

Bakhtinian concept of literature and the analysis of characters in modern foreign language textbooks / *Concepção bakhtiniana de literatura e a análise de personagens nos livros didáticos de LEM*

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, part of a larger study, we analyse an EFL textbook using Bakhtinian concepts of literature and language. This research focuses mainly on the role played by characters in the structuring of thematic units. In particular, concepts from the Bakhtin Circle, such as polyphony, exotopy and the surplus of vision, are used. In the analysis, we investigate if the discursive voices are illuminated by a single authorial consciousness or if the author's evaluation monopoly prevails in relation to the characters. In the dialogue between the areas, we relate the study of characters in the textbooks to the study of the role of character in the fictional universe presented by Candido (1968), and we search, by means of this relation, points of convergence between the areas of literature and of these foreign language textbooks.

KEYWORDS: Characters; Textbooks; Teaching; Modern foreign language

RESUMO

No presente trabalho, inserido em uma pesquisa mais ampla, analisamos, à luz da concepção bakhtiniana de literatura/linguagem, um livro didático de LEM Inglês, focando essencialmente, nesta investigação, o papel desempenhado pelas personagens na estruturação das unidades temáticas. Para o desenvolvimento da pesquisa, são mobilizados os conceitos do Círculo de Bakhtin de polifonia, exotopia e excedente de visão. Na análise, investigamos se as vozes discursivas são plenivalentes ou se prevalece o monopólio avaliativo do authorteam/autor em relação às personagens. No diálogo entre as áreas, aproximamos o estudo das personagens dos livros didáticos ao estudo sobre o papel da personagem no universo ficcional apresentado por Candido (1968), e buscamos, nessa aproximação, pontos de convergência entre as áreas da Literatura e dos materiais didáticos de línguas estrangeiras.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Personagens; Livros didáticos; Ensino; Língua estrangeira moderna*

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Initial Remarks

In the present study, we analyse an EFL (English as a foreign language) textbook called *TECH teens Ensino Fundamental*¹, emphasising its characters and primarily using the Bakhtinian concepts of language and literature as a basis. Notions of polyphony, exotopy and surplus of vision from Bakhtin/the Bakhtin Circle are employed. In the analysis, we focus on the discursive voices of the textbooks, considering whether the different voices are represented (target culture sociodiscursive perspective) or whether there is a tendency toward a single, monological authorial voice. We also investigate whether these discursive voices were plenivalent or whether there was an evaluative monopoly from the authorteam/authors in relation to the characters.

We first present the Bakhtinian perspective of exotopy and surplus of vision, highlighting the author-hero relation, which in turn allows us to focus on the aspects of plenivalence of the author-hero voices in fiction and the authorteam-character relation in textbooks.

Our second step is to establish a theoretical basis for the analysis of the characters. We approach the analysis of textbook characters in a similar fashion to the role of fictional characters presented by Candido (1968), in the text *The Character of the Novel (A personagem do romance* in the original) and we identify points of convergence between Literature and foreign language teaching materials. From such convergence, we establish components which subsidize the investigation of the textbook.²

We finally analyse, considering the established theoretical background, the characters present in the textbook *Tech teens Ensino Fundamental*, focusing on the notion of plenivalence, from the Bakhtinian perspective of exotopy. We use the goals

¹ We chose this textbook mainly because it features fictional characters which can be found throughout the book. We believe this structure favours the analysis of the textbook, especially in the first stage, considering the Bakhtinian categories and concepts. Another reason for its choice is that it is recent, having been released in 2000.

² We do not conceive textbooks as literary production. The element of approximation is the fictional aspect inherent to the characters of both universes. This naturally does not imply that in textbooks aesthetic issues cannot be contemplated. Nevertheless, the developed analysis reveals that such issues do not figure as fundamental components in the structure of the textbook. Thus, even though the aesthetic completion has a formative component, it seems to us that this component is not acknowledged by the authors, so that the aesthetics of the book is restricted to the visual aspect of the material and not related to the discursive approach or metaphoric themes of the textbook.

presented in the introduction of the teacher's book as reference for our analysis, and attempt to relate them to the units themselves, associating them to the analysis of the speech of the characters and of some communicative situations set forth by the author team.

