing themselves from the dialogical and multilingual conception of speech genre. In Brazil, many texts of the Bakhtin Circle were translated at the early years of this century, while the authors of textbooks do not mention in bibliographies, for example, the important reference to speech genre in the work of Pável Nikoláievitch Medviédév (the Bakhtin Circle), *O método formal nos estudos literários: introdução crítica a uma poética sociológica* (*The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: a Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*), translation by Ekaterina Vólkova Américo and Sheila Camargo Grillo, in 2012 and *Questões de estilística no ensino da língua* (*Questions of Style in Language Teaching*), in 2013.

These translations show how necessary it is to re-read the works of the Circle “in order to understand Bakhtinian thinking one cannot ignore the bases of an innovative approach to language developed through the different contributions of the members of the Circle at different moments of history”⁵¹. We reassert the need to revisit the conception of speech genres at high school level, so that the students can grasp the social and fundamental aspects of the living language within an organic whole within its dynamic circulation.

Final considerations

As initially proposed, this article sought to show how speech genre of Bakhtin and the Circle is inserted in official documents and in high school textbooks within a perspective that does not address its theoretical bases. One can but conclude that native language teachers are used to proposals for activities that in the end lead students to read the text for the text’s sake, looking for features in a mechanical and abstract manner, that is, a theory of genres that is very distant from the one proposed by the Russian theoreticians Voloshinov, Medvedev and Bakhtin. The starting point for Bakhtinian studies of speech genres is the study of man and his language in human sciences.

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