

## The teaching of argumentative writing in the dialogic perspective / *O ensino da escrita argumentativa na perspectiva dialógica*

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we intend to show part of the results obtained in the present author's Master's thesis, defended in 2010, in which the didactic activities of the argumentative texts from the course book series *Português: Linguagens*, for high school education, were analyzed. The objective is to analyze how this course book teaches the production of written argumentative texts. Dialoguing with the results, we propose a theoretical-methodological approach to teach argumentative writing, in the dialogic perspective, having as an excerpt the didactic activity *Opinion Article (O artigo de opinião)* and the perspective of building meanings by the students. Taking into account that, from the analysis, the questions presented in the course book sequence do not allow the student to live the social practices of argumentative writing, the didactic suggestion here proposed tries to link reading and interpretation procedures with the necessary knowledge for the production of argumentative texts, so as to make it possible the study of a language in the totality of the utterance.

KEYWORDS: Argumentative writing; Dialogic perspective; Social practices

### RESUMO

Neste artigo, pretendemos demonstrar parte dos resultados obtidos em dissertação de mestrado defendida em 2010, na qual foram analisadas as atividades didáticas de textos argumentativos escritos da coleção *Português: Linguagens*, destinada ao ensino médio. O objetivo é analisar como essa obra didática ensina a produzir textos argumentativos escritos. Em diálogo com os resultados, propomos um encaminhamento teórico-metodológico para o ensino da escrita argumentativa, na perspectiva dialógica, tendo como recorte a atividade didática *O artigo de opinião* e a perspectiva da construção de sentidos por parte do aluno. Considerando, a partir da análise, que as questões apresentadas na sequência não possibilitam ao aluno vivenciar as práticas sociais da escrita argumentativa, a sugestão didática aqui proposta procura interligar procedimentos de leitura e de interpretação com os conhecimentos necessários para a produção de textos argumentativos, de forma a possibilitar o estudo da língua na totalidade do enunciado.

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Escrita argumentativa; Perspectiva dialógica; Práticas sociais*

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## Initial Considerations

When *I* use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.  
*Lewis Carroll*

This article is part of the present author's Master's thesis<sup>1</sup> defended in 2010, which had the objective to show, in relation to a course book series used nationwide, how the production of written argumentative texts is taught and, adopting the corpus analysis as a starting point, proposes the possibility of teaching argumentative writing within the framework of the theoretical-methodological approach with an utterance-discursive perspective.

In order to reach these goals and with the objective of characterizing the teaching of the Portuguese language in the educational system, one of the most used course book series in the Brazilian schools was chosen: *Português: Linguagens* (high school education, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2008). It is co-authored by William Roberto Cereja and Thereza Cochar Magalhães. There are six editions of the course book which were published in the following years: 1990, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2005, and 2008. There is a version in one volume with two editions, dating 2003 and 2005. Therefore, the choice is justified by the course book series' long tradition in Brazilian schools, providing elements to think about the teaching that aims at the production of written argumentative texts in high school.

In this article, we intend to show just part of the results obtained in the research. For this purpose, we chose one didactic activity – *The Opinion Article*– which is part of the course book series, with the objective of analyzing the approach given by the authors for the teaching of argumentative writing and, dialoguing with the results, propose a theoretical-methodological approach for the same teaching object.

### 1 Dialogic perspective and didactic activity

In the dialogic perspective, language study is inseparable from the discursive interactions in which mankind relates and positions himself/herself in relation to different questionings and situations that interpose themselves throughout his/her life experiences. This is crucial for the development of a didactic proposal that aims at studying the language in their several social practices, intrinsic to different spheres of human activity.

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis proposal is part of our Master's thesis, advised by Professor Beth Brait, financed by CAPES and defended in October, 2010, at PUC/SP. Cf. *A escrita argumentativa: diálogos com um livro didático de português* (ROCHA, 2010).

The interaction concept, fundamental to language dialogic theory, allows the analysis of the materiality of language as social phenomenon, comprised of ideological signs that reflect and refract the specificities of the spheres that integrate them. Vološinov (1986) states that each ideological product has a meaning and refers to something that is exterior to it; therefore, everything that is ideological is considered a sign; in other words, the ideological creation is essentially semiotic, as the domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs, which means that they are mutually corresponding.

According to Vološinov (1986), each sign obeys to the coercions of ideological evaluation, oriented according to each sphere of ideological creation, as each field of ideological creation has its own orientation way for reality and refracts reality in its own way. For this author, each field has its own function in the set of social life.

The Bakhtinian concept of language, besides considering the coercions of the ideological spheres, presents the sign as an omnipresent ideological phenomenon, materially constituted, reflecting and refracting reality. By reflecting and refracting, a sign points toward the exterior, but it refracts the axiological diversity of the subjects. This happens because the meanings are not guaranteed in the abstract system of the language, but are constituted in the interaction of the subjects, in the dynamics of their experiences.

