

A REFLECTION ABOUT PUNCTUATION ACTIVITIES IN TEXTBOOKS OF PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE (ELEMENTARY EDUCATION) IN BRAZIL AND PORTUGAL

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Abstract

This research discusses the teaching approaches in punctuation found in 8th grade textbooks in *Português: linguagens*, by William Roberto Cereja e Thereza Cochar Magalhães, and by vol. of 2^o year of the Alpha collection, of Eva Lima, Nuno Barrigão, Nuno Pedroso, Vítor Pedra - Portugal. The motivation for this paper arose from the concern we have about punctuation marks are addressed in Portuguese textbooks of Elementary Education/Basic Education approved and distributed by the National Program of Textbooks in Brazilian public schools, and the General Direction of Education, in Portugal. Thus, this work is justified by the need to reflect on the subject, with a view to improve the proposals about punctuation marks in the textbooks, revealing a way of questioning the approaches in use, and allowing new perspectives on the subject, whose results can contribute to expansion of the subject in the field of language studies. In support of our investigation, the research has as theoretical framework the contributions of Dialogic Discourse Analysis (DDA), taking as input some key concepts developed by Bakhtin's Circle, such as utterance, dialogism and dialogical relations. From the methodological perspective, two axes were proposed. In the theoretical axis, we introduce the state of knowledge on the subject of punctuation searched in Brazilian academic production in recent decades, and a contrastive study on the subject in contemporary's grammars. Afterwards we structured the description of the research context, gathering and defining the corpus. In practical axis, we aimed a dialogic study of teaching approaches on the use of punctuation listed in both collections, as well as the reflection of these contrastive results. In our considerations, preliminary data indicate considerable differences in approach to the punctuation between the two collections, which include the heterogeneous distribution of content in different years.

Keywords: Teaching, punctuation, textbook, dialogic discourse analysis.

1 INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the importance of an adequate use of the punctuation by any active citizen, it is our aim to examine and discuss how this subject is addressed in didactic books of Portuguese, both in Brazil and in Portugal.

The reason for choosing didactic books is because both countries are currently undergoing a process of government centralization in this area. In Brazil there is the National Program of the Didactic Book PNLD/2011-2013) and in Portugal a mandatory evaluation and certification has been submitted (Declaration n. 1347/2013, 12th December)

Furthermore, it is understood that the didactic book is an essential tool in the school, since on the one hand, it supports the teacher in his teaching practice, and, on the other hand, it frequently works as a vehicle for the transmission of values, thus being able to influence the students' attitudes and behaviour, in addition to its scientific and pedagogical aspect.

Thus, and having as basis the National Curricular Parameters and the Program of Portuguese for Primary School (PPEB) (2009), we aim specifically to analyse the texts that address the punctuation (theoretical part and exercises) in the VIII volume of *Portuguese: languages*, by William Roberto Cereja and Thereza Cochar Magalhães (Brazil) - and in the 2nd volume of the *Alpha collection*, by Eva Lima, Nuno Barrigão, Nuno Pedroso and Vítor Rocha (Portugal).

Our intention is to reach the (future) teachers of Portuguese, so that they can understand, through these cases, the shades in what concerns punctuation in didactic books, thus becoming more critical regarding the way in which the pupil's punctuation is addressed.

This target will only be possible if there are theoretical subsidies that question the perspectives of the didactic materials, enabling an opening to new approaches, since there is no questioning of the contents on punctuation in didactic books. Therefore, the teaching is often guided by the reproduction of traditionalism which, in turn, cannot present alternatives to the improvement of the learning process.

This work is justified by the necessity to reflect on the subject in order to improve the teaching practices, while enabling different approaches to punctuation, whose results can contribute to the expansion of the subject in the field of the Applied Linguistics, Didactics and Language Studies.

To support our inquiry, the research will have as theoretical framework the contributions of the Dialogic Discourse Analysis (DDA), namely the key-concepts developed by Bakhtin and the other members of the Circle, especially Medvedev and Voloshinov.

