

THE MEME GENRE AS DIDACTIC MATERIAL IN PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE CLASSES <https://doi.org/10.63330/aurumpub.010-009>**Wemerson Simões¹****ABSTRACT**

This article is an excerpt from one of our studies, developed as part of our specialization in Informatics in Education at the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo. It focused on the use of the meme genre in a second-year high school classroom. The objective was to examine how this genre, part of students' everyday technological experiences, can be used in Portuguese language classes to encourage reading, comprehension, and, most importantly, text production. The activity's theme was "pesticides and their problems in society," a topic closely related to the rural realities of the Escola Família Agrícola de Olivânia and most of its students. The activity revealed that the meme genre, a result of technology, attracts significant attention from students and can be usefully used in native language classes, since it is present in their reality and is capable of constructing and conveying meaning. At the end of the activity, we found that textual genres arising from new technologies cannot be left aside, as they are capable of strengthening students' connections with what is offered to them.

Keywords: Portuguese Language; Genres; Meme; Pesticides.

¹ Master in Linguistic Studies
Federal University of Espírito Santo
E-mail: wemersonsimoes@gmail.com



INTRODUCTION

Sírio Possenti (2000) states that it is not uncommon for Portuguese language teachers to encounter students struggling in their classes, nor is it unusual to hear that some students find the content boring or even unnecessary. This perception is shaped by various factors, one of which is the use of normative grammar and texts disconnected from the learners' everyday lives, treating our language as unique and immutable. Furthermore, the offering of disconnected and decontextualized texts, detached from lived experiences, further complicates their application in the classroom.

Another contributing factor to student disengagement is the resources used. According to Caiado (2011), society is undergoing significant technological evolution, leading to new means of communication. Often, teachers do not take advantage of these changes, whether due to lack of resources in schools, insufficient training, or lack of pedagogical support, leaving them reliant on outdated methods. Therefore, using resources and content aligned with technological changes can be a way to encourage student participation.

Within this context, the meme is a discursive genre produced with digital technology resources and constantly disseminated through them. Its widespread circulation makes it popular and routine, easily recognized by social media users. Typically, it arises from a socially relevant event and is constructed as humorous texts, sometimes with critical reflections. The semiosis of this type of production is based on a relationship between context, writing, and image, making it a way to construct meaning and express opinions.

The widespread circulation of memes is fueled by social media users, where adolescents spend much of their time. Thus, they are democratic texts that address various themes and issues, always through succinct texts and representative images. They are often how young people (and people in general) access societal issues in the given context, and this, combined with their broad dissemination potential, makes them important tools for constructing meaning and conveying ideas. The fact that this genre is an integral part of society's daily life makes it pedagogically significant.

In this sense, we first provide a brief conceptualization of what a genre is and how it functions in society. Bakhtin (2003) already proposed in his theory of discursive genres that language reflects the environment and, for this reason, adapts to it. Marcuschi (2003, 2008, 2010) built upon this to conceptualize his theory of textual genres. Therefore, our conceptualization is based on these two authors.

Another factor that cannot be overlooked when discussing the meme genre is the interactive construction between image, writing, and other textual resources, studied in multimodality theories. This relationship is important because elements such as color, font size, margin positioning, and other factors also carry significant semantic weight for the genre to achieve its purpose. To analyze these factors, we



will use the Grammar of Visual Design by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). Additionally, we will examine how the genre can be validly and importantly used in the classroom.

Based on these conceptualizations, we will demonstrate examples of the meme development and production process carried out by students.

DISCURSIVE AND TEXTUAL GENRES: SOME CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

Mikhail Bakhtin, in his book *Estética da criação verbal* (2003), considered one of the most important studies on discourse genres, asserts that human activities differ according to the social spheres to which they belong, and that language and its use are tied to these spheres. Thus, discourse reflects the purposes and conditions of its producer, and every form of communication is subject to numerous variations. These variations are implicitly related to those involved in the discourse and the environment in which it is situated.

To the numerous varieties of produced discourse, Bakhtin assigns the term "genres of discourse." According to him, all our utterances follow a standard form, a relatively stable structure. This may occur intentionally or through implicit relationships between the produced discourse and its producer. It is important to note that a discourse is a sequence of one or more utterances, and according to Bakhtin, the concept of discourse genre refers not only to oral discourse but also to written discourse. According to Bakhtin, the use of language:

[...] takes place in the form of utterances (oral and written), concrete and unique, which emanate from participants in one or another sphere of human activity. The utterance reflects the specific conditions and purposes of each of these spheres, not only through its thematic content and verbal style—that is, through the selection made from the resources of the language: lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources—but also, and above all, through its compositional construction. These three elements (thematic content, style, and compositional construction) merge inseparably in the whole of the utterance, and all are marked by the specificity of a communication sphere. (BAKHTIN, 2003, p. 179)

For the philosopher, the social environment is extremely important in determining the structure of the genre, since each sphere in which discourse is produced elaborates a relatively stable sequence.