In the dialogic perspective, the text analysis in a didactic activity can point out which appreciative impressions are established and which values are enunciated; in other words, it shows that these axiologies constitute the concrete utterances, permeated by multiple social voices. It is believed that the didactic activity for the teaching of Portuguese can integrate different proposals about the world, is able to evoke a questioning, allows the student to engage himself/herself responsively; in other words, to become his/her own discourse enunciator while establishing dialogues with the multiplicity of texts that circulate in the different spheres of human activity.

In an utterance-discursive perspective, for instance, the dialogic one, the reading didactic activity and the written production consider that language lives and evolves historically, as Vološinov (1986) indicates. This means studying the (more immediate and ampler) context of text production, circulation and reception, the subject-enunciator and his/her(their) interlocutor(s), and the materiality that composes the verbal, visual and verb-

visual procedures used to produce meaning. This re-articulation links the reading and writing practices and the study of a language.

Therefore, it is understood that the didactic activity, although transferring the text to the scholar sphere, can recover the specificities of the concrete utterance, by keeping its original materiality. Firstly, the student can study the language as a living organism and not as a mere organization of sentences, and secondly, the visual and the verb-visual allow for the insertion of the didactic activity in the “life of the text”, bringing the original context of reception, production and circulation.

In a didactic proposal that considers the theoretical dimensions indicated, language reflects the dynamics of life, materialized in an utterance; it does not only reflect the immediate reality but it recovers the subjects’ discursive memory and it updates it at the moment of its production. Thus, it is assumed that to read and to write texts is to participate of the different language practices, once, by the dialogue happening between the subject and the voices established in the different forms of the discourse, a responsive attitude can be found, marking appreciatively the assumed positions of the enunciator.

In the recovery of the verbal materiality, the student will be able to analyze the discursive-linguistic resources in such a way that the written text will not be a sequence of sentences linked by logical connectors. For that matter, the young person can be led to apprehend the aspects related to how a language functions, such as the construction of sequential and referential cohesion, clarity monitoring, informational consistence and coherence of the text, the use of argumentative textual articulators, the use of adequate verb tenses and the grammatical persons; finally, the necessary procedures that allow the subject to use language as a resource to produce meanings, through a reflection on the real world phenomena, since, according to Bakhtin (1986), language forms are assimilated by means of utterances and just with these forms. Language forms and speech genres get in our experience and to our conscience altogether and are closely linked. To learn how to speak means to learn how to build utterances, as we speak by utterances, and not by isolated sentences, and obviously, not by isolated words. Speech genres organize our discourse in almost the same way as the grammatical (syntactic) forms organize it.

Thus, the notion that it is not enough to expose students to a considerable variety of texts is supported. It is crucial to make students reflect on the coercions of social spheres in which these texts circulate. Portuguese language teaching in schools should insert the social practices of reading and writing into the production, circulation and reception of texts, so that they motivate the construction of meanings.

## **2 The course book series and the didactic activity**

The course book series *Português: Linguagens* (hereinafter, *PL*) is organized in three volumes, according to the school years of high school. Each book presents four units, which were named, in this investigation, didactic dimensions: *Literature*, *Text Production*, *Language: Use and Reflection*, and *Text Interpretation*. In the dimension dedicated to interpretation, there are activities related to the National High School Exam (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio – ENEM) and to the specificities of the university entrance exam.

There are thirty-six didactic activities that compose the series, and among these, fourteen aim at teaching argumentative writing<sup>2</sup>. In this selection of study objects, the emphasis is on journalistic texts: among the fourteen activities of production of argumentative written texts, seven of them deal with genres that belong to the journalistic sphere. Considering the importance given to argumentation and the emphasis given to argumentative texts of the journalistic sphere, the activity *The Opinion Article* (volume 1) was chosen, with the objective to clarify in which way the coercive aspects of a specific sphere, in this case, the journalistic one, were dealt with in *PL*, trying to show how the study of the relations between the verbal and the visual, the profile of the newspaper or magazine and its readers are dealt with.

The activity *The Opinion Article* is organized in two sections: *Working the Genre* and *Producing the Opinion Article*. Our focus is an analysis of the questions proposed, to

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<sup>2</sup> There are three activities in volume 1 (*The Public Debate*, *The Opinion Article*, *The Debate and the Opinion Article*), three in volume 2 (*The Advertisement*, *The Comment*, *The Editorial*) and eight in volume 3 (*The Argumentative Story*, *The Reader's Letter*, *The Complaint and Request Argumentative Letters*, *The Public Debate: Counter-Argumentation Strategies*, *The Argumentative Text: the Selection of Arguments*, *The Argumentative Text: the Informativity and Common Sense*, *The Dissertational-Argumentative Text*, *The Dissertational-Argumentative Text: the Paragraph*).

show which linguistic-discursive aspects are examined for the analysis and production of the genre in question. This activity is targeted for the first-year high school students.