2 FROM THE DIDACTIC BOOK TO PUNCTUATION – A REFLECTION

We believe that the construction of didactic materials by the teacher is paramount, since they can then more easily meet their students' needs, given that the sustainability of any educational system requires solid foundations, such as the curricular programs of the different subjects which help the teacher's in his pedagogical practice.

Such necessities could be met through the systematization of information, the orientation of a work which intends to be autonomous, the training of exercises which contribute to a consolidation of knowledge, the formation of citizens who are aware of their rights and duties, the learning of new work methods and also the possible connection established between the student and his family or guardians. Thus, we believe that the didactic book can constitute a tool that guides the teacher's teaching practice.

It follows that, on the one hand, we are overwhelmed with a thought of excellence but on the other hand we think it can be narrow, since the teacher might be tempted to develop his entire pedagogical activity based on a didactic book (DB) which can make him overlook the class' heterogeneity, the fullness of diversity and the stimulation of critical thought.

We do not intend to advocate the use (or not) of DBs but reflect upon its advantages and disadvantages since the DB is still the common and necessary practice (Circular DEB n. 14/97).

We point out, however, a question that goes beyond the elaboration of the DB - its scientific and pedagogical quality, in which we highlight the scientific and pedagogical rigour, as well as its conformity with the PCN in Brazil, and the PPEB (2009) and Curricular Goals (CG)(2012) in Portugal.

In the case of the DB of Portuguese, in Brazil, the problem, as we see it, lies in the fact that the Ministry of the Education controls the adoption of textbooks throughout the country while conceding state autonomy to make adjustments to the Brazilian Curricular Parameters allowing variations in the mother tongue's learning process. Thus, the federal (national) option of a certain DB probably (certainly) does not coincide with the different "programs" adopted by the various Brazilian states. For this reason, the use of the DB by teacher and students is complex since it does not contemplate subjects that contribute at a certain moment to an effective and significant students' learning. However the fact that the students are not tied to a ministerial imposition which will always be normative, allows them to widen the work to develop in this area in a linguistic use perspective.

In what concerns the DB of Portuguese in Portugal, it is also controlled by the Ministry of Education (ME) since any DB can only be adopted by the schools if it has the approval of the Ministry, indicating its conformity with the PPEB (2009) and the CG (2012) (Declaration n. 1347/2013, 12th December, Portugal). This situation, can, at a first glance, seem delimiting since it somewhat removes the teacher's scientific and pedagogical autonomy, making the teaching and learning process regulated by a norm. However, as professors of Linguistics we can only recognize the deviations to the norm if we have a deep understanding of it. Only thus can we identify and analyze the specifics of the linguistic use. Furthermore we believe that the didactic approach which has as its basis the linguistic use can greatly contribute to the creation of "other norms" which occur at syntactic, phonological, morphological and prosodic terms, such as punctuation and aspects corroborated by studies in the area of the history of language.

It is our understanding therefore that the teaching of the Portuguese language and its didactic resources are a subject which is important to the scientific community.

We have discussed the traditional teaching of the mother tongue, more specifically the proposals regarding the teaching of punctuation found in didactic materials in public schools through the PNLD/2011-2013 (Brazil) and of the Declaration n. 1347/2013 (Portugal). We took into account the considerations of Faraco and Castro (2000) concerning the frailties of the prescriptive-normative approaches which have been the object of interest not only from Linguistics but also specialists of other areas of knowledge. However, if we think that as early as in the Middle Ages, in concomitance with the Prosody, the Punctuation had already a semantic function which corresponds to the requirements of clarity and logic; centuries later it shows a grammatical orientation required by the “establishment” of the press (LEAL; GUIMARÃES, 2002) thus the normative necessity takes on new shapes.

Indeed “... the task of punctuate requires the capacity to decide the conflicts between the probable or possible intonation of the reading and the grammatical determination...” of a certain statement whether written or oral (LEAL & GUIMARÃES, 2002, p.133). It follows that we believe that the phonic, syntactic, literal and enunciative dimensions concur to an adequate use of the punctuation since the first one relates to intonation, the second to graphical signs and thus the different constituents of a sentence, the third to text organization and the fourth to the combination of the writing process and the writer’s subjectivity.