1 Theoretical Background

As stated above, the organization of our work and analysis is centred on the several categories and concepts found in the reflections on literature and language employed by the Bakhtin Circle. It is frequent for such categories and concepts to be present in reflections on literature and language, and to be interrelated. The concept of exotopy, for example, originates in reflections referring to the literary universe³ and is later transposed to a wider discussion (our own culture and other cultures). As with other Bakhtinian texts, there is an interrelation between the artistic universe and the extra literary life – Bakhtin establishes analogies, differences and interdependencies between those fields in the epistemological development of his work. For him, one of the fundamental elements of exotopy is the surplus of vision. According to Bakhtin, “when I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide.” (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.22). Using his surplus of vision, one of the observers perceives, obviously, in the other, things which he alone can perceive – because of the place he alone occupies (and because of its unique meaning) – and which are inaccessible to the other (other culture). Still, according to the author,

The excess of my seeing in relation to another human being provides the foundation for a certain sphere of my own exclusive self-activity, i.e., all those inner and outer actions which only I can perform in relation to the other, and which are completely inaccessible to the other himself from his own place outside of me; all those actions, that is, which render the other complete precisely in those respects in which he cannot complete himself by himself (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.24).

³ The discussion which takes exotopy as a category of Bakhtinian thought is present mainly in the text “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” (1990). Exotopy refers then to the role of the author in relation to the hero/character.

In this dialogic process, Bakhtin postulates the realisation of empathy: “seeing the world through the other’s values”, perceiving things that are only accessible to one of the interlocutors, in order to later return to the initial standpoint (through contemplation), which enables the elaboration of himself and of the other. When Bakhtin refers to this exotopic perspective in life, he highlights that the richness of exotopy does *not* lie in the duplication of the neighbour, but instead in the fact that the other lives (and goes on living) in a different category of values: “Let him rather remain outside of me, for in that position he can see and know what I myself do not see and do not know from my own place, and he can essentially enrich the event of my life.” (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.78).

It is important to point out that this *a priori* incompleteness – according to Tezza’s (2003) denomination – which lives from the substantial absence, in relation to time, space and meaning, can only be completed in the perspective of the other. The perception, the evaluative focus, and the emotive standpoint of the other pervade our worldview in the first experiences we have in life and offer us parameters for the construction of our *Weltanschauung*. If in life the completion we give the others are fragmented, in the work of art – the aesthetic event – completion is a reaction to the whole. In literary art, the author’s consciousness comprises the totality of the hero. The author, according to Bakhtin, with his surplus of vision, causes an evaluative tension, since the centres of values do *not* coincide.

In this sense, the completion is guaranteed by the distance between the author and the hero. In the elaboration of the aesthetic event, the author is found in a later moment “not only in time” (time-wise out of the hero experience), but also in a later moment in meaning (the author transcends time, space and values). The author needs to establish a distance in order to contemplate and elaborate the aesthetic completion of the hero, for there is no exotopy when both merge; there is a *duplication of the centres of values, a finished aesthetic form*. The central issue is: if two centres of values coincide, there is no aesthetic event. And, in this perspective, the characters only duplicate the discursive voice of the author, weakening the “dramatic density” and the aesthetic acuteness involved in the development of characters and meaning.

If in exotopy – in a Bakhtinian perspective – the central issue surrounds being outside, surplus of vision, the author-character relation in aesthetics and in the extra

literary life, the object of this relation is centred – in polyphony – in the literary universe. Bakhtin develops an original reflection concerning the position of the author in relation to the characters. Above all, this Bakhtinian reflection refers to the issue of polyphony, as suggested. We deem it productive for our investigation to seek, in the Bakhtinian vision of *polyphony*, the substrate for the analysis of the role of the author and the characters (author-team, in the present study) in textbooks. The goal is to borrow from this Bakhtinian concept mainly the notion of plenivalence in the author-character relation. When mentioning plenivalent voices, Bakhtin (2003, p.13) stresses the “astonishing internal independence of Dostoevsky’s characters”, also pointing out that these voices “are consciousnesses and voices that take part in the dialogue with other voices in absolute state of equality; they do not objectify themselves, i.e. they do not lose their BEING as autonomous voices and consciousnesses”. According to Norton & Emerson: “a work in which author and character merge is not polyphonic, and perhaps not even a literary work at all, but rather a confession in varying degrees of disguise.” (1990, p.243).