The activity is developed on five pages<sup>3</sup>. On the first page (p. 336), the standard title page is presented: chapter (*Chapter 5*), didactic dimension (*Text Production*) and chapter title (*The Opinion Article*). In the section “Working the genre”, there is a didactic text introducing some aspects of the genre that will be studied and also the topic that will be discussed in the article.

On the second page of the activity (p. 337), a transcription of an opinion article is presented (Quotas: what is fair and what is unfair, by Lya Luft, *Veja*, N. 2046, no date), in a greenish box, overlapping the white pattern of the page, looking like some kind of leaf. This text, whose copy is stated below, discusses the implementation of the quota system for Negro students and/or those coming from public schools in the Brazilian public universities.

#### Quotas: what is fair and what is unfair

The fear from the different causes conflicts everywhere, in the most varied circumstances. Some are surprising clashes, others are subtle misunderstandings, but, in all of them, there is suffering, explicit wickedness or silent treachery, sorrow, frustration and injustice.

I grew up in a small town in which the people (mainly, the families) were divided into Catholics and Protestants. Much pain occurred from that. Marriages were forbidden, friendships were jeopardized, and lives were sheared. Today this difference is not even thought about when couples or circle of friends are formed. But, as the world goes in circles or ellipses, at this moment, in our country, much is being said about a question that stimulates racial and social difference: the quota system for those wishing to enter the university who are Negro students and/or those coming from public schools. The theme frees much populist and stupid verbiage, it produces frustration and hostility. It instills racial and social prejudice. All the “goodness” that is directed to those who belong to a minority, be it related to genre, race or social condition, points out to the fact that they are at a disadvantage, that they need this special attention because, due to some fact related to race, genre, scholarship or any other, they are not at the desired autonomy and esteem plateau. What a shame.

In the universities a battle for the quotas begins. Students who did well on the university entrance exam – only those who have children or grandchildren in this situation know the sacrifice, the discipline, the study, and the expenses involved in this – are rejected in favor of those who did

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<sup>3</sup> The images reproduction was not authorized by the publishers.

not do so well but are of African origin or come from public schools. And what about the others? The poor whites or those who are neither rich nor poor of Portuguese, Italian, Polish, German origins, and the like, whose parents fought hardly to give them shelter, health and education?

The idea of a quota system reinforces two nefarious concepts: that Negroes are less capable, and for that matter, need this push, and that the public school is terrible and has no salvation. It is a weird, badly thought and badly executed idea. We will now have white and poor families who will not fight any more for their children to have a good scholarship and to get into a university, because their place has been given to another person. Once more, the study is relegated to something of less importance.

I remember the time, perhaps twenty or more years ago, when farmers' children who wished to enter the university to study Agronomy (or go to Veterinary school?) got there by means of the quota system, the so-called "cattle law". Nevertheless, it was verified that legitimate farmers' children were in a reduced number. Children from well-to-do families, owners of a nearby farm, took advantage of the situation by taking the place of those students who deserved, by their effort, their assiduousness, their studiousness, and their grade, that opportunity. Much injustice was done that way, up to the moment that the parents, by going to court, got an injunction for their children to get the place they deserved by law. Finally the cattle law went down the tubes.

Not all those involved in the new discriminatory and unfair law were responsible for this misdemeanor. The students who benefited have all the right to vindicate a possibility that is being offered to them. But the sad part is that they are pawns for a selfish populism, victims of disinformation and of narrow mindedness, which leaves them in a bad position. They do not enter the university by personal merit and their families' support, but because of what the government, sadly, considers deficiency: race or the school from which they came – the latter, by the way, offered by the government itself.

I'm sorry as this disorder is harmful to everyone: those who are officially considered less capable, and, for that matter, receive the candy of aid and those who suck their finger in frustration, no matter how many years they have spent studying, their parents' battle or their personal merit. My condolences, once more, to the Brazilian education.

*Veja*, N. 2046, February, 2008, p.16.

Then, there are nine questions proposed for the study of the transcribed article. In the section *Producing an Opinion Article*, a text selection composed by the transcription of five readers' letters, published in the No. 2047 of *Veja* with comments about Lya Luft's article, is introduced.

On the last page of the activity (p.340), there is the last text (*Two defeats for the quota system*, by Thiago Cid, *Época*, N. 506, no date), with information about some facts related to the quota policy. Below this text, there are eight instructions for the production of

the opinion article, numbered from *a* to *h*, and to the right, there is a purple text box, titled *Evaluate your opinion article*, with some parameters for the student to evaluate his/her text production.