Thus, socio-communicative interaction enables the speaker to easily determine which discourse genre to use and how it should be structured at the moment of communication. This occurs because genres are:

[...] constituted in a certain way, with a specific function, in given spheres of human activity, which makes it possible to (re)cognize and produce them whenever necessary. If this were not the case, there would be a predominance of individual and individualizing production devoid of the traits of socially constructed work, which would greatly hinder the process of reading and comprehension [...]. (KOCH & ELIAS, 2013, p. 106)



Koch and Elias (2013) agree with Bakhtin, stating that the composition of discourse genres follows a structure that varies according to the function for which the discourse is produced. Thus, the discourse genre “is constituted under different formats, contents, and styles, inseparable at the moment of constitution” (p. 106). The social sphere in which the discourse is produced guides this construction.

Textual genres thus emerge from discursive domains (journalistic, religious, legal, etc.), since:

all human activities are related to the use of language, which is realized through utterances [...] that emanate from participants in one or another sphere of human activity [...]. And with this theoretical position, we arrive at the union of genre with its social involvement and its relation to human activities. (KOCH & ELIAS, 2008, p. 155)

Koch and Elias affirm that textual genres are interconnected with social practices and sociocultural knowledge, although they may undergo thematic, compositional, and stylistic changes. All genres possess styles, which are not fixed or rigid instruments. The authors explain that the sociocultural life of authors is important in their productions; therefore, the textual genre is not defined by its format, but by its function (2013, p. 113). To claim otherwise contradicts the sociocultural competencies proposed by Bakhtin.

Still within this context, Marcuschi (2008) emphasizes that textual genres arise from demands, from diverse and different purposes in the social spheres in which they are produced. This justifies their diversification. Thus, those who produce a text structure it according to their objective. According to Marcuschi (2008), discourse production is considered relatively stable, as it often follows the same parameters; therefore, social relations and contact with these modalities enable recognition of the structure to be used.

Since language is a form of social interaction, constructed by the social sphere of its user, the choice of textual genre occurs at the moment of its production. For this reason, often during the process of constructing the utterance, this structuring is not perceived by the producer, as it occurs intuitively. As discourses are created and formed from relatively stable sequences, as explained by Bakhtin (2003), it is up to the producer to discover which one is most appropriate for the textual genre to fulfill its purpose. This search is one of the reasons for variations in genre structures.

Within these considerations, we cannot overlook the fact that the meme is a product of the emergence of new technologies and their constant use in society. This genre, when disseminated through media detached from new communication channels, loses its semantic load. Therefore, its medium is extremely important in constructing meaning. Separating the meme from its medium—the digital environment—is akin to issuing a medical certificate in the form of a song, or producing a sales contract through a drawing.

According to Barreto (2015), the concept of meme was introduced by Richard Dawkins in 1976. For its conceptualization, a comparison was made between cultural evolution and genetic evolution to



assert that a meme would be a cultural gene replicated through interaction. Thus, the meme would be a unit of information diffusion and cultural transmission. Meme construction, therefore, arises from the replicability of social interactions and behaviors.

Dawkins (apud BARRETO, 2015) bases the meme evolution process on three fundamental elements: mutation, natural selection, and heredity. The first considers the meme's ability to undergo small changes each time it is passed on, with more changes occurring over time; the second element arises from the idea that some memes attract more attention and are therefore replicated longer; the third element posits that the meme undergoes variation and recombination from an original idea, which remains present throughout its mutations. From these elements, the author asserts that memes compete for survival.

Relating Dawkins' concept to Bakhtin's (2003) considerations on language, it is possible to understand the traits that characterize the meme, the focus of our study. Barreto (2015, p. 31) states:

[...] memes are understood as ideas, jokes, games, or behaviors that spread through viral replication, characterized by the repetition of a basic formal model from which people can produce different versions of the same meme. Thus, memes differ from viral videos because they presume that, as the meme spreads through the network, altered versions of the original idea emerge.

The author also notes that the meme is strengthened by technological resources, as they offer ease of production and dissemination—factors conducive to its use in the classroom. She also notes that memes are often part of jokes, games, and humor, another excellent pedagogical attraction.

Although the meme genre is new, it resembles others already in existence, such as infographics, flowcharts, or even billboards. This proximity reveals the presence of Dawkins' concept of heredity and Bakhtin's (2003) concept of secondary genre. A defining feature of these genres is the meaning produced through the interaction of present modalities.

MULTIMODAL GENRES

Many genres associated with new technologies incorporate various resources in the construction of meaning. Just as with other textual genres, these structures draw upon different modalities of language, such as images, sounds, gestures, etc. These are known as multimodal genres.