In other words, the author ceases to have, at least in part, the monological control of the other characters. The author’s truth lies, in this new fictional construction, on the same level of his characters. In a polyphonic work, the characters have the power to directly signify, they have the possibility of being subjects of the discourse, thus not being only objects of an author’s discourse.

In this perspective of polyphony, according to Bakhtin (1981), these independent voices and consciousnesses are part of the architecture of the novel, which is structured by the *combination* of several individual volitions (the plurality of independent and non-merged voices). In this structuring of the novel, originally developed by Dostoyevsky in the Russian literary universe, the author would be a participant in the dialogue of internally unfinished voices, in which the last word, theoretically, does not belong to him. This new perception of the aesthetic event – in which the characters are in a dialogue and in constant tension of ideas and are internally unfinished – constitutes a fresh artistic model and projects elements to a new *Weltanschauung*.

The Bakhtinian reflections on the position of the author in relation to the characters and the dialogical nature of the relations between author and hero, which in

turn comprise the Russian author's theoretical construct, also guide the related research of the role of the authors (authorteam) and, above all, of the characters and the form of structuring a textbook.

2 Characters – a typology

We find in the methodological propositions of the structuralist/behaviourist orientation a tendency toward the homogenization/typifying of the characters, having as substrate⁴ the traditional view of culture. It is common in foreign language teaching, especially within an approach inspired by structuralism, to observe textbooks which present characters built from general common characteristics, with no individual traits which can differentiate them from other characters who play similar roles.

It is worth mentioning that in such textbooks characters are presented (in texts, dialogues, etc.) without a personal background, for they belong to an everyday life presented in an idealized and artificial fashion. The private (everyday) life, presented out of any social context, is disconnected from the economic and political situation of the country. The tendency to the unification of discursive voices is present in many textbooks – which can be attributed to a traditional vision of culture which still works as substrate to the preparation of many current textbooks (and which hardly takes the learner into account)⁵.

In this conception of teaching, there is an unmistakable tendency toward the duplication of the centres of values of the authorteam in the characters. The student/reader is also invited, when performing the directed activities, to duplicate the vision of the authorteam/characters when they have to repeat expressions such as “I am sick”, even if they are just coming back from their breaks, still glowing for having played a football match. In such moment, the student is merely imitating/copying the speech of a textbook character, restricting the possibility of a dialogical construction.

⁴ This tendency toward stereotyping was in many ways found in some English/German as foreign language textbooks. For instance, we mention the construction of characters of textbooks used in Brazil until the 1990's (which can still be found in many current books, albeit with different looks). These characters, as a general rule, were presented in a rather stereotyped (typified) fashion.

⁵ This movement towards the dilution of individuality through the presentation of a generic profile close to stereotyping can be entailed to a traditional view of culture (Bhabha, 1998). Therefore, the textbooks influenced by linguistic structuralism often project a unitary view of the target culture.

The issue is: how is it possible to talk about exotopy/surplus of vision when the student/reader restricts his or her action to the mechanical repetition of a model structure? It is worth reminding that, for Bakhtin, it is necessary that the centres of values of the author and the hero do not coincide for the aesthetic event to happen, i.e. the voice of the hero (character) is not merely a duplication of the author's voice. In some textbooks, in repetition drills such as the one mentioned above, not only is there a duplication of those centres of values, but also a simulation of the characters by the students when they are invited to directly take part in the "plot". There is, then, a double coincidence of values: the characters in relation to the author/team, and the reader in relation to the characters and the author/team. This double coincidence prevents the aesthetic event from taking place, and even the displacement of meaning of the Brazilian student/reader in the sense of building new meanings for the speech/texts of the other culture. The characters – in such conception of teaching – are marked by their predictability and guided by common sense.

In *The Character of the Novel (A personagem do romance* in the original), a study on the role of the character in the fictional universe, Candido (1968) brings a typology of characters that we consider relevant for our analysis of the characters created by the author/team in the textbooks⁶. As previously mentioned, the literary and teaching genres are structured and built with different intentions, but we understand that it is possible to relate them, from several points of convergence between them, in order to seek out, from the literary studies perspective, new components for the analysis of textbook characters as a pedagogical exercise.

We can relate the construction of typified characters with what Candido characterizes, in a reading of Forster, as flat characters. "In their purest form, they are built surrounding a single idea or quality; when there is more than one factor involved, we have the beginning of a curve towards the sphere." (1968, p.62). And, quoting Forster, he adds that these characters are easily recognizable, since "they remain unaltered in their spirit because they do not change with circumstance" (p.62).