#### Truth X Opinion

In argumentative genres in general, the author always has the intention to convince his/her interlocutors. In order to do that, he/she must present good arguments, which consist of truths and opinions.

Universally accepted statements are considered truths (for instance, the fact that the Earth spins around the Sun, that pollution is harmful to the environment), as well as scientific data in general, such as statistics, social research or laboratory results, among others. Yet, the opinions are justified on the personal impressions of the author of the text, and, thus, can be easier opposed. The good argumentative texts generally balance the use of these two types of arguments.

The above description shows that the didactic activity is organized from a transcribed text and without reference to the publication date. The nine questions prepared for students to study the text address textual structure, without highlighting the linguistic-discursive resources used in argumentative construction. In Questions 1 and 2, students have to locate the discussed thesis and the facts that justify the position defended by the article's writer ("introduce", "theme", and "point of view"):

1. The author introduces the theme and her point of view by means of an ample presentation.

a) What is the theme of the article you have just read?

*The quotas for entering the universities for Negro students and/or those coming from public schools.*

b) Identify, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph, the author's point of view.

*According to her, the quota system stimulates racial and social prejudice.*

2. The article's writer, when presenting her opinion on the theme, shows that the implementation of a quota system hurts a crucial principle of democratic societies.

a) Which is this principle?

*The principle that each and every citizen should have equal rights.*

b) What is the article's writer position in relation to the quota system?

*She does not agree with those who believe that Negro students and/or those coming from public schools need quotas to be able to enter the university. She defends that the entrance should be based on merit.*

(CEREJA and MAGALHÃES, 2008, p.337-338. In the transcription of the questions, the answers given to the teacher are in italics.)



Considering that the section is titled *Working the Genre*, for those who actually work the genre, the verbs used in the formulation of the questions are observed. There is the verb *be*, a non-dynamic verb, that serves to characterize, qualify, as the question is a general one, an information request: the attribution of a predicate to a subject (“What *is* the theme of the opinion article you have just read?”; “Which *is* this principle?”; “What *is* the writer’s position in relation to the quota system?”). The objective is to highlight attributes or genre identifiers of the studied genre, markers of the truth axis.

The use of dynamic verbs in the present tense and in the imperative form (“The author *introduces* the theme [...]”; “*Identify* [...], the author’s point of view”; “The writer [...] *shows* that the implementation of the quota system *hurts* a crucial principle [...]). By being in the present tense, these verbs function to qualify what is said, to characterize the genre that is being talked about. But, used in the imperative form, this kind of verb indicates, in the activity analyzed, the tasks students have to do to find the concepts previously described in the question.

In questions 3, 4 and 5, the enunciator starts identifying the argument types (“justifies”, “truths”, “opinions”, “to compare it”, argument types”, main idea defended”, “good arguments”, “reasons or explanations”).

3. In an opinion text, the author normally justifies his/her point of view in truths and opinions (read the box “Truth X Opinion”).

a) Identify in the text truths; in other words, objective data that can be proved.

*The prohibition of marriage between Catholics and Protestants and the “cattle law”.*

b) What is the author’s objective when she mentions these truths?

*To compare them to the quota system and defend her opinion that this kind of measures are unjust and discriminatory.*

c) Statements such as:

“a question that stimulates racial and social difference: the quota system for those wishing to enter the university who are Negro students and/or those coming from public schools.”

“The idea of a quota system reinforces two nefarious concepts: that Negroes are less capable, and for that matter, need this push, and that the public school is terrible and has no salvation. It is a weird, badly thought and badly executed idea.”

Are truths or opinions?

*Opinions.*

4. In an opinion text, the main idea defended by the author must be

justified with good arguments; in other words, with reasons and explanations.

The main idea of the text that you have just read is justified by two basic arguments, contrary to the implementation of the quota system. Which are they?

*Students who did well on the university entrance exam are rejected in favor of those who did not do so well but are of African origin or come from public schools; the idea of a quota system reinforces two nefarious concepts: that Negroes are less capable, and that the public school has no quality.*

5. In the 6<sup>th</sup> paragraph, the author makes reference to the ones involved in the law: the students who benefit from it and the ones who are responsible for the quota system.

a) Does she exempt from responsibility the students who benefit from the quota system? Justify your answer.

*No, she considers that they have the right to benefit from this system, but she thinks that they are pawns for a selfish populism, victims of disinformation and of narrow mindedness.*

b) What opinion does she express about the ones who are responsible for the quota system law?