The texts used in everyday society are models: products of interactions and relationships among diverse social groups and contexts. As Bakhtin (2003) stated, if a completely new genre were used at every moment, communication would become practically impossible. From this perspective, we cannot ignore the emergence of numerous textual genres arising from a society in constant transformation of its communication media.



It is common for genres to emerge from new technologies. Considering textual genre as something concrete, recurrent, and socially rooted (MARCUSCHI, 2008), this issue becomes even more evident. New genres are communicative instruments with specific purposes, developed to fulfill particular functions; they are mediated by digital communication and, as such, evolve alongside it.

Marcuschi (2004) emphasizes that the many emerging genres share similarities and often spark debate regarding their impact on language and social life. Viewing textual genres as historical and social phenomena, we can observe that new communication proposals influence language use while also being the result of its evolving usage. These genres “radically transform existing genres and develop some truly new ones. However, [...] the internet and all genres linked to it are fundamentally based on writing. On the internet, writing remains essential.” (MARCUSCHI, 2008, p. 198).

Language is considered a living entity that evolves with a constantly changing society. That is why we no longer speak or write as people did thirty years ago. This social dynamism leads to the emergence of new words, while those no longer in use fade from recognition among younger generations. These are ongoing changes in language since its inception. Alongside these variations, new genres and modalities also emerge (MARCUSCHI, 2008). In today’s context, filled with technological advancements, these linguistic variations accompany such developments. An example of this is the social media platform Twitter. There, each message can contain a maximum of 143 characters, which encourages the use of abbreviations to shorten words—an accepted norm within that platform. This creates a new modality. Additionally, Twitter messages include other features such as profile pictures, usernames, timestamps, etc.; these elements also constitute a new textual genre. This example supports Marcuschi’s (2008) assertion, as the essential component of the genre remains writing, albeit in a different modality. What must not be overlooked is the need for reflection on language, its genres, and its modalities, since these numerous changes and variations also produce new types of readers. Schools must not remain bound to disciplinary approaches from decades past, as they often do, but must instead adapt to this new reality (DOMINGOS et al., n.d.).

In its use alongside new technologies, Portuguese language emerges with different modalities, no longer confined to formal standard language. In digital communication, resources that were not available in face-to-face, telephone, or letter-based communication become common: sound, image, layout, typography, and other forms of meaning-making. Dionísio comments on these issues:

“[...] it is very easy to create [...] and disseminate such creations to a wide audience. All the resources used in constructing textual genres contribute rhetorically to the construction of meaning. Increasingly, we observe the combination of visual material with writing; we undoubtedly live in an increasingly visual society.” (DIONÍSIO, 2008, p. 131)



Dionísio's observations are, in a way, supported by Bazerman (2011), who states that each text and each genre involves a set of relationships, positions, and social roles recognized by those involved. Thus, he explains that each textual genre is produced through a dialectical interaction among members of a specific social group—what Bakhtin (2003) calls a sphere.

Bakhtin (2003) argues that genres vary according to the social spheres to which they belong. Each group produces texts according to its specific needs. This notion aligns with Marcuschi (2002), who describes a textual genre as a tool. In a hospital, for example, medical reports and prescriptions are common texts that serve the context in which they are used; they cannot be effectively applied in every social communication sphere, as they are laden with resources and artifacts that construct their meaning. Considering the genre studied here—the meme—other aspects of its multimodality must not be overlooked.

A FREIREAN PROPOSAL

Wall (2009) states that in some classrooms, the idea of language as a system of fixed and immutable values still prevails—a rather problematic and closed perspective that disregards language as something living, evolving alongside human and societal changes. The author emphasizes that this limited view of language teaching often results in students becoming disinterested in the content offered to them. A clear example is the frequent use of argumentative-essay writing activities, which are often bound to specific patterns of normative grammar that define what is right or wrong. Based on these observations, Wall argues that language teaching should strive to reflect and demonstrate how language functions, rather than presenting isolated excerpts disconnected from students' realities.

New genres, especially those used in digital environments, possess semantic constructions that can be explored and should have a place in the classroom, just like traditional genres. However, due to a lack of training or pedagogical acceptance in their work environments, many teachers remain tied to traditional teaching methods and normative views of language, avoiding these newly emerged genres. This attachment to traditional views of language and established genres is not a new issue and does not occur only in Portuguese language teaching (VALADARES, 2012). The ideological teaching approach proposed by Paulo Freire in the 1960s addresses this issue and serves as the foundation for numerous educational studies.

In *Pedagogia do Oprimido* [Pedagogy of the Oppressed] (2011), Paulo Freire asserts that teaching is not merely the transmission of knowledge but the creation of opportunities for its construction. With this proposal, Freire suggests that educators must possess critical awareness and recognize that their teaching should contribute to the development of individuals within society—another reason to understand language and how it functions.