According to Candido (1968), these characters are sometimes "types" and other times "caricatures" and, as typified characters found in textbooks, these flat characters are predictable. Candido, when opposing flat and round characters, quotes

⁶ Or taken out of other discursive genres and inserted in textbooks by the authors.

Forster: “the proof that a character is round is its ability to surprise us in a convincing manner. If it never surprises, it is flat” (FORSTER, 1949, *apud* CANDIDO, p.63). In this view, according to the authors, a serious or tragic flat character would tend to be *boring*.

This view of the character/hero as predictable/flat can also be associated to a static aesthetic conception in time-space (non-historical) of the travel novel hero as described by Bakhtin (1997) in his text *The education novel in the history of realism*. In this text, Bakhtin discusses, among other aspects, the literary representation of education. The author seeks to identify the principles of the individual structuring of the hero in the travel novel.

In the travel narrative, “the hero is a point moving in space. He has no essential distinguishing characteristics, and he himself is not at the centre of the novelist’s artistic attention.” (BAKHTIN, 2004, p.10) *The image of men is static, as is the world that surrounds him*. There is a juxtaposition of the spatial and social elements, in such a way that the sociocultural context of the peoples, ethnic groups and communities within time and space issues is not elaborated.

We can relate this Bakhtinian conception with the view presented by Candido (1970). In his text “dialectics of trickery” (“a dialética do malandro”, in the original), Candido highlights that some characters (with characteristics similar to those pointed by Bakhtin) are emptied of any “psychological foundation” and have a “calling to be a puppet”. Resulting from this absence of psychological density and a voice of their own, these characters lack what Candido (1968) calls a “sentiment of truth”. For him, the issue of *verisimilitude* in fiction (novel) relies on the possibility of a fictional being communicating “the impression of the most authentic existential truth”. Thus, still according to the author, character and plot cannot be dissociated. “The plot exists through the characters, and the characters live the plot.” (p. 53)

Such reflections on the characters, developed in the field of Literary Studies, can be recontextualized for the analysis of characters built in English/second language teaching. As the analysis that follows shows, the target culture and the contact with other cultures frequently is presented, via characters and plot, in an exotic and simplified fashion, even if involuntarily. We have, therefore: the Mexican wearing the

sombrero and his guacamole recipe, the adolescents with an unstoppable tendency to obedience, the always welcome and well received tourists and immigrants, etc.

The characters tend to be presented as “flat characters” and with “a call to be puppets” as characterized by Candido (1968). This tendency to the *perfect world* (*Heile Welt*), the absence of polyphony, in the addition of the elements aforementioned that we often find in textbooks, generally lead the reader to boredom, a factor also attributed by Candido to flat characters.

In some textbooks, in activities involving repetition, there is not only a coincidence of centres of value of the author/team/characters, but also the reproduction of the character by the student/reader when he is invited to directly take part in the “plot”. There is, in this case, a double coincidence of the centres of values: the characters’ in relation to the author’s and the reader’s in relation to the characters’ and the author/team’s. This double coincidence prevents the aesthetic event and even the displacement of meaning of the Brazilian student in the sense of building new meanings for speeches and texts of the other culture. The characters are marked by their predictability and guided by common sense.

In this sense, we can observe in textbooks a difficulty in building an attractive plot with logic and internal coherence, considering it relies on characters who tend not to go through meaningful transformations, because they are predictable, guided by common sense. We observe a limitation in the production of verisimilitude, which relies on the aesthetic organization of the material and on the internal coherence of the character, i.e. the relation between plot, characters and ideas (*cf.* CANDIDO, 1968).

In summary, based on the perspective of flat/static characters and on the presentation of some representative characters of the behaviourist/structuralist conception of teaching, we argue the following about flat characters in both textbooks and literary genres: they have general common characteristics; they can be considered types, caricatures and stereotypes; they are guided by common sense; they are restricted to the role they are to play; they tend to be disconnected from any economic, social and political situation as well as from the history of the country; they are predictable, not changing with the circumstances; they are idealized.

3 Textbook analysis

At the end of the last session, we discussed some characterizing elements of characters from the literary and teaching genres. For the textbook analysis, it is important to stress that the elements belonging to the Bakhtinian epistemological universe which we use in our work are those surrounding exotopy and polyphony (focusing on the notion of plenivalence). These concepts/categories are paramount to the analysis that follows.

Before we begin the study of the characters, we find it important to briefly focus on some of the goals presented by the author in the introduction of the textbook.. This presentation is pertinent to our research because it allows us to elaborate a wider picture of the composition of the characters, as well as the conceptions of student and culture which serve as basis for the textbook.

The student/reader is invited to interact with the world, and not only with elements of the American or British culture – which are still present in many textbooks. As they interact with the world, the student would be in touch with a “universal culture”. According to the authors,

[...] to study a foreign language is to open a door to know new ideas, new cultural manifestations, as well as to rethink one's own social context and mother language. Considering the way the contemporary world has been developing, knowledge of English allows access to cultural manifestations beyond those of the English speaking countries. English, in the globalized world, is the instrument of world communication, either when understanding other people's ideas, or when expressing one's own ideas. This entails a reflective and interactive attitude in the learner's part. This is the goal of TECH TEENS (HOLDEN et. al. 2000, p. II).

Before such invitation, a doubt remains: is not this perspective presented by the authors that enables didactic-methodological activities close to a structuralist conception (“neutrality of the language”), watered down in an abstract cultural universality? In a way, we face a problem of language/culture conception. After all, how to conceive a language as universal? Which cultural-linguistic aspects could be considered universal? If the linguistic signs can refer to distinct axiological axes, how can we represent these axes in a universalistic perspective?

In the introduction of their textbook, the authors develop goals that, in our opinion, are contradictory, or at least hardly complementary. They state that the goal concerning culture is to study the “manifestation of other cultures.”⁷ In the same introduction, they establish that the textbook “presents a balance between the knowledge of language and its use both as an instrument of communication as well as an instrument of transmission of culture [...]” (p.II). The expression “cultural transmission” suggests much more the idea that one culture has something to transmit to the other one. This perspective seems contradictory when contrasted with the universalistic cultural proposal, as indicated by the authors as a goal. Making an analogy with the teaching universe, it would be similar to the view that “the teacher transmits knowledge.”

The authors propose an international scenario and, in this sense, the characters are supposed to represent various countries. Mike, Mario, Annie, Rick, Jodie, etc, are characters which represent countries such as the USA, Brazil, Italy, etc. The authors have Jodie establish the main plotline. In unity 1, lesson 5, a small dialogue is presented, and it is supposed to take place by email, between Jodie and Mario. According to the authors in the teacher’s book, this dialogue has the purpose of “recognizing pets mentioned in a simple conversation” (p.18). In the student’s book, the authors ask from the students to “read the email conversation,” which follows.

JODIE: Hi, I’m Jodie. What’s your name?

MARIO: Hi, Jodie. I’m Mario. I’m in Venice, in Italy.

JODIE: Hi, Mario. How are you?

MARIO I’m fine, thanks. This is my hamster. His name’s Michelangelo.

JODIE: Nice to meet you! This is my cat. Her name is Maggie.
(HOLDEN, 2000, p. 18).

The structure and the dialogue show little differences from typical artificial dialogues characteristic of the structuralist approach. We understand that the dialogue reflects the notion of language as merely a means of transmission of structural items which historically pretends to be neutral. This neutrality can be associated to a “cultural neutrality” (universal culture) and a lingua franca.

⁷ “(...) either as knowledge as well as na act of reviewing one’s own cultural context; (...)” (p. II).

The student/reader is invited to take part of the thematic which is portrayed in the dialogue, even if indirectly. The authors suggest that “the students do a survey of veterinarian clinics close to their school or residence and/or animal protection institutions in their city” (p. VII). This suggestion stumbles in linguistic issues, since it is not reasonable to expect that the student is able to develop open end activities, after just some simple (repetition) activities.⁸

In order to have a wider view of the textbook, we present three texts and analyse them according the elements/criteria proposed earlier in this work..

JEFF: Hi! Is this your school?
JODIE: Yes, and this is a photo of the classroom.
JEFF: What’s this, Jodie?
JODIE: Jeff! It’s a table!
JEFF: Oh! And this?
JODIE: It’s a chair. And this is a chair, too!
JEFF: Where’s the board? It’s here! And there’s the teacher.
JEFF: Oh. And where are you? I’m here! Here’s my backpack.
(HOLDEN, 2000, p. 46).

MOM: Mike! Jodie. Come on! It’s late!
MIKE: OK.OK. Where’s my backpack?
MOM: Is this your backpack?
JODIE: No, this is my backpack...
MOM: Well, is that your backpack, Mike?
MIKE: Yes, it is! Thanks, Mom. You’re great! Come on, Jodie! It’s late!
JODIE: OK. OK. Mom, where’s my dictionary?
MOM: Is that your dictionary? On the table?
JODIE: No, that’s my old dictionary. Where’s my new dictionary?
MOM: Is this your new dictionary?
JODIE: Mom, this isn’t a dictionary. This is a grammar book.
MOM: Well, is that your new dictionary...? Over there?
JODIE: Mom, you’re fantastic. Bye! See you! (HOLDEN, 2000, p. 54).

Hi! This is Vince. He’s a turtle. His house in Florida. And these are his kids, Greg, Karen and George.
Ciao! He’s a hamster. His name’s Michelangelo. This is his family in Italy. (HOLDEN, 2000, p. 64).

⁸ On the other hand, the themes of animal protection or pet care cannot be found in the unity. The suggestion of this survey is, then, unrelated both thematically and linguistically to the rest of the unity.

The dialogues, though supposedly taking place in modern settings⁹, are merely excuses for the teaching of grammar aspects – as widely discussed in the area of foreign language teaching – and the characters, at least apparently, are found in a position to play a role which resound these structures. These characters have general common characteristics, covered by a characterization with some strong typifier tone, tending to caricaturing. The typifying is oriented by an idealized view of the adolescent. Contrary to issues surrounding conflicts, struggles and lack of limits found in literature associated with teenagers, the characters of this book are always cordial and possess absolutely no individual traits. Thus, Mike could speak Mario's lines, who in turn could take the lines from Jodie, without the reader noticing. In this sense, the characters are predictable since they do not undergo meaningful change and are guided by a common sense of pedagogic and universalizing nature. The characters, basically teenagers, never lose the spirit of gratitude and the predisposition to maintain healthy conversations, while the mother (presented in text 3) still fulfils the role of the loving mother, always willing to help, a role played in the dialogues of textbooks from the 60's through the 80's. Therefore, a static perspective runs through the principles of character construction, once they are left with a linearity which prevents them from being perceived as in formation/evolution, not to mention conflict. Therefore, they can be identified, in Candido's denomination (1970), as "emptied from any psychological background."

We can link the issue of verisimilitude to the static perspective of the characters, as it is difficult to bestow credibility upon such predictable characters. For instance, in dialogue 2 we find Jeff's reaction of admiration/surprise to Jodie's statements hardly believable. The "Oh" reaction does not fit with the introductory nature of the dialogue and it can be characterized as an attempt to make up for the absence of density of the characters and of elements that might surprise the reader/student.

It seems clear to us that this character profile can be considered as what Candido defined as "plain", considering they hardly ever cause surprise. When they do, it is not for their psychological density, for their inherent conflicts, but because they carry a certain dramatic nonsense.

⁹ In text 2, the dialogues develop from a film posted in the computer. It is watched by Jodie and Jeff. The film shows Jodie inside the classroom and the scene starts the dialogue. Text 3 has no relation with technology. It is a traditional dialogue from foreign language textbooks, with a loving mother and grateful children. Dialogue 4 again takes place in a digital environment. Mario and Mike, with their pets close to them, talk apparently using some kind of chat or social network.

These characters are also disconnected from the economical, social, political or historical situation of the country – of any country. Mario, Mike and Jodie could be representing any country, since we do not find any marks specific from any culture. More than that, it would be expected that they might be identifiable by some sociocultural characteristic. It is worth highlighting that these characters do not carry any cultural marks from their social group either, as teenagers or youngsters.

If we analyse the characters from the perspective of exotopy and surplus of vision, it seems to us that they seem to be a duplicate of the views and values of the authorteam. They basically reproduce their values, their *Weltanschauung* and their pedagogic perspective. In the Bakhtinian perspective, for the completion of the other, for the construction of the aesthetic event, a distance in meaning between the characters and the author is necessary; otherwise there can be no finished aesthetic form. Nevertheless, the textbook characters only duplicate the view of the authors. For instance, consider the globalizing traits of these characters. According to the authors, “the teaching of English is found in a context of global education of the student, citizen of a society with its own characteristics, seeking to awaken and discuss universal values and ethical issues” (HOLDEN et. al., 2000, p.III). But in the textbook, this seems to come in the form of linguistic stereotypes. In unity 5, lesson 28, Mario introduces himself saying: “Ciao! He’s a hamster. His name’s Michelangelo. This is his family in Italy.” If not for the Italian greeting, nothing else would allow us to associate the character to Italy. Even though the authors propose an international interchange in the education of the global citizen, which demands to situate the characters locally in order to enable global interactions, there is no reference to the origins of the characters in the book. In this sense, we can suppose a global citizen is a citizen of no country. Therefore, the characters are not situated anywhere. In a similar way, if not for the frequent references to technology – which locate us in the present – the characters are not situated in time either.

The characters, as previously pointed out, resonate the values of the authorteam, to the point of objectification. In this perspective, they only duplicate the discursive voice of the authors, weakening the “dramatic density” and the aesthetic acuteness which could be involved in the development of the characters and of the meanings of the text. Consequently, the polyphony (especially the plenivalence of the characters) is

impossible; i.e. their consciousness and voices do not dialogue with equality and cannot be considered autonomous. The author team holds the monological control of the characters which – when the plot and dialogues are considered – are only objects of the authorial discourse.

From this analysis, it seems difficult to find that the reader/student of textbooks of our time may wish to develop an “affective and intellectual attachment through the mechanisms of identification, projection, transference, etc.” (CANDIDO, 1968, p.54) to the characters and to the plot, since the possibilities of these readers/students of taking part in the aesthetic event (or in the construction of new meanings) are very restricted.

As one of the objectives of this research is to identify how the student/reader is invited to interact with the textbook and ask new questions to the target culture, considering the analysis developed so far, we argue that such interaction is restricted, since the activities proposed by the author team generally do not contemplate possibilities for the surplus of vision of the students to be utilised. These students are, most of the time, only invited to reproduce the discourse of the characters/author team through the repetition of linguistic structures. Therefore, the possibility of transposing oneself to other cultures and countries is also limited. It is clear that textbooks generally do not have aesthetic intentions, but it is worth reinforcing that they are in good measure oriented by fictional characters (imagined by the authors).

We also point out to the homogenizing profile of the characters. They do not possess characterizing traits that differentiate them (also common in textbooks). As a result, the dramatic density is weakened. Not even the good/evil, hero/villain, oppositions, or unlucky, bully or badly behaved characters can be found in this textbook.

In the same way that the characters lack aesthetic completion – despite their importance as responsible for the dialogues and activities which structure the book – they also receive little attention from the authors in their presentation in the teacher’s book. In its introduction, the guidelines are restricted by a pedagogic proposal:

Discuss in class the mean age of the characters and how their clothing styles influence this inference. In their speech, exploit the idea of greetings, identifying the languages and possible countries of origin and the previous knowledge of the students when arriving at their conclusions (HOLDEN et al., 2000, p.II).

The objectification and evaluative monopoly of the author team in relation to the textbook characters encumber the aesthetic event, because they resonate a static (nearly empty) view of the plot, of language and of culture.

Final Remarks

The profile with which the *characters* are presented and the way the students/readers are invited to interact with several *utterances* (texts, socio-communicative situations, etc.) indicate a homogenizing tendency of these two structuring elements of the analysed textbook. This tendency can be associated to a static perspective which guides the characterization of the characters, which in turn can be related to the predictability of their behaviour and actions. They remain unaltered since they do not change with circumstances. In this sense, the analyzed fictional characters leave the student/reader little room for building new meanings. Therefore, the possibility for the student to interact with the characters and the texts in the textbook in the sense of building fictional alternatives, projecting other aesthetic possibilities, is emptied by the author team of the book.

Therefore, the absence of a plenivalence of voices in the text and the duplication of the centres of values of the author team and of the characters, as well as the proposal of activities which tend to promote the duplication of those centres of values weaken the aesthetic development of the textbook. This frailty not only restricts the dialogue of the students with the textbook and with the target culture/language, but also limits their education, since the aesthetic component has a formative value. The weakness of this component in the textbook, associated to the structuralist theoretical and methodological perspective adopted, can limit the students to learn only linguistic structures, ignoring the intercultural exchange and the construction of new meanings upon the events of life and the human condition.

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