*She considers them populists, and, besides, incoherent, as they offer quotas to students who come from schools for which they are responsible.*

(CEREJA and MAGALHÃES, 2008, p.338)

In the five questions, the use of verbs indicates the construction of a classificatory process, trying to characterize an attribute of the genre in question (“In an opinion text, the author normally justifies his/her point of view in truths and opinions.”). The use of dynamic verbs to qualify what is said is also a way to characterize the genre (“justifies”, “exempts”, “expresses”). The modal verbs indicate an epistemic need and are used to insert “obligatory” attributes of the studied genre (“For this *must present* good arguments, which consist of truths and opinions”; “the main idea defended by the author *must be* justified”).

The use of the present tense and/or imperative form indicates the truth axis, presenting the transmitted information as truths, validating the use of epistemic or asseverative modal adverbs, which indicate a belief, something that legitimates knowledge. The sequence enunciator, however, gives room for the subject enunciator to express the exceptions (“the author *normally* justifies his/her point of view”; “The good argumentative texts *generally* balance the use of the two types of arguments”; “In argumentative genres *in general*, the author *always* has the intention to convince his/her interlocutors”).

The appointed markers make it possible to identify an exposition/demonstration of concepts used by the sequence enunciator as he/she describes the genre general aspects. The description of the types of arguments is valued, as “good argumentative texts” make use of “good arguments”, which are named as truths, opinions, reasons, explanations. Nevertheless, the articulated linguistic-discursive markers pertaining to these types of arguments, or which meanings are constructed by using them, is not explained.

6. In the last paragraph, the author concludes her point of view about the topic. According to this conclusion:

a) Who are the victims of the quota system?

*Those who are officially considered less capable and those who dedicated themselves to studying, had family support and personal merit, but are left out to give room to the first ones.*

b) According to the text that you have just read, conclude: for the author, the exclusion of Negroes from the public universities must be treated as an ethnical-racial problem? Justify your answer.

*No, as there are whites who are also excluded from the university. The solution to the problem, according to the article's writer, would be to improve education.*

7. Observe the text in relation to its structure and exposition of ideas. Is the conclusion coherent with the idea and the arguments that were presented throughout the text? Justify your answer.

*Yes, as she confirms the idea that all should have equal rights and that measures that favor some people to the detriment of others create suffering, frustration and injustice.*

8. Observe the text language.

a) What linguistic variety was used? The formal or informal one?

*The formal standard variety.*

b) Considering the theme, the media in which the text was published and the readers' profile, can we say that the choice of this linguistic variety was adequate? Why?

*Yes, as the text was published in a magazine that circulates nationally and whose readers are schooled young people and adults. Besides, this genre type generally uses the formal standard variety.*

9. Get together with your group colleagues and conclude: What are the characteristics of an opinion article? Answer this question considering the following criteria: genre aim, interlocutors' profile, support or media, theme, structure, and language.

*This is an argumentative text which expresses the opinion of a writer, journalist, teacher, student, etc., about a polemic theme that is being discussed by society. It circulates in the means of communication in general (newspapers, magazines, the radio, the Internet, and the TV) and has these media public as the receiver. It is structured around a central idea (which summons up the author's point of view) and it is justified, through the use of arguments, expressed as truths and opinions. It uses the formal standard*

*variety of the language.*

*To the teacher: We suggest that you build a table with the characteristics of an opinion article with the groups' conclusions on the board.*

(CEREJA and MAGALHÃES, 2008, p.338-339)

The final questions refer to the identification of the conclusion (“conclude your point of view”, “conclusion”, “conclude”) and to the use of linguistic-recursive resources. In question 7, the use of terms such as “text organization”, “structure” and “ideas exposition” is observed, ratifying a sequence of exercises that suggest text structuring and its relationship to the ideas exposed. Question 8 refers to the analysis of the linguistic variety used (“linguistic variety”, “formal or informal”), suggesting as an answer the “formal standard variety”, which is adequate to the “theme”, to the “media” and to “profile of the reader”.

In the last question, the student is requested to conclude, based on what was worked on, which are the characteristics of the opinion article: “genre aim”, “interlocutors profile”, “support or media”, theme”, “structure”, “language”. The questions that can be asked are the following: were all these attributes/characteristics actually developed so that the student could master these characterizations?

The dimension adopted by the enunciator is the study of the text structure. The verbs used to formulate the questions show that the enunciator is the person working the genre, as there is a demonstration of the concepts/attributes that should be validated by the student, once the didactic activity has been descriptively organized.

It is an assumption that the student knows the magazine and the reader’s profile. If, however, the student does not know the magazine, or the circulation sphere, he/she will not know which linguistic variety is appropriate. According to the suggested answer, the formal variety is the standard; and the informal one, in this activity, comprises all the other language variants, not being helpful for the student’s written production.

Yet, the organization of the activity takes for granted that students and teachers know the genre specificities, as concepts are inserted into each question, and the student has to reproduce the answers already introduced by the very same questions, producing a text based on the arguments of other people, in a repetition process rather than a dialogue that produces knowledge.