To reach this idea, Freire explains that teaching is an exchange of knowledge in which students are active participants, as the knowledge they possess is essential to the process. He argues that students must study content that is part of their lives, as this is where their interests and needs arise. Such engagement is fostered through students' recognition of what is present in their daily lives.

From this perspective, Freire emphasizes that the educator is not the sole holder of knowledge. In the learning process, there is a mutual exchange of knowledge in which everyone can contribute, and the teacher's role is to organize ideas and relate them to each participant's social context. Freire assigns to the teacher the responsibility of interacting and promoting interaction within the teaching and learning process.

Freire also states that teachers must possess a range of knowledge beyond content expertise, including political and social awareness of all involved. He argues that only then will educators be able to recognize what and how each issue can be addressed. One of the key elements Freire works with is the social dimension.

Freire's stance on social issues stems from a belief that education is a tool for action, capable of driving change. Through educational proposals and the development of critical thinking, individuals can identify what changes are necessary to live in their reality. Freire (2001, p. 51) affirms that "every educational practice involves a theoretical stance on the part of the educator," warning that this leads to "a conception of human beings and the world." Based on these insights, Freire aims to show that content offered mechanically and without connection to students' realities can lead to rejection and learning difficulties. Such content may not contribute to the development of students' critical thinking. He further explains:

"For me, the difference and the 'distance' between naivety and critical thinking, between knowledge gained through pure experience and that resulting from methodologically rigorous procedures, is not a rupture but a progression. This progression—not rupture—occurs as naive curiosity, without ceasing to be curiosity, becomes critical. By becoming critical, and thus, I repeat, epistemological curiosity, it becomes methodologically rigorous in its approach to the object, lending greater accuracy to its findings." (FREIRE, 2011, p. 31–32)

Reflecting on the creation of a critical individual through language study from a Freirean perspective, it becomes clear that students should not be separated from the social and ideological issues of their world. When presented with classroom content, students must be able to recognize it so they can understand why it is necessary to learn. Language cannot be viewed merely as a set of syntactic structures without considering other factors. In fact, when classes are based solely on such structures, we must not overlook the difficulties many students face with topics like syntactic analysis, pronoun placement, and interpretation of textual genres that are disconnected from their realities, such as letters. These difficulties are directly related to the fact that such content is not part of their lived experience and, therefore, is not



recognized. Freire proposes that the material offered should go beyond simply following the curriculum and should aim to foster critical thinking.

For Freire (2011), the first element necessary for developing critical thinking is the student's connection to the content offered. Once students perceive that the content is part of their reality, it ceases to be seen in isolation. This recognition is the driving force behind reflection and discussion, highlighting its importance in the interaction between school and society. A text production activity, from this perspective, cannot be solely focused on pre-established grammatical norms; it must also relate to content and other aspects of students' lived experiences.

As Freire (2011) affirms, the teaching process must be embedded in a broad context, addressing the social, linguistic, and cultural issues of those involved. In the case of Portuguese language teaching, textual genres can be used for this purpose, as they are products of social spheres and emerge and evolve according to reality.

GRAMMAR OF VISUAL DESIGN

Textual genres emerge and evolve based on socio-cultural needs and, therefore, can vary significantly. The rise of information and communication technologies has favored the emergence of short texts, in which various resources are used to convey maximum meaning in minimal time and space (MARCUSCHI, 2008).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2007) assert that the combination of different resources in the construction of a text renders it multimodal. For the authors, this term is used to represent the various semiotic modes that compose a text (image, graph, table, sound, etc.). Each of these components plays a role in the text creation process and, for this reason, contributes to the construction of overall meaning. Texts with a greater emphasis on written language, such as reports, statements, and articles, tend to focus more on verbal language and its construction, and thus follow a distinct encoding process. However, genres linked to new technologies incorporate resources and modalities derived from these technologies. A clear example of this is the infographic.

Constructed with a predominance of non-verbal language, the infographic genre aims to facilitate understanding of the subject it addresses. It is an example of a multimodal text, as its semantic load is built through the integration of various modes of construction. Hemais (n.d., p. 01) proposes that multimodality:

[...] is understood [...] as the co-presence of various modes of language, with the modes interacting in the construction of meanings in social communication. What is important in this view of language use is that the modes function together, with each mode contributing according to its capacity to generate meaning.



The author further states that human communication is essentially multimodal, since semiotic modes do not function in isolation but rather in a process of interaction and meaning-making. This is why selection occurs during the text construction process.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2007) emphasize that the choice of each mode is not random. It occurs because each resource involved has its own limitations and possibilities. The text producer makes choices deemed necessary and/or capable of helping the text achieve its intended purpose. This assertion aligns with Marcuschi's (2008) notion of textual genre and Bazerman's (2011) concept of social relations. Marcuschi explains that a genre is produced according to its objective; this is the key factor in its formation. Bazerman states that all discursive production is a product of the sphere in which it was created; thus, it cannot be analyzed without considering its context.