Aires (2012) mentions that “... between the association of the rhythm’s linguistic category and the writing modality, many of the relations are based in traditional conceptions of rhythm.” (p.8), highlighting the result of theoretical and practical implications in the process of teaching and learning.

Taking as a starting point some reference texts by the Bakhtian Circle, such as *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1999), *Problems of Dostoiévski’s Poetry* (2010a) and more recently the article “Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar (Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language)” (2004), we observe the discussion about fundamental questions regarding the language and its teaching, among which the teaching of punctuation. It is not a merely theoretical discussion but establishing links between theory, practice and teaching which leads us to the concept of *enunciation* within the Bakhtian perspective.

One of the first texts that foreshadowed the concern with the term is *For a philosophy of the responsible act* (2010b), where he can see the Russian academic with the whole, with the complete word. Concerning the word’s aspect, Voloshinov elaborates on the daily enunciation in his *The Discourse in Life and the Discourse in Art* (s.d.). In Bakhtin and Voloshinov’s *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1999) we come across a discussion on the enunciation in its different aspects: ideological sign, world, anterior enunciation, dialogical/ monologic enunciation and other’s enunciation (SOUZA, 1999, p.85).

3 ANALYZIS OF THE CORPUS

From the observation of the table, in regard to our analysis, we took as reference the Teacher’s Textbook in which the subject was addressed in Unit III – Consumption; Chapter 3 – titled Advertising Language – between the trivial and the extraordinary.

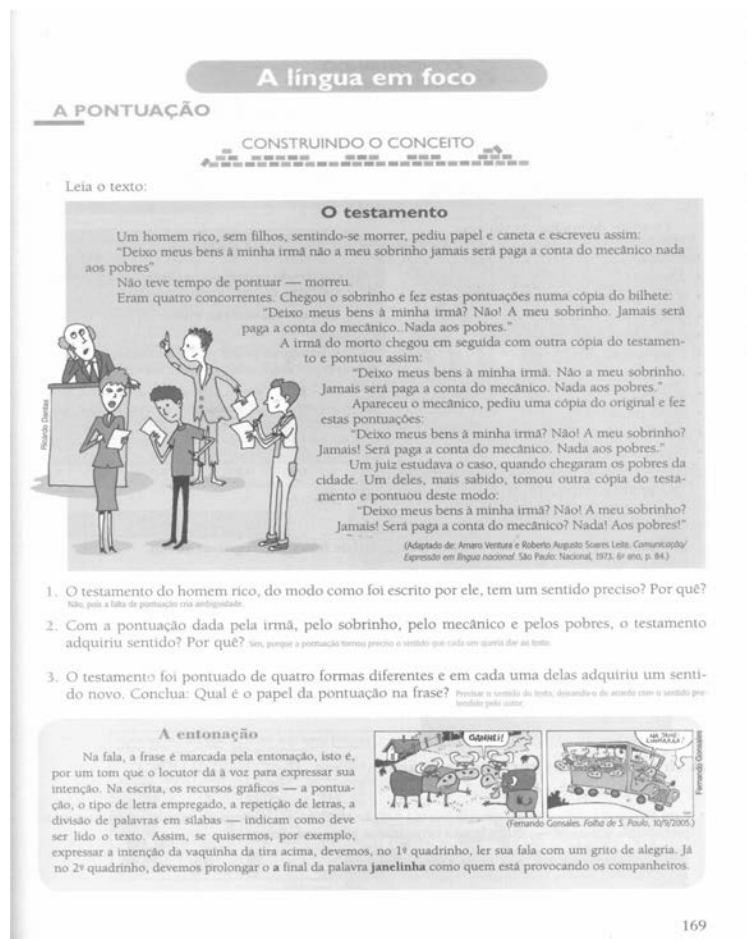


FIGURE 1 – *Português: linguagens*, 8º ano, p. 169

Examining the layout of this first page on the theme of Punctuation, it has the name of the section (*The Language in Focus*) highlighted on the top centre. Immediately below, on the left with smaller letters we have the indication of the subject (Punctuation).

Below that we have on the centre the heading of a section (*Constructing the Concept*).

To start off the authors chose a text for reading entitled "The Will", a 1973 text found in the book *Communication and expression of the national language*, adapted by Amaro Ventura e Roberto Augusto Soares Leite. The text is about a very rich man who while writing his will forgets to punctuate it. There were four people claiming the inheritance and, as each read and punctuated as it suited him, the meanings would change according to each person's interest.

After reading the text, the students are faced with three discursive questions that they must answer. In the teacher's book, we find the probable answer to each question in smaller blue letters. Such elements commonly express a more direct relation between the authors and the teachers who use the book.

In the first question (1 - *The rich man's will, as he wrote it, has an accurate meaning? Why?*) the teacher asks the students to reflect upon the absence of punctuation and justify their answer.

Regarding this question, there is the following answer suggestion: *No, because the lack of punctuation creates ambiguity*. It is only a suggestion and thus there can be different variations of answers since it is an open and discursive question to different interlocutors, in this case, students.

From our professional experience, some teachers usually take the suggestion given by the authors as one of the only possible answers, disregarding the fact that the answer has as first and direct interlocutor the teacher, aiming at helping him in his daily practice.

In the case of second question (2 - *With the punctuation given by the sister, by the nephew, by the mechanic and by the poor people, did the will gain sense? Why?*), the students are required to answer and to justify the meaning(s) the will gained from the use of punctuation made by each supposed heir.

From the suggestion of answer given for question two (*Yes, because the punctuation took the direction that each one wanted to give to the text*), we notice that the authors want that the pupils to reflect on the subjectivity of the sign and the effects of meaning that they can occur in the text from the use of punctuation. At this point, they should also reflect about the existing exchange between the signs, as well as the position that they occupy in the linguistic materiality.

The last question (3- *The will has been punctuated in four different ways and in each it acquired a new meaning. Make your conclusion: What is the role of punctuation in the sentence?*) requires the students to draw conclusions from the reading of the text and the first two questions regarding the role of punctuation.

In the suggestion given for the answer to the third question (*Pinpoint the meaning of the text according to what the author intended*) we see a ramification of the conception that that the authors want to instill in the pupils, associating the use of punctuation to the discourse subjects and their interests, setting aside the initial association of the use of certain signs to the basic elements of the sentence and their various syntactic nomenclatures.

At no moment of the creation of the questions or in those suggestions of answers, do we find any association with syntactic terms and its nomenclatures. In this way, the authors initiate the approach on Punctuation showing to the pupils the question of subjectivity, since the use of the signs depends in a great deal on the interlocutor and his subjective constitution (SILVA, 2009).

To finish off this first page on the approach to Punctuation, there is a feature orange box in which the authors discuss the subject of intonation. In a didactic way they try to explain the concept to an 8th grader, adding a comic by Fernando Gonsales in the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*.

The comic used to illustrate is composed by two pictures, in the first one we four small cows drawing lots, and one of them claims to have won. In the second picture we see all of the cows in a sort of a pickup truck and the one who had won is sitting in the passenger's seat yelling *Windowwww* to tease the others.

From the analysis of this set of initial activities, we verify that the creation of the didactic proposal is consistent with the aim to make the pupil reflect on the concept by means of a range of abilities: reading, observing, comparing, arguing, analyzing and/or inferring.

Bucking the weak point on working with the grammar explained by the evaluators of the collection in the PNLD Guide (2011-2013), , the authors do not seem to reproduce the strategies commonly used in normative-prescriptive grammars, at least when addressing the contents of Punctuation.

With respect to Image 2 - Alpha (2012), this is the only page of the Textbook in which it is possible to find a boarding to the punctuation.

1 Lê as três frases seguintes, fazendo a entoação indicada pelo sinal de pontuação.

Qual é a coisa qual é ela que se quebra ao falar.

Qual é a coisa qual é ela que se quebra ao falar?

Qual é a coisa qual é ela que se quebra ao falar,

1.1. Assinala o nome do sinal de pontuação que indica uma pergunta.

ponto final (.) ponto de interrogação (?) vírgula (,)

1.2. Assinala a função do ponto final (.).


O ponto final indica o fim de uma frase em que se afirma uma ou várias ideias.

O ponto final indica uma frase em que se exprime admiração, espanto, surpresa, ordem.

2 Lê o excerto seguinte:

E o rapaz a menina o polvo o caranguejo e o peixe foram pelos carreirinhos de água.

Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, A Menina do Mar, Porto Editora, 2012 (adaptado)



2.1. Reescreve a frase colocando o sinal de pontuação que separa cada uma das personagens. Atenção, onde houver a palavra "e" não deves colocar esse sinal de pontuação.

Sinais de pontuação

- Ponto final: assinala uma pausa longa. Indica que a frase termina.
- ?** Ponto de interrogação: assinala uma pergunta.
- ,** Vírgula: assinala uma pausa breve. Separa as palavras numa enumeração.
- !** Ponto de exclamação: aparece no final das frases que indicam emoções, prazer, surpresa.

FIGURE 2 – Alfa

When observing the page of the manual, we verify that there is a prominence to the signals of punctuation through a heading of a box of text in which there are definitions of period, interrogation mark, comma, exclamation mark. It is preceded by four exercises, in which the first establishes the relation between the Punctuation and Intonation. However, if the pupils do not to know the punctuation signs, they will not be capable of attributing the correct intonation to it (GUIMARÃES, 2002).

Later, and along with the use, the pupils will have to designate, of between two possibilities, which are the functions of the period.

The last exercise reports to the use of the comma in an enumeration situation, and other contexts of use of the comma are not authorized. The question arises: Is the comma only used in an enumeration situation? We know that it is not. But what will the student think when he reflects on the use of the comma?

The occurrences that we mention do not constitute, in our understanding, significant learning outcomes, because students are towards decontextualized exercises therefore they do not articulate the exercises themselves. It increases, still, that the comma definition figures incomplete, because it only quantifies the duration of the pause, omitting the intonation that confers meaning to the text. Thought we are towards a normative teaching, in which it is not possible to observe adequate trainings of the possibilities uses of this punctuation mark.

4 FINAL REMARKS

After analyzing the presented examples, it seems that in the first textbook the exploration of the written activities leads to stimulation and reflection on the constitution of directions caused by the use of the different signals of punctuation. It is verified, however, an opposing situation in the second textbook that it turns possible to lead the students to mistakes and confusions of linguistic nature. In the

analyzed page, in the first textbook, it is observed the didactic proposal as positive. Authors exemplify the content from a story and explicit to the students that signals of punctuation do not possess crystallized rules, that the interchange of signals and its syntactic position are so important that can change de meaning of speech. However, it fits to stand out that the practical of reducing the use of the punctuation to the syntax is to limit the importance of this content, getting, this content, less importance.

On the presentation of this content, the authors of both collection of textbooks had opted to concentrating the exploration of the punctuation marks only in one book. This characteristic makes to reflect on the relevance of this strategy, if it is possible to say, and its possible effect in the learning of students.

It is clear for us that the use of the textbook does not excuse the orienting presence of the teacher, however, in the first manual, it is possible to understand that the activities of the textbook expects that students have certain autonomy. In this way, as it happens in some textbooks, the structure of its activities depends on the teaching accompaniment during all application process of the activity, the first analyzed textbook seems to structuralize questions that can be answered individually by the students, conducting themselves to a pedagogy for autonomy (VIEIRA, 2001).

Thus, one perceives that the enunciative-discursive boarding makes to emerge social voices of the sender and the possible interlocutors, not only in relation to the immediate context, but also with the dialogic character, once they are guided by the bakhtinian rules.

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