Each and every text is a real-life product, in which the enunciator responds to other interlocutors. Based on this concept, the activity could go further, adding some crucial aspects for the understanding and analysis of the selected article, emphasizing, for instance, the extra-verbal context that permeated its production. The objective would be to dialogue with the different points of view that were evoked at the production moment and that contributed to its publication, which could be experienced by the student.

### **3 Argumentative writing: a theoretical-methodological possibility**

In this part, the objective is to consider a theoretical-methodological approach for the teaching of argumentative writing, in an utterance-discursive perspective. For this purpose, another didactic activity from the article: Quotas: what is fair and what is unfair, by Lya Luft was proposed. The high school student can comprehend that an opinion does not consist only of an assertion, but it is sustained by arguments built in a discursive web, constituted by several voices that compare points of view.

The recovery of the extra-verbal context intrinsic to the production of this text was considered, its verb-visual composition as a factor to build meaning, trying to recover the social practice that permeates the production of an opinion article. Thus, in the suggested didactic activities, the presence of the other was made clear, someone who invites an interlocution, setting into motion a responsive attitude, and also, from the person who invited us, directing our texts.

We did not intend to exhaust all the possibilities to teach reading and writing by offering the ideal and perfect work model. The proposal is organized in such a way that it is possible to work with text reading in different materialities, trying to develop a responsive understanding, which implies reaction to the text, an answer to it. To read, therefore, is integrates itself into the writing activity, for the production of a text starts with a dialogue with other texts.

The act to produce arguments is put into evidence as a conflict of ideas intrinsic to a discursive chain, in which the linguistic-discursive resources are used to construct meaning, in the formulation of a positioning in relation to the discourses spoken in society.

In the *PL* chapter, the opinion article is edited. The authentic materiality of the text, however, can be seen by the student. When recovering the original text (copy below), some differences in its verb-visual composition are noticed, mainly to the circulation space: the magazine section and page in which the article circulated.

In a didactic publication, the transcription is important to make reading easier, but this editing can be followed by the original materiality, because the exploration of the verb-visual organization of the article is a possibility to approach the text.

**WRITER'S PICTURE**

**SECTION**

**WRITER**

**TITLE**

**STANDFIRST**

**ILLUSTRATION**

**CREDIT**

**WRITER'S PICTURE**

**SECTION**

**WRITER**

**TITLE**

**STANDFIRST**

**ILLUSTRATION**

**CREDIT**

Veja magazine, São Paulo, N. 2046, February 06, 2008.

Available in: <<http://veja.abril.com.br/acervodigital/home.aspx>>. Access: May 21, 2010.

In the activity one can analyze: the section title, which announces the exposition of a specific opinion (“point of view”); the disposition of verbal and visual elements, exploring what is meant by the illustration in the totality of the page, since it introduces the representation of an Afro-Brazilian person and the division proposed by a graph, recapturing visually what the title suggests with the word “quotas”; the composition of the article’s title, suggesting a division between the aspects that will be discussed, implying, with the chosen title, that the author will discuss what is fair and what is unfair in the quota system; the final credit mentioning that the column writer is also a writer, to make the text more trustworthy. Such description can be observed in the compositional form of the original text.

The reading activity can be approached so as to familiarize the student with social practice, making him/her understand that the article production is inserted into real life; in other words, that behind each and every text there is a subject, constituted by values. This way of contacting the text may deal with questions that involve doing research, as well as reflection and a discovery about the genre in question in relation to the study of the enunciative aspects: what does the section title suggest? What is the magazine’s objective when giving credit to the article’s writer? Based on the title and on these pieces of information, what does the reader expect to find in the article?

An opinion article is immersed in a discursive web, which, generally, refers to another text or to a recent event, to stimulate the readers’ interest. This being said about the genre allows for the recovery, in the reading activity, of the more immediate production context. Two weeks previous to the publication of Lya Luft’s article, more precisely on January 18, 2008, the federal Appeals Court of the 4th Region of Brazil determined the suspension of the quota system at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, stirring the debate on the legal aspects of the quota system for Negro students and/or those coming from public schools. In December, 2007, a white student obtained an order from the Santa Catarina state court that gave him/her the right to compete for any of the vacancies of the UFSC university entrance exam, including those reserved for Negroes by the quota system. In that same month, the private schools of Santa Catarina state went to court against the

quota system at UFSC, pleading that the quota system hurts the equality principle provided for in the Brazilian Constitution<sup>4</sup>.

After analyzing the verb-visual organization of the original article and rebuilding the extra-verbal context that motivated its publication, the student can read the text transcript to analyze the linguistic-discursive resources used to construct meaning. We emphasized the use of evaluation markers as the main factor to build a point of view in this article; nevertheless, other language resources responsible for argumentative construction were also pointed out<sup>5</sup>.