In addition to these factors raised by Kress and van Leeuwen, it is important to highlight that meaning construction through the relationship between written modality and other present modalities is also shaped by the interpretation of each component. Each part contributes to the constitution of the text as a whole.

Multimodality arises from the richness of modalities within the text's structure, as the variation of modalities becomes essential in meaning construction. If we analyze, even the meanings in a conversation between parent and child are composed of at least two language modalities: gestures and speech. Different cultures, with different gestures, may interpret messages in different ways. Modalities and their social frameworks are extremely necessary for understanding a text.

Recognizing that the modalities present in a text's composition are indispensable for its comprehension, Kress and van Leeuwen (2007) propose the Multimodal Discourse Theory. Based on the notion of textual multimodality, the authors observe that the constitution of the modes that compose each genre follows certain criteria, and that each mode carries its own semantic load. In the image of an advertisement, for example, one must consider size, color, its social sphere's semantic load, font, and the network it may form with other modalities. Clearly, these same factors are also connected to other modalities present in the meme genre.

The Multimodal Discourse Theory is grounded in the Grammar of Visual Design. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2007), just as texts possess a linguistic structure, multimodal genres and the images used within them do as well. The Grammar of Visual Design is divided into a scale of details intended to facilitate the analysis and observation of images used in the communication process and their importance for text comprehension. For the study of a multimodal text, the authors understand that this structure must be observed, as the modality with non-verbal resources is related to other modalities present in the text. The authors subdivide the compositional structure into three systems: Informational



Value (the image and layout of the meme); Saliency (the observation of irregular surfaces on a page); Framing (the organization of modalities used in the text and how they assist in constructing its semiosis).

THE MEME IN THE CLASSROOM

One of the problems encountered by students in learning Portuguese is its focus on normative grammar (POSSENTI, 2000). Some students claim that what the teacher aims to teach is not part of their daily lives, which leads to a lack of recognition of the need to learn such content. This lack of recognition is one of the factors contributing to difficulty and demotivation in Portuguese language classes at times.

Breaking away from the customary praxis in native language teaching can occur through the use of language in context. Language accompanies life situations, and contexts give rise to different forms of expression. Language teaching must be connected to these factors so that students themselves can recognize it in their daily lives (MARCUSCHI, 2008).

Numerous technological advances in communication continue to emerge, bringing with them new forms of expression represented by new genres. On the other hand, some formats are gradually abandoned, forgotten, or rarely used, and these are often the focus of native language teaching (KOCH & ELIAS, 2013), which contradicts Freirean educational perspectives. Today, smartphones are in students' hands most of the day and night, serving as constant tools for reading and writing; yet, they rarely have a didactic function in most classrooms. If students' difficulty in learning their native language stems from not recognizing what the teacher presents as part of their lives, the question arises: wouldn't it be valid for classes to work with something that is part of their daily lives and interests? Based on this proposal, we developed the idea of using memes—products of new digital communication forms—in Portuguese language classes.

Presenting students with genres unrelated to their reality is something that must be reconsidered. Teachers must realize that textual production cannot be limited to syntactic and orthographic norms of the language, but must also address current issues and social contexts (MARCUSCHI, 2008). Thus, our proposal to work with memes emerged.

The school where the activity was conducted is the first in Latin America to implement the Pedagogy of Alternation. In this model, students spend one period at home and another at school, and these timeframes are called sessions: one is academic, and the other is socio-familial. Activities are sent home, and students return with them to school, where they are further developed. This methodology provides tools that allow students to bring to school reports and issues from their social and family realities.

The division of periods aims to ensure that students bring empirical knowledge to school and return home with it discussed and developed. The proposal seeks to show students that their lived



experiences are valuable and complement academic knowledge—and vice versa. This approach aligns with Freire (2011), who asserts that teaching is not about transferring knowledge but creating possibilities for its construction and production. Considering the aspects offered by the Pedagogy of Alternation, the textual production activity also embraced this Freirean ideology.

The activity was conducted with a second-year high school class, with students around 16 years old. The initial plan was to work over six lessons. The first two were dedicated to explaining the meme genre and relevant features of its constitution. This point is crucial because, as Marcuschi (2008) states, we have a natural recognition of a text. We understand its function in society, as it “circulates in recurrent and specific environments.”

The six lessons were divided into four at school and two during the alternation period, when students were at home. In the first school session, students were asked what they knew about memes. Most recognized the genre, but none could explain its characteristics or components. Important features of the text were then explained, such as the relationship between images and text. This is essential, as verbal and non-verbal messages are the two main modalities of the genre. During this session, students were taken to the multimedia room and shown numerous examples of the text.

During the explanation of meme formation, students showed great interest and recognized the genre. Another factor discussed with them was the chosen image. The textual genre arises from a fact considered important to the social environment. According to Barreto (2015), this factor generates meme replicability, as its production is tied to social values.