The article's writer used the first person singular and plural and the third person singular. It can be asked what the purpose of introducing each grammatical person is and how the meaning by its use can be explained. It can be seen, in this text, that the first person singular is used to introduce the writer's private historic memory, which serves as an analogy to the argumentation that will be presented. In this case, the writer takes on her singular role as an authority to discuss the topic ("I grew", "I remember", "I'm sorry", "my condolences"). When she uses the first person plural, she becomes the defender, in her social role, of a collective point of view; in other words, she speaks for the society ("We will now have white and poor families"). The third person is used to discuss the topic as a generalized social problem in which social roles appear, and not people in particular. ("Students who did", "the question stimulates", "the theme frees", "the students who benefit have", "gives them", "that leaves them", "they are").

The theme frees much populist and stupid verbiage, it produces frustration and hostility. It instills racial and social prejudice. All the "goodness" that is directed to those who belong to a minority, be it related to genre, race or social condition, points out to the fact that they are at a disadvantage, that they need this special attention because, due to some fact related to race, genre, scholarship or any other, they are not at the

<sup>4</sup>To enrich the activity, the student could do some research to find the production context of the article. The proposed activity can show the event and suggest that students do research on the news about the topic or even to bring news to be read, dialoguing with the article. On January 22, 2008, the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* dedicated a whole page, in the section *National*, to describe the fact and to relate it to similar events in other universities (Cf. ROCHA, 2010).

<sup>5</sup>In our thesis (ROCHA, 2010), we propose questions and their respective answers that could improve the analysis of the argumentative strategies used. In the work, the answers were marked using the *Times New Roman* font to differentiate them from the questions, representing the editing of a sequence of questions that could belong to a didactic unit of a course book. In this suggestion, the built meanings appear from the interaction between *I* and *other*; in other words, each reader is unique and the axiologies cross themselves with the interlocutor experiences; thus, the answers were developed as reading possibilities, but a course book could present other possibilities.



desired autonomy and esteem plateau. What a shame.

In the universities a battle for the quotas begins. Students who did well on the university entrance exam – only those who have children or grandchildren in this situation know the sacrifice, the discipline, the study, and the expenses involved in this – are rejected in favor of those who did not do so well but are of African origin or come from public schools. And what about the others? The poor whites or those who are neither rich nor poor of Portuguese, Italian, Polish, German origins, and the like, whose parents fought hardly to give them shelter, health and education?

The idea of a quota system reinforces nefarious concepts: that Negroes are less capable, and for that matter, need this push, and that the public schools are terrible and have no salvation. It is a weird, badly thought and badly executed idea. We will now have white and poor families who will not fight any more for their children to have a good scholarship and to get into a university, because their place has been given to another person. Once more, the study is relegated to something of less importance.

In the above excerpt from the article, the nouns used are highlighted in blue, and in purple, we find the appreciative tags used by the author (adjectives, adjective locutions, adverbs and adverbial locutions).

These tags make it easier to understand the author's point of view. By noticing them, questions can be asked so that the student can, in his/her answers, characterize the university entrance exam, the quota system, the public school, the white students, the Negro students and/or those coming from public schools.

From this, the student can understand that the university entrance exam is characterized as “sacrifice”, “discipline”, “study”, “expenses”. The quota system, on the other hand, frees “populist and stupid verbiage”; produces “frustration” and “hostility”; instills “racial and social prejudice”; needs a “special attention” and is a “push” for those who are of African origin and students from public schools; reinforces “nefarious concepts”; constitutes a “weird, ill-conceived and badly executed” idea.

The whites are students who did “well on the university entrance exam”; “rejected” in favor of those who “did not do so well”; “people who are neither rich nor poor<sup>6</sup>”; those that are “in the desired autonomy and esteem plateau”; those who have “white and poor families” that fight for “good scholarship”; those whose place will be “given to another person”. Yet the Negroes and students from public schools are “genre”, “race” or “social condition minority”; those who are at a “disadvantage”; those who need that “special

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<sup>6</sup> Translator's Note: In Portuguese, we refer to these people as “remediados”. Economically speaking, they would probably belong to the low middle class.

attention”; those who do not do “so well” in the university entrance exam and are of “African origin”; “less capable”; those who need that “push”.

By analyzing the writer’s evaluative tags, it is possible to reflect as follows: if the university entrance exam is “sacrifice”, discipline”, “study”, “expenses”, those who do well, succeed because they sacrificed themselves, had discipline, studied, and spent. Who does well on the university entrance exam, according to the author? What is implied in relation to those who do not do well? The whites do well on the university entrance exam, implying that Negroes and students from public schools did not sacrifice themselves, did not study, did not spend, did not have discipline.

According to the established way of rating, the families of the whites fight for “good scholarship”. There is no mention of the families of Negroes or of students from public schools, implying that the families of Negroes or students from public schools do not fight for good scholarship.

The term *verbiage* means an overabundance of words, but with few ideas. By using the expression populist verbiage, it can be said that this term is linked with the thought that the quotas are a “weird, ill-conceived and badly executed” idea, once the populist verbiage would be an empty argumentation connected to popular interests, and by popular here it is meant getting closer to the lower classes. To write that the quotas are ill-conceived and executed, therefore, reinforces the expression, implying that these ideas come from the underprivileged classes, and thus, are not well conceived.

Other argumentative strategies can be explored such as the subject passivity or the use of graphic resources, such as the two points used in the title. The writer suggests in the title that she intends to explain the quota problem from two points of view –what is fair and what is unfair in quota vacancies. After analyzing the appreciative tags, it is possible to ask the student if the writer really accomplishes what she announced she would do, as she positions herself against the quota system and, to defend her point of view, writes about it from the point of view of what is fair or unfair to the whites.

Before the actual text production, other articles could have been inserted, in which different evaluative tags would be used, so that the student could compare several journalistic media, their respective editorial profiles and other linguistic-discursive

resources might be analyzed, such as the textual organizers, the thematic progress, the referential cohesion, etc.

After being analyzed, according to the methodological order defended by Vološinov (1986), the more immediate extra-verbal context (publication date, section, author), the student was inserted into the social practices that permeate the production of an article and can be invited to practice it, writing an answer, using the opinion article genre as a way to position himself/herself in relation to a relevant fact in society. The written proposal might suggest the same path as the analysis, in which the student does research on the most recent facts in newspapers and magazines to activate his/her production. The student would become the competent authority that would discuss a topic<sup>7</sup>.

In the total didactic series, considering that there are several activities to produce argumentative texts, after each one of them, an activity asking the student to reflect on the language can be developed, dealing with one of the studied linguistic-discursive aspects, so that, by the end of high school, all these resources would have been worked on in different texts. As this is a book for the first year of high school, a sequential chapter that improved the study of the grammatical persons and their social roles represented in the text in question could be developed.

## **Final Considerations**

In this article, the analysis object was a didactic activity from the series *Português: Linguagens*, by Cereja and Magalhães (2008), aimed at high school students. The objective was to demonstrate the linguistic-discursive approach that the authors used to lead the student to write an opinion article. From that analysis, a theoretical-methodological possibility for the teaching of argumentative writing based on an utterance-discursive perspective was proposed.

Once an opinion article is inserted in the scholastic sphere, there are coercive characteristics of the journalistic sphere, such as, for instance, the newspaper's or magazine's profile, the verb-visual composition of the page, style, and thematic content that

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<sup>7</sup> Check complete production outline in ROCHA (2010).

must be considered. When taking the text to the scholastic sphere, with didactic purposes, the authors of *Português: Linguagens* favored and worked on the text content and the prescriptive aspects of the language, without contemplating this perspective with the elements of the original sphere of production, circulation and reception, which would provide conditions for the student to live, understand and produce the genre in question. The text reading, production and analysis activities should articulate the grammar aspects, prescriptive of the language, to the reflection about a social practice.

Dialoguing with the book, the proposed didactic approach suggests ways in which some specificities of the journalistic sphere can be studied in the scholastic practices to teach written production, making it possible to link the several didactic activities implied in reading, text production and reflection on the language. Regarding the written production, the analysis and reflection on the used linguistic-discursive procedures allow the student to incorporate them into his/her production to build meanings and mark his/her position.

To read and to interpret are crucial to argumentative written production, as they allow the analysis and discussion of the approaches inserted in the discursive web, which are socially established, inserting the student in the discussion of the analyzed question; in other words, into social practice. There is no writing without reading, without reflection, without the adoption of a point of view. The student must find his/her place as a reader and as a text producer, in order to muter the desire to speak out, establishing a social place from where he/she speaks, who he/she speaks with and to whom he/she directs his/her text.

In the same way as there is no writing without reading, there is no reading nor writing without language, because it establishes the student as an acting subject, author, someone who masters resources that mark his/her position and his/her role in society. Through the text, in the flux of the discursive interactions, materialized by the Portuguese language, the student can express himself/herself about something, in a given situation and with a specific objective. In the Bakhtinian concept, the language life practice does not allow the individuals to interact with the language as an abstract system of norms, but as a word filled with content, or with ideological or life meaning.

The theoretical-methodological approach is unfinished, as there are no answers to many of the questions that have emerged. It is believed, thus, that, by adopting a dialogic

perspective to the teaching of the Portuguese language, didactic activities that may reflect the different concrete forms of the language can be developed. Thus, the young person takes the other person's word in the interlocution to be able to pronounce his/her own word, in different dialogic contexts, and, therefore, show new and different semantic possibilities.

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