After the initial discussion about the proposed genre and the activity plan, students were taken to the computer lab for the production phase. The problem that arose was that, because students recognized the meme, I assumed they had already understood its structural elements. We overlooked Bakhtin’s (2003) warning that communication becomes impossible if a discourse is not recognized. Thus, while students knew what a meme was and recognized the genre due to its societal function, we failed to realize that this did not guarantee their ability to produce one.

This issue led to a new explanation of the textual genre. According to Barreto (2015, p. 79), successful meme construction requires “sharing of prior cultural knowledge.” For replication to occur, also proposed by the author, there must be a “space in the social context in which it is inserted” (p. 79). In other words, the modalities used in meme construction must have representation in the social sphere.

During the first production session, one observed issue was that students, with internet access, became overwhelmed by the vast array of available images. This, combined with their initial difficulty in constructing the genre, led them to believe that creating a meme was simply about placing an image to illustrate the text. The relationship between existing modalities was incomplete. Upon realizing this, a



second lesson was needed to re-explain the necessary relationships, emphasizing the historical-social semantic load that images carry.

In this second session, we again explained to students the semantic load an image brings to text construction and the importance of carefully choosing both components. As an example, I asked students about the reputation of football player Neymar. Most responded that he is known as a “diver.” The boys, especially, said the player is called this by many fans because he is often seen on the ground during matches, sometimes pretending to be fouled or exaggerating contact. Since students were in the multimedia room, I asked them to search for memes using the player’s image. Afterward, I asked them to observe that Neymar’s image in the texts did not merely illustrate the message, but that the idea of him “diving” was embedded in the meme’s message. Then, I gave another example.

After the football player's explanation, I asked the class to search for memes about Formula 1 driver Rubens Barrichello. I asked if they understood, and most said no. I then explained that due to certain events in Formula 1 years ago, the Brazilian driver became the subject of jokes in some circles. His reputation in those contexts is tied to being second place or arriving late. After this explanation, nearly all students understood the memes they viewed.

We used these examples to help students understand how the two modalities present in the text are crucial in constructing meaning. They realized that the memes they viewed would not convey the same message if they featured a different player or driver. After this explanation, students resumed their text productions—with different results.

The analysis was divided into two parts. The first includes texts that can be considered satisfactory, based on Barreto’s (2015) conceptions of the meme genre. The second includes the students’ initial productions, when they still had difficulty perceiving the meaning constructed through the modalities present in the text. In the first group, student productions are categorized according to the image used.

The first productions used images of President Dilma Rousseff. Text comprehension depends on the social relationships of both the producer and the reader. At the time of the activity, Brazil was experiencing a political crisis, and the president’s image was frequently circulated in the media. Through the memes produced, we observed the relationship between image and text, as well as the students’ political stance.

Figure 1. Original text in Portuguese (Brazil): “Pesticides harm the skin.”



Figure 2. Original text in Portuguese (Brazil): “The problem is the tomato.”



Figure 1 shows the president with a distressed expression. Being a 68-year-old woman, she has natural dermatological marks. The written modality states, “pesticides harm the skin,” a factual statement that gives the image a pejorative tone linked to age. The image constructs meaning based on aesthetics and appearance, implying that the president is somehow associated with pesticides—an undesirable connection. In this way, it suggests that she is somehow associated with pesticides, which is not a good thing. The second image is loaded with irony, since the blame for the use of pesticides does not lie with the tomato, but with the producer of the food. Moreover, the tomato is not even the food that contains the highest amount of pesticides, as was explained. This image also brings an aspect that cannot be overlooked: color. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2007), color carries a load of meanings in the social environment and is therefore very important in constructing the meaning of a genre.

Figure 2 shows the president in a position that appears to be explaining something, which gives the message a significant semantic weight. Common sense says that the tomato is the food that uses the most pesticides in its production process. However, this is incorrect information, and since the students in their technical course have access to this data, they based their activity on that knowledge. The online magazine *Globo Rural* published, in 2011, a report analyzing pesticides in food conducted by the National Health Surveillance Agency (Anvisa). In this report, the ten food products that most consume pesticides are: bell pepper, strawberry, cucumber, lettuce, carrot, pineapple, beet, kale, papaya, and tomato; and the

students used this knowledge in their production. The red color present in this figure, besides making the text more visible, is the color that represents the tomato. Once again, the semantic representation is built through color, as affirmed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2007).

Figure 3. Original text in Portuguese (Brazil): “Organic products.”



Figure 4. Original text in Portuguese (Brazil): “Pesticides; Organic.”



While the first two constructions imply a critique of the president, the next ones take a different perspective. In both images, Dilma Rousseff is associated with organic products—those that are better, healthier, and beneficial. Unlike Figures 1 and 2, in Figure 3, the president appears with a happy expression, making a gesture of support. It can be interpreted as a message encouraging the use of organic products because they are good. The face of the president used in the first figure shows a tense or anxious person. However, the one used in Figure 3 does not show that. The choice of this image is meant to support the idea of support for organic products, a proposal of the school. Kress and van Leeuwen (2007) affirm that the use of an image in a multimodal text is only valid if it dialogues with the other modalities present.

Looking at Figure 4, we can revisit the observations of Bakhtin (2003) and later Marcuschi (2008), that language is a product of the social sphere. Brazil is undergoing political turmoil related to the impeachment, in which part of society supports it and another part claims it is a political coup. One of the individuals involved in this supposed coup is Vice President Michel Temer, who appears in the meme. Furthermore, an individual who does not understand the situation will have difficulty comprehending the genre produced, as proposed by Barreto (2015).

Figure 5. Original text in Portuguese (Brazil): “They didn’t count on my PPEs.”



Figure 6. Original text in Portuguese (Brazil): “Chapolim, he didn’t use PPEs.”



Figures 5 and 6 were chosen for using the image of a character very present in memes and other multimodal genres circulating on the internet: Chapolin Colorado. Both texts address the same topic: personal protective equipment, known as PPEs.

Throughout the technical course, the school does not propose that pesticides cannot or should never be used. It states that they should be avoided, reduced, and used only when absolutely necessary. But a technician must be aware that they are harmful to the health not only of those who consume the food with them but also of those who apply them to the crops. For this reason, students must know how to use them, always seeking resources aimed at protecting their health—PPEs.

Chapolin Colorado carries the image of a clumsy hero, a success across many generations, and it is rare for someone to see him and not recognize him. This likely motivated the students to choose this image for constructing the genre. As Barreto (2015) states, for a text belonging to this genre to be produced and understood, it is necessary that both the text and the image carry a load of meaning with significant social representation (characters, famous people, events, etc.).

Chapolin is a well-known character from a TV show of the same name. Moreover, he has a famous phrase in his episodes: “They didn’t count on my cleverness,” always used when he solves a problem. This phrase was used in the textual modality of Figure 5, adapted to: “They didn’t count on my PPEs!” This theoretical construction aligns with Dawkins’ theory of meme heredity (apud Barreto, 2015), which states that the text arises from the recombination of an original idea, and even after it has changed, it remains recognizable. While Figure 5 gives a positive message to those who use safety equipment, Figure 6 proposes the opposite.

In Figure 6, the character played by Rubén Aguirre, famous for being Professor Girafales, explains to Chapolin why he is on the ground: the lack of PPE use. Just like the previous figures, these two Chapolin memes propose two points of view on the topic: using and not using the equipment. On the other hand, from a more reflective perspective, it is possible to infer that the school is forming students with a more critical awareness of rural life, as they seem at least minimally aware of an important issue in this context.

Figure 7. Original text in Portuguese (Brazil): “When somebody says the food is organic.”



Figure 7. Original text in Portuguese (Brazil): “When somebody tells me the food is organic!”



This critical perspective is reinforced in Figure 7. There is enormous difficulty in producing 100% organic food, and that is why it is expensive. In addition to the non-use of pesticides directly, there are factors related to the soil, neighboring properties, the harvesting process, transportation, and processing. For this reason, obtaining an organic product certification is a laborious process, and there is not a large

quantity of such products when compared to conventional ones. With this knowledge acquired in their technical training, the student created a meme in which the image of the smiling then-President of the United States ironically refers to the production of this type of food.

Even if the reader is unaware of the difficulty in producing organic food, the structure of the meme helps construct this meaning. This is because the image of Barack Obama laughing is a widely known meme used to convey messages of irony and sarcasm. Combined with the image, which already carries this semantic load, the phrase referencing organic products ends up constructing a meaning that can be recognized by readers familiar with the meme in question. An individual who does not possess understanding of any of the modalities present in the text will not be able to comprehend it, since “in the current view, the reader is not a conscious subject and owner of the text, but is inserted in the social reality and must operate on contents and sociocultural contexts with which they deal permanently” (MARCUSCHI, 2008, p. 231).

The use of the runner Usain Bolt in the construction of the text in Figure 8 was very interesting; it shows that the students have their own awareness that organic products are healthier and, for that reason, they want them on their tables. Placing the runner alongside the message “when they tell me the food is organic” conveys the idea that one must hurry to get it—therefore, it is something good. Once again, the production shows that the school’s proposal is gradually being embraced by its students. Kress’s (2010) statement about the social relationships of those who read the text is important. Knowing that he is a runner evokes the idea of wanting to reach something; recognizing who the athlete is and the semantic load Usain Bolt carries regarding human speed further enhances this semantic construction.

Although they recognized themselves as readers, the students had great difficulty in producing. At that moment, they thought the image was simply a complement to the text, and not that both parts were of extreme importance in a multimodal way. Moreover, there was a lack of concern on their part regarding details related to the compositional structure proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen, such as font size, color, and placement.

Looking at the first eight productions in our analysis, we can affirm that they represent the multimodal textual genre of our research: the meme. However, as already mentioned, the students’ ability to construct it did not occur at first. Due to a lack of recognition of the linguistic artifacts of the genre, the students believed that creating a meme was simply about illustrating the message they wanted to convey, and they had not yet realized that meaning construction in the text is achieved through multimodal convergence in a unified form within the meme. The next eight analyses are examples of this failure in production.

During the analysis of the first eight texts, we noticed that the genre used multimodality to construct itself. Even though the theme of the activity—pesticides—had been previously shared with the

students, the memes they created were not solely based on it. The images of the President, Chapolin, Obama, and Bolt were extremely important for understanding the final product. Our caveat is that, semiotically speaking, the visual modality isolated from the written modality has no direct connection with pesticides and the issues related to them; of course, the visual modality in these examples belongs to our social sphere, and therefore they are effectively constitutive of the meme genre—which did not happen in the next examples.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is a vast and ongoing academic discussion regarding the use of textual genres in native language teaching, and the consensus among participants is clear: they are in favor. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to encounter teaching materials and lesson plans focused exclusively on normative grammar.

Sírio Possenti, in his book *Por que (não) ensinar gramática na escola* (2000), argues that this occurs because the role of the school is to teach the standard language. He further states that teaching is often laden with political and prejudiced values. As a result, classrooms demand a language used by a minority of the population—those privileged individuals who have had access to education, culture, books, and the internet. Consequently, most of the population is expected to master linguistic artifacts that are not part of their everyday lives. Possenti also raises another issue: the sociolinguistic diversity in Brazil, which reinforces his initial argument.

Although Possenti highlights these points, his work does not aim to demonstrate that normative grammar is taught incorrectly or that it should not be taught. Rather, he seeks to offer suggestions for improving the process and identifies what he considers to be its problems.

His observations are valid and rooted in sociolinguistics. This issue motivated our interest in the specialization in Informatics in Education. In the context of Portuguese language teaching, it is common to encounter textual genres that emerge from technology; however, few of these are addressed in the classroom and are often ignored—as if they did not exist. Most teachers overlook a significant part of their students' lives.

We learn to communicate without necessarily undergoing formal educational processes. Even so, through necessity, interaction, and meaningful contexts, learning occurs, as Freire (2011) affirms. In this light, Marcuschi (2008) emphasizes that any text can be effectively used in learning, stating that “there is no linguistic problem whatsoever, provided that the category of text includes both spoken and written forms” (p. 51). For this reason, he highlights the numerous aspects that can be explored through textual genres. The major technological transformations in communication and the way language adapts to them cannot be ignored by schools or teaching methodologies.



We must not forget Possenti's (2000) assertion that teaching grammar in an isolated, normative format is socially disconnected. This mechanical methodology contributes to students' lack of interest, as content that does not reflect their lived experiences is not engaging—an idea also supported by Freire (2011). Thus, a textual genre that is part of students' daily lives can serve as a motivator and a tool for connecting and constructing knowledge.

When classes fail to keep pace with the emergence of new communication media, problems and difficulties often arise for both teachers and students. Marcuschi (2008, p. 90) asserts that teaching a language involves much more than linguistic resources; it involves “discursive operations for meaning-making within a given culture, using specific genres as forms of linguistic action.” Therefore, if one of the genres students engage with most is the meme, it can be a viable option for delivering content. If, ten years from now, memes are no longer used—just as letters have fallen out of favor—teachers must adapt to these transformations.

Regarding the meme production activity with the second-year high school class, it was deemed successful. Initially, students struggled to produce genres that are part of their daily lives, but they gradually became more confident as their understanding deepened. Moreover, the school's limited access to functioning computers during the students' sessions posed a challenge. Nevertheless, the shift away from the idea that Portuguese language classes should focus solely on written modality and exclude technology-related multimodalities marked an important first step. Although students were initially hesitant and faced difficulties in their productions, over time they began to create with more humor and developed a critical sense regarding the textual genres present in the technological environments where they spend much of their time.

Through this work, we were able to put into practice the academic theory that Portuguese language classes can be taught through textual genres. Students realized that creating a meme is not simply about placing an image and text side by side, but about relating, debating, and reflecting on the theme and the interaction between the modalities present in the text.

In conclusion, the activity proved to be highly beneficial, though it requires better organization and planning when implemented with students. Despite their frequent use of the meme genre, students did not easily assimilate it into an educational context—likely because the genre does not yet belong to that sphere. This provides further justification for such a pedagogical shift. Although students enjoy activities involving communication technology, they belong to a dogmatic society. Teachers must be aware of this and demonstrate that clinging to isolated grammatical norms disconnected from our lived context does not support Freirean educational principles